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**Apologia as a Self-Defense Strategy to Support the Public
Persona in Crisis Communication Process**

**Inci Cinarli
Professor
Galatasaray University
Turkey**

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Athens Institute for Education and Research
8 Valaoritou Street, Kolonaki, 10671 Athens, Greece
Tel: + 30 210 3634210 Fax: + 30 210 3634209 Email: info@atiner.gr URL:
www.atiner.gr

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**Apologia as a Self-Defense Strategy to Support the Public Persona in Crisis
Communication Process**

Inci Cinarli
Professor
Galatasaray University
Turkey

Abstract

Crisis management is the process of seeking to accomplish an ultimate goal of an organisation, which is essentially to restore normalcy and survive the crisis with a minimal damage. Within this process, crisis communication strategies inform the rhetoric of the organisation to maintain or restore the organisation's reputation. The aim of this article is to examine how corporate apologia derived from rhetoric is being used as a self-defence strategy when a persona is facing an attack. To this end, firstly, a range of literature on crisis management and crisis communication has been reviewed to establish the role of corporate apologia as a crisis response. Secondly, apologetic discourse has been analysed during specific recent corporate crises in order to expose how this particular strategy has contributed to the corporate rhetoric. This study reveals that in corporate apologia, an actual apology is usually delayed until the reactions of the corporation's public and/or stakeholders have increased to the point of threatening the social and commercial legitimacy of the corporation. It also explores the extent to which the more prompt making of an apology might have led to an earlier defusing of the crisis.

Keywords: crisis management, crisis communication, corporate apologia, corporate discourse.

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Introduction

Crises are undoubtedly not specific to our era but have become ubiquitous and more visible, especially via conventional and new media, in the 21st century. Terrorism (e.g., 9/11, ISIS), financial and economic crises (e.g., the 2008 global financial crisis and the Eurozone crisis), corporate crises (e.g., the Enron collapse, the BP Mexican Gulf oil spill, the VW emissions scandal, News Corp. phone hacking), epidemics (e.g., Ebola, avian influenza), and natural disasters triggering industrial disasters (e.g., the Japanese earthquake and tsunami followed by the Fukushima nuclear disaster) are mega-crises of our century with high global impacts.

Scandals, failures, and collapses that global corporations are experiencing in our era can predominantly be identified as self-inflicted crises. Although multiple causal linkages can be determined related to these crises, corporate misconduct is predominantly at the core of triggering mechanism of corporate crises.

As a consequence of the globalisation, especially as a result of transformations in the information age; both organizations' ways of doing business and communicating with their publics and stakeholders are also transforming. Corporations are applying various strategies and tactics in order to construct or reinforce their legitimization, and also in order to manage more effectively issues, risks, and crises that they are facing.

The aim of this article is to examine how corporate apology derived from rhetoric is being used as a self-defence strategy by corporations when their persona is under attack. To this end, firstly, a literature on crisis management and crisis communication will be reviewed to establish the role of corporate apology as a crisis response. Secondly, apologetic discourse will be analysed during three recent corporate crises of Facebook/Cambridge Analytica data breach scandal, Uber video PR disaster, and Apple's iPhone battery controversy in order to expose how this particular strategy has contributed to the corporate rhetoric.

Crisis Concept

Etymology of the word 'crisis' derives from the Greek word '*krisis*' which means 'turning point for better or worse in an acute disease or fever' and used by the pioneers of medicine; Hippocrates, Galen, and Avicenna as a medical term. On the other hand, the Greek verb '*krinein*' means 'to judge, separate or decide' and the word 'critic' comes from this same root.

Hermann differentiates the term crisis from seemingly related terms (e.g., tension, stress, anxiety, and panic) by the concept of stimulus and response. He describes crisis as a stimulus to which certain kinds of behaviour are possible responses. He identifies organisational crisis with three dimensions as threat high priority values, restricted response time, and negative surprise.¹ Although these characteristics are still valid today, additional characteristics are required since

¹Charles F. Hermann, "Some consequences of crisis which limit the viability of organizations", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 8, 1963, pp.63-64.

neoliberal capitalism and its globalization have dramatically transformed institutions and corporations, industrial relations, labour, social relationships, and therefore the crisis concept itself is one of the endemic negative outcomes of this new complex system.

In the earlier crisis management literature, a crisis was identified as “a turning point for an organization”², similar to Regester’s definition of crises as “turning points in organisational life.”³ Pauchant and Mitroff assert that a crisis is “a disruption that physically affects the system as a whole and threatens its basic assumptions, its subjective sense of self, and its existential core”⁴. Subsequent to these organization-centred definitions in the literature, the perceptions of a crisis by an organisation’s public/stakeholders and the impact of the crisis upon them were incorporated in crisis definitions. In these later definitions, a crisis has been defined as “the perception of low-probability, high-impact situation by critical stakeholders to threaten the viability of the organization and that is subjectively experienced by these individuals as personally and socially threatening”⁵ and “a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting the organization, company, or industry, as well as its publics, products, services, or good name.”⁶ Similarly, Coombs states that “a crisis threatens to disrupt an organization’s operations and poses both a financial and reputational threat.”⁷ It has also been asserted that a crisis “creates victims.”⁸ Hence, a need to seek information about causality has been emerged, and accordingly attribution of crisis responsibility by organisation’s publics and stakeholders has been introduced into the recent crisis definitions. As a result, a crisis has also been identified as “an event for which people/publics seek causes and attributions.”⁹ The public attributes responsibility to those who are perceived as responsible for the crisis and therefore expected to manage it.

Furthermore, the *sine qua non* component of today’s crisis concept is ‘uncertainty’ which has been highlighted in more recent definitions, such as “a

²Steven Fink, *Crisis management: Planning for Inevitable*, New York: AMACOM, 1986, p.15

³Michael Regester, *Crisis management: What to do when the Unthinkable Happens*, London: Hutchinson Business, 1989, p.38.

⁴Thierry C. Pauchant and Ian I. Mitroff, *Transforming the Crisis-prone Organization*, San Fransisco-CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1992, pp.15-16.

⁵Christine M. Pearson and Judith A. Clair, “Reframing crisis management”, *Academy of Management Review*, 23(1), 1998, p.66.

⁶Kathleen Fearn-Banks, *Crisis communication: A Casebook Approach*, 4th ed., NY: Routledge, 2011, p.2.

⁷Timothy W. Coombs, “Protecting organization reputations during a crisis: The development and application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory”, *Corporate Reputation Review*, 10(3), 2007, p.164.

⁸James E. Lukaszewski, *On crisis communication: What Your CEO Needs to Know About Reputation Risk and Crisis Management*, Connecticut: Rothstein Associates Inc., 2013, p.3.

⁹Timothy W. Coombs and Sherry J. Holladay, “Reasoned action in crisis communication: An attribution theory-based approach to crisis management”, in D. P. Millar and R. L. Heath (Eds.), *Responding to crisis communication approach to crisis communication* (pp.95-115), Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004, p.247.

time of ambiguity, uncertainty, and struggle to regain the control”¹⁰ and “a specific, unexpected and non-routine event or series of event that create high levels of uncertainty and simultaneously present an organization with both opportunities for and threats to its high-priority goals.”¹¹

Crisis concept and its management, and consequently its communication are also evolving through the transformations in the information age. As a consequence, crises are becoming more visible, their impact is echoing in a great speed, and stakeholders are getting more active and demanding.

Organisational Crisis Management and Crisis Communication

Coombs states that crisis management “is a process designed to prevent or lessen the damage a crisis can inflict on an organization and its stakeholders.”¹² Similarly, Fearn-Banks describes crisis management as “a strategic planning process that removes some of the risk and uncertainty from the negative occurrence and thereby allows the organization to be in greater control of its own destiny.”¹³ Hence, crisis management can be defined as a strategic process of achieving objectives to accomplish an ultimate goal, which is essentially to restore normalcy and survive the crisis with minimal damage.

The approach to crisis management can be proactive or reactive. In the reactive approach, the decision to manage the crisis is made after the event occurs. In the proactive approach, the crisis is anticipated by managers, and a vulnerability analysis is prepared in advance to address the crisis.¹⁴ Therefore, risk management and issue management might be defined as initial stages of the proactive crisis management process.

The core of the crisis management process is crisis communication. Fearn-Banks defines crisis communication as “the dialog that details strategies and tactics designed to minimize damage to the image of the organization.”¹⁵ The communication demands of a crisis are “managing uncertainty, responding to the crisis, resolving it and learning from it.”¹⁶ Coombs states that crisis knowledge management and stakeholder reaction management are two types of crisis communication. Crisis knowledge management involves gathering information, processing this information into knowledge, sharing this knowledge with stakeholders and making decisions. As for stakeholder reaction management, it

¹⁰Robert L. Heath, “After the dance is over: Postcrisis response”, in D. P. Millar and R. L. Heath (Eds.), *Responding to crisis communication approach to crisis communication* (pp.247-250), Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004, p.247.

¹¹ Robert L. Ulmer *et. al.*, *Effective Crisis Communication: Moving from Crisis to Opportunity*, 2nd ed., CA: Sage Publications, 2011, p.7.

¹²Timothy W. Coombs, *Crisis management and communications*, <http://www.instituteforpr.org/crisis-management-and-communications>, 2011, (21.03.2017).

¹³Fearn-Banks, *op.cit.*, p.2.

¹⁴Michelle G. Hough and John Spillan, “Crisis planning: Increasing effectiveness, decreasing discomfort”, *Journal of Business and Economics Research*, 3(4), 2005, pp.19-20.

¹⁵Fearn-Banks, *op.cit.*, p.2.

¹⁶Robert L. Ulmer *et. al.*, *Effective Crisis Communication: Moving from Crisis to Opportunity*, 4th ed., CA: Sage Publications, 2017, p.8.

comprises communication efforts aiming to influence stakeholders' perceptions of the crisis management process.¹⁷

William Benoit uses communication to defend reputation in his Image Restoration Theory (IRT). This theory is based on rhetorical and interpersonal communication.¹⁸

Coombs brings Bernard Weiner's Attributional Theory and rhetorical approaches to crisis communication together in order to form Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT).¹⁹ This theory develops Benoit's Image Restoration Theory further, and as a strategic approach it focuses on the form and content of the crisis communication.

On the other hand, Frandsen and Johansen's multivocal process of crisis communication embraces communicative efforts ('voices') of corporate and non-corporate actors to influence crisis management during each phase of a crisis:²⁰

Crisis communication consists of a complex and dynamic configuration of communicative processes which evolve before, during, and after an event, a situation or a course of events that are seen as a crisis by an organization and/or one or more of its stakeholders. Crisis communication also includes various actors, contexts, and discourses (manifested in specific genres and specific texts) related to each other.

Hence, this particular approach (Rhetorical Arena Theory) to crisis communication does not address crisis communication as a core component of the crisis management process orchestrated by a particular crisis manager/sender. Instead, these voices are at the core of the model, and they "meet and compete, collaborate and negotiate" in the rhetorical arena²¹ regarding the crisis. In the rhetorical or text-oriented research tradition of crisis communication, the focus is on studying what and how an organization communicates when its image or reputation is under attack; notably based on William Benoit's Image Restoration Theory (IRT) or Image Repair Discourse, derived from verbal defence strategies, such as 'corporate apologia'. Within this sender- or rhetoric-oriented approach, crisis communication is considered "a form of rhetoric which involves both information and persuasion."²²

Crisis communication is a defence mechanism of organizations facing a crisis. The response of the organization aims at convincing stakeholders and/or publics that the organization is fulfilling its responsibilities and managing the

¹⁷Timothy W. Coombs, "Parameters for crisis communication", in W. T. Coombs and S. J. Holladay (Eds.), *The Handbook of Crisis Communication* (pp.17-53), MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2012, p. 25.

¹⁸Ibid., p.31.

¹⁹Ibid., p.38-39.

²⁰Finn Frandsen and Winni Johansen, "Crisis communication, complexity, and the cartoon affair: a case study", in T. W. Coombs and S. J. Holladay (Eds.), *The Handbook of Crisis Communication* (pp. 4425-449), Boston, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, p.431.

²¹Ibid, p.433.

²²David L. Sturges, "Communicating through crisis: A strategy for organizational survival, *Management Communication Quarterly*, 1994, 7(3), p.299.

crisis in order to meet their interests. On the other hand, public interest and private interest could conflict with each other during a crisis situation. Nevertheless, public interest should be protected and favoured over public interest in this chaotic period.

Corporate Apologia

‘Apologia’ is a term first coined in Greek and defined as “a defence especially of one’s opinion, positions or actions.”²³ Etymologically, the word derived from ‘apologos’ (the prefix ‘apo-’ means ‘away from, off’ and ‘logos’ means ‘speech’) which is “an account, story”.²⁴ In ancient Greek, ‘*Apologia Sokratous*’ (Ἀπολογία Σωκράτους) is the title of the accounts of the trial and execution of Socrates written by Plato after Socrates’ death. Socrates has been tried before a jury of 501 Athenian male jurors in 399 BC., with the charge of heresy and corrupting the moral of the youth of Athens. His Socratic method consisted of a defence by inquiring into the nature of moral concepts and virtues by asking to the audience about their thoughts on these concepts.²⁵ Socrates’ speech did not involve any ‘apology’ with a meaning of the word in the late-Latin, yet a defence.

Ware and Linkugel analysed apologetic discourses in Occidental tradition in Aristotelian perspective in which ‘apology’ concept has been used for “speeches of defence that are about wrongdoing, that is in legal terms causing harm and committing crime.”²⁶ Olshtain’s definition of apology underlines the responsibility of the wrongdoer as following:

*“[...] a speech of act which is intended to provide a support for the hearer who was [...] malaffected by a violation X. In the decision to carry out the verbal apology, the speaker is willing to humiliate himself or herself to some extent and to admit to fault and responsibility for X.”*²⁷

This “speech of self-defence”²⁸ is a personalized defence against an attack on individual’s “morality, motive and reputation.”²⁹ Therefore, this individually focused reaction is a response to an attack upon a person’s character.³⁰ Later, the concept of apologia has been used in corporate focused definitions as “a response

²³ ‘Apologia’, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/apologia>, (02/01/2018).

²⁴ ‘Apology’, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/apology> (02/01/2018).

²⁵ Paul Allen Miller and Charles Platter, *Plato’s Apology of Socrates: A Commentary*, Oklahoma: Oklahoma University Press, 2010, p.8.

²⁶ Frans H van Eemeren, *Strategic Maneuvring in Argumentative Discourse*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2010, p.175.

²⁷ Elite Olshtain, “Apologies across languages”, in S. Blum-Kulka, J. House and G. Kasper (Eds.), *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics Requests and Apologies* (pp.155-173), New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1989, p.156.

²⁸ B. L. Ware and Wil A. Linkugel, “They spoke in defence of themselves on the generic of apologia”, *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 59(3), 1973, p.273.

²⁹ Jackson Harrell, B. L. Ware and Wil A. Linkugel, “Failure of apology in American politics:

“Failure of Apology in American Politics, *Speech Monographs*, 42, 1975, p.274.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p.276.

to criticism that seeks to present a compelling competing account of organizational accusations”.³¹

Corporate apologia reflects corporate culture and might include apology. Apologies can serve individual, institutional, intergroup, and moral purpose. A leader should apologize if it serves to these first three strategic purposes or for the last authentic purpose. Furthermore, a full-apology consist these four parts: an acknowledgment of the mistake or wrongdoing, the acceptance of responsibility, an expression of regret, and a promise that the offense will not be repeated.³²

Apologia acts as corporations have public ‘personas’ in crisis communication.³³ Jung defines the ‘persona’ as “a complicated system of relations between individual consciousness and society, fittingly enough a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and, on the other, to conceal the true nature of the individual.”³⁴ This concept of ‘persona’ has been identified as ‘character’ in crisis communication literature³⁵ and which could also be identified as ‘reputation’³⁶. The true nature and image of the corporation ought to be more overlapping in order to survive with less damage, since crisis situations are periods during which corporations’ personas are under further scrutiny, and therefore any deceitful behaviour of a corporation could be easily perceived by stakeholders and/or public. In this case, the damage would be colossal.

Apologia is being referred as a crisis communication theory or a crisis reaction strategy in crisis communication literature. Managing the threat caused by an attack aims at protecting image, and therefore defending reputation of the organization. To this end, organization might use ‘redefinition’ to deny, ‘dissociation’ to explain, and ‘conciliation’ to apologize through its communication discourse.³⁷ Ware and Linkugel developed four strategies drawn on Abelson’s four modes of resolution of belief dilemmas; “denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence.”³⁸ Similarly, Hearit identifies five communication strategies to respond accusations of wrongdoing as “denial, counterattack, differentiation, apology, and legal.”³⁹

³¹Keith M. Hearit, “Corporate apologia: When an organization speaks in defense of itself”, in R. L. Heath (Ed.), *Handbook of Public Relations*, Thousand Oaks: Sage, p.502.

³²Barbara Kellerman, “When should a leader apologize-and when not?”, *Harvard Business Review*, April 2006, pp.75-76.

³³Keith M. Hearit, “Mistakes were made: Organizational apologia and crisis of social legitimacy”, *Communication Studies*, 46, 1975, p.7.

³⁴Carl G. Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology: Collected Works of C.G. Jung. Vol.7*, NJ: Princeton University Press, p.190.

³⁵Coombs, 2012, p.30.

³⁶Timothy W. Coombs, *Ongoing Crisis Communication*, 4th ed., California: Sage, 2015, p.263.

³⁷Fearn-Banks, op.cit., p.17.

³⁸Ware and Linkugel, op.cit, pp.275-281.

³⁹Keith M. Hearit, *Crisis Management by Apology: Corporate Response to Allegations of Wrongdoing*, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006, p.15.

Table 1. *Benoit's Image Restoration Strategies*

Denial	Simple denial Shift the blame
Evading responsibility	Provocation Defeasibility Accidental Good intention
Reducing offensiveness	Bolstering Minimize Differentiation Transcendence Attack accuser Compensation
Corrective action	
Mortification	

Source: Coombs, 2010, p.110.

On the other hand, Benoit's image restoration strategies (Table 1) have also been included in discourse analyse methods of this study, since his theory is based on corporate apologia which introduces subsidiary communicative options in order to restore damaged credibility.

Corrective action and mortification are two strengths of Benoit's theory, as taking action and accepting responsibility are restorative strategies which could contribute to a more effective crisis management.

Methodology

Based on the above literature, this study aims to examine apologetic discourse applied by corporations during corporate crisis management. Two main research questions arise:

RQ1: How corporate apologia derived from rhetoric is being used as a self-defence strategy?

RQ2: How apologetic strategy has contributed to corporate rhetoric?

To this end, apologetic discourse of corporate executives has been analysed during three recent corporate crises of Facebook/Cambridge Analytica data breach scandal, Uber video PR disaster, and Apple's iPhone battery controversy. The analysis will be focused on a consolidated apologetic strategy clusters of Ware & Linkugel, Hearit, and Benoit.

Table 1. *Consolidated Apologetic Strategy Cluster*

Apologetic Strategies
Simple denial
Shift the blame
Provocation
Defeasibility
Accidental
Good intention
Bolstering
Minimize
Differentiation
Transcendence
Attack accuser/Counterattack
Compensation
Corrective action
Mortification
Apology
Legal

Source: Ware & Linkugel, Hearit, and Benoit.

The data is consisted of apologetic discourse in public statements of the executives of the above mentioned corporations; released via press releases, announcements, and advertisements uploaded in corporate web sites, published and/or broadcasted in conventional and social media, and/or cited in major news web sites.

Analysis and Findings

Facebook/Cambridge Analytica Data Breach Scandal

The social media networking company Facebook Inc. which has 1.45 billion daily active users has been founded by Mark Zuckerberg, Dustin Moskovitz, Chris Hughes, and Eduardo Saverin in 2004.⁴⁰ The New York Times and The Guardian broke the news on 17th of March 2018 that a data analytics company Cambridge Analytica had unauthorized access to the data of 50 million (which was later announced as 87 million) Facebook users early in 2014. The documents alleging the breach has been by Christopher Wylie, a former Cambridge Analytica contractor who helped build the algorithm. The company has worked with Donald Trump’s election team in US elections, and also the Brexit Campaign, Vote Leave, in UK. Cambridge Analytica has harvested million of Facebook profiles and used them to build a powerful software program to predict and influence voters’ choices.⁴¹ Facebook initially replied this crisis on Newsroom (corporate

⁴⁰Facebook Newsroom, Company info, <https://newsroom.fb.com/company-info>, (04 May 2018).

⁴¹Carole Cadwalladr and Emma Graham-Harrison, “Revealed: 50 million Facebook profiles harvested for Cambridge Analytica in major data breach”, The Guardian, 17 March 2018,

blog on Facebook), by Paul Grewal, the Vice President and Deputy General Counsel of the company. This statement made by Facebook executive has announced that the company has suspended Cambridge Analytica and SCL Group from the platform, therefore this rhetorical strategy is primarily ‘differentiation’ which consists of separating Facebook from alleged breach of data and therefore redefining the situation in order to change the public perception about the crisis:

“We are suspending Strategic Communication Laboratories (SCL), including their political data analytics firm, Cambridge Analytica, from Facebook.[...] In 2015, we learned that a psychology professor at the University of Cambridge named Dr. Aleksandr Kogan lied to us and violated our Platform Policies by passing data from an app that was using Facebook Login to SCL/ Cambridge Analytica, a firm that does political, government and military work around the globe. He also passed that data to Christopher Wylie of Eunoia Technologies, Inc. Protecting people’s information is at the heart of everything we do, and we require the same from people who operate apps on Facebook.”⁴²

Grewal’s rhetorical strategy is also consisting ‘defeasibility’ as he said “...we learned”, therefore he implied that there was a lack of information about what was going on. Furthermore, he is accusing Dr. Kogan, therefore is ‘shifting the blame’.

This statement has shortly been updated in less than 24 hours in which the company used ‘simple denial’ strategy by claiming that data breach was not Facebook’s responsibility:

“The claim that this is a data breach is completely false. Aleksandr Kogan requested and gained access to information from users who chose to sign up to his app, and everyone involved gave their consent. People knowingly provided their information, no systems were infiltrated, and no passwords or sensitive pieces of information were stolen or hacked.”⁴³

Cambridge Analytica CEO, Alexander Nix has ‘denied’ any wrongdoing on BBC on the 19th of March. Same day later at night, Nix and Managing Director of the Company Mark Turnbull were shown explaining to undercover Channel 4 reporters how they had manipulated the voters of democracies across the globe. Nix has been suspended the next day.⁴⁴

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/17/cambridge-analytica-facebook-influence-us-election>, (25 March 2018).

⁴²Paul Grewal, Suspending Cambridge Analytica and SCL Group from Facebook, Facebook Newsroom 16 March 2018, <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/03/suspending-cambridge-analytica>, (8 April 2018).

⁴³Loc.cit., 17 March 2018.

⁴⁴Tim Adams, “Facebook’s week of shame: The Cambridge Analytica fallout”, The Guardian, 24 March 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/mar/24/facebook-week-of-shame-data-breach-observer-revelations-zuckerberg-silence>, (8 April 2018).

Facebook shares were 185.09 USD on the 16th of March, prior to the crisis has been public, and dropped to 168.15 USD on the 20th of March.⁴⁵ As a consequence, Facebook's founder, Chairman, and CEO Mark Zuckerberg made his first public statement on the 21st of March via Facebook post after remained silent for five days:

*"I want to share an update on the Cambridge Analytica situation including the steps we've already taken and our next steps to address this important issue. We have a responsibility to protect your data, and if we can't then we don't deserve to serve you. I've been working to understand exactly what happened and how to make sure this doesn't happen again. The good news is that the most important actions to prevent this from happening again today we have already taken years ago. But we also made mistakes, there's more to do, and we need to step up and do it. [...] This was a major breach of trust. I'm really sorry this happened. We have a basic responsibility to protect people's data."*⁴⁶

In this statement, Facebook CEO is using 'apology' strategy but denied any wrongdoing. He also implying 'corrective action' strategy by telling that they have taken steps to address the issue, but he is not clarifying which steps the company has taken. He acknowledged that the company made mistakes but not specified. He also is using 'bolstering' strategy as he is telling that the company has taken precautions years ago in order to underline the company is fulfilling its responsibilities, and also is trying to direct attention of publics towards more favourable past of the company. On the other hand, he is not justifying his argument.

Zuckerberg later apologized by saying "I'm really sorry that this happened" on the same day in a televised interview with CNN. In similar conference calls with the New York Times, Wired, and Recode; he expressed qualified openness to testifying before Congress and said that he was not entirely opposed to Facebook being subject to more regulations. He also continued to 'deny' any wrongdoing, and also smoothly used 'shift the blame' strategy data as following:

*"We've seen some scraping. I would assume if you had that setting turned on that someone at some point has access to your public information in some way."*⁴⁷

Hence, he is claiming that users who turned a setting on were responsible of the private data has been made able to be scraped.

⁴⁵NASDAQ Facebook, <https://www.nasdaq.com/symbol/fb>, (16 March and 20 march 2018).

⁴⁶Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook, 21 March 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/zuck/posts/10104712037900071>, (22 April 2018).

⁴⁷Todd Haselton, "Zuckerberg says most Facebook users should assume they have had their public info scraped", CNBC, 4 April 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/04/facebook-most-people-could-have-had-their-public-profile-scraped.html>, (20 April 2018).

Zuckerberg finally apologized for the ‘breach of trust’ with full-page ad in seven British and three American newspapers. He once again used ‘corrective action’ strategy and he also reminded that the leak was someone else’s fault, therefore he ‘shifted the blame’ as following:

“We have responsibility to protect your information. If we can’t, we don’t deserve it. You may have heard about a quiz app built by a university researcher that leaked Facebook data of millions of people in 2014. This was a breach of trust and I’m sorry we didn’t do more at the time. We are now taking steps to make sure this doesn’t happen again. We’ve already stopped apps like this from getting so much information. Now we’re limiting the data apps get when you sign in Facebook. We’re also investigating every single app that had access to large amounts of data before we fixed this. We expect there are others. And when we find them, we will ban them and tell everyone affected. Finally, we’ll remind you which apps you’ve given access to your information- so you can shut off the ones you don’t want anymore. Thank you for believing in this community. I promise to do better for you.”⁴⁸

However, Facebook CEO’s apology is not a full-apology which consist an acknowledgment of any wrongdoing and taking the responsibility, but he showed some regret about “not have been done more”.

Zuckerberg once again used ‘corrective action’ and ‘apology’ strategies in a Q&A session on Facebook blog:

“We’re an idealistic and optimistic company. [...] But it’s clear now that we didn’t do enough. We didn’t focus enough on preventing abuse and thinking through how people could use these tools to do harm as well. ... [We are] going to do a full investigation of every app that had a large amount of people’s data.”⁴⁹

The company suspended the Canadian firm, AggregateIQ on the 7th of April 2018, which played pivotal role in Brexit. On the 10th of April, Facebook CEO gave testimony to US Senate Committees over data misuse.⁵⁰ His testimony’s key moments revealed same apologetic strategies that he used previously. In his testimony, Zuckerberg admitted that Facebook could have banned Cambridge Analytica however they did not, and used ‘corrective action’ strategy as following:

“So we could have in theory banned them then. We made a mistake by not doing so. [...] We’ve updated our policy to make sure we don’t make that

⁴⁸Facebook advertisement, The Guardian, 25 March 2018.

⁴⁹Facebook Newsroom, Hard Questions: Q&A with Mark Zuckerberg on protecting people’s information, 4 April, 2018, <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/04/hard-questions-protecting-peoples-information>, (10 April 2018).

⁵⁰Julia Carrie Wong, Congress grills Facebook CEO over data misuse-as it happened, 10 April 2018 (updated 11 April 2018), The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/live/2018/apr/10/mark-zuckerberg-testimony-live-congress-facebook-cambridge-analytica>, (12 April 2018).

mistake again. [...] We're investigating every single app that had access to a large amount of information in the past. And if we find that someone improperly used data, we're going to ban them from Facebook and tell everyone affected."⁵¹

However, he is indicating that Facebook should be allowed to regulate itself and he can fix the problem without any government intervention.

On the other hand, Zuckerberg has insisted on 'denying' that Facebook is selling data to advertisers:

*"Yes, we store data... some of that content with people's permission. There's a very common misconception that we sell data to advertisers. We do not sell data to advertisers."*⁵²

Mark Zuckerberg, who apologized several times for Facebook failures over years, once again 'apologized' at the hearings:

*"That goes for fake news, foreign interference in elections, and hate speech, as well as developers and data privacy. It's clear now that we didn't do enough to prevent these tools from being used for harm. We didn't take a broad enough view of our responsibility, and that was a big mistake. It was my mistake, and I'm sorry. I started Facebook, I run it, and I'm responsible for what happens here."*⁵³

Facebook corporate apology consist a half-acknowledgment of the mistake (as Zuckerberg, the acceptance of responsibility, and a promise that the mistake will not be repeated, but lacks an expression of regret; therefore, it cannot be considered as a full-apology.

Facebook users are being urged by Faceblock (#BoycottFacebook campaign), an international group of campaigners to stop using the social media platform (including Whatsapp, Instagram, and Messenger apps) to protest the company for one day, coinciding with Zuckerberg's testimony.⁵⁴

Facebook stock was 157.93 USD on the 9th of April (since the beginning of the crises the lowest was 153.03 USD on the 28th of March), a day before Zuckerberg testimony at the US Senate, and the day after the testimony the stock rose to 166.32 USD.⁵⁵

Another movement against Facebook in the aftermath of the Cambridge Analytica crisis was #DeleteFacebook trending hashtag. A survey conducted by

⁵¹Chloe Watson, The key moments from Mark Zuckerberg's testimony to Congress, The Guardian, 11 April 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/apr/11/mark-zuckerbergs-testimony-to-congress-the-key-moments>, (12 April 2018).

⁵²Loc.cit.

⁵³Loc.cit.

⁵⁴Nicola Slawson, Faceblock campaign urges user to boycott Facebook for a day, The Guardian, 7 April 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/apr/07/faceblock-campaign-urges-users-boycott-facebook-for-one-day-protest-cambridge-analytica-scandal>, (22 April 2018).

⁵⁵NASDAQ, FB, <https://www.nasdaq.com/symbol/fb>, (20 April 2018).

Techpinions revealed that 9% of 1,000 U.S. Facebook users said they had deleted their profiles completely due to privacy concerns in the wake of the Cambridge Analytica scandal.⁵⁶

The company has announced that new privacy experiences will only be introduced as part of the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) for European users.

Uber Video PR Disaster

Uber Technologies, Inc. is a start-up company which offers a mobile application enabling users arrange and schedule transportation. The company has been launched by Travis Kalanick and Garrett Camp in 2008. Uber faced a serial of scandals of corporate misconduct in 2017. These crises are including undermining a New York taxi union strike at NY JFK Airport protesting Donald Trump's travel ban against some Muslim countries which was backfired by #DeleteUber campaign in the US and resulted with 200.000 users uninstalled their accounts, revelations of questionable spy programs, claims of stealing trade secret, sexual harassment and discrimination allegations, and also embarrassing leaks about executive conduct.⁵⁷

Uber video PR disaster arose in this vulnerable period of the company. On February 28th February 2018, a video has been released by Bloomberg, showing a heated discussion between Uber's then-CEO Travis Kalanick's and a Private UberBlack's driver, Fawzi Kamel over falling fares. In the 6 minute video footage which was captured by the car's dashboard camera, Kamel was complaining about the company decreasing prices for its UberBlack service and was blaming the CEO of his bankruptcy. Kalanick ended up losing his temper and shouting at the driver:

*"Some people don't like to take responsibility for their own s@! They blame everything in their life on somebody else. Good luck!"*⁵⁸

The driver replied:

*"Good luck to you, but I know [you're not] going to go far."*⁵⁹

⁵⁶Kif Leswing, Nearly one in 10 Americans surveyed say they deleted their Facebook account over privacy concerns, Business Insider, 12 April 2018, <http://www.businessinsider.com/delete-facebook-statistics-nearly-10-percent-americans-deleted-facebook-account-study-2018-4>, (22 April 2018).

⁵⁷Sam Levin, Uber's scandals, blunders and PR disasters: the full list, 28 June 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/jun/18/uber-travis-kalanick-scandal-pr-disaster-timeline>, (13 April 2018).

⁵⁸Eric Newcomer, In video Uber CEO argues with driver over falling rates, Bloomberg, 28 February 2017 (updated on 1 March 2017), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-02-28/in-video-uber-ceo-argues-with-driver-over-falling-fares>, (16 March 2018).

⁵⁹Loc.cit.

Kalanick has issued an apology on the night of the broadcast, via staff e-mail and also company's blog:

“By now I’m sure you’ve seen the video where I treated an Uber driver disrespectfully. To say that I am ashamed is an extreme understatement. My job as your leader is to lead...and that starts with behaving in a way that makes us all proud. That is not what I did, and it cannot be explained away. It’s clear this video is a reflection of me—and the criticism we’ve received is a stark reminder that I must fundamentally change as a leader and grow up. This is the first time I’ve been willing to admit that I need leadership help and I intend to get it. I want to profoundly apologize to Fawzi, as well as the driver and rider community, and to the Uber team.”⁶⁰

Kalanick’s apologia consists of an ‘apology’ (“...profoundly apologize”), ‘mortification’ (“I’m ashamed...”, “...is a reflection of me”), ‘corrective action’ (“I must fundamentally change”, “I need leadership help and I intend to get it”). However, the later strategy consists of an individual corrective action but the reasons that the company faced many scandals in a short period of time; therefore this attack on persona necessitates a more comprehensive corporate corrective action. On the other hand, the then-CEO’s apologia can be considered as a full-apology; hence he acknowledged of the wrongdoing, accepted the responsibility, expressed regret, and showed willingness to change.

As a consequence of the string of scandals lasted 6 months, the world’s dominant ride-hailing service’s reputation has been damaged considerably, and Kalanick had to resign under shareholders’ pressure in June 2017 after months of chaos. Therefore, Kalanick apologia might be considered as a timely apologia for the video PR disaster, yet considering previous scandals, this apologia is actually delayed until the company’s reputation has eroded and ultimately the then-CEO had to aggregate a full-apology for the company’s long-denied but inexorably revealed misconduct.

Apple’s iPhone battery controversy

Apple Inc. (former Apple Computer Company) is a multinational, innovative technology company founded in 1976 by Steve Jobs, Steve Wozniak, and Ronald Wayne. The company “designs, manufactures and markets mobile communication and media devices (sells also a range of related software, services, accessories, networking solutions and third-party digital content and applications), personal computers and portable digital music players.”⁶¹

Apple was subject of ongoing rumours about deliberately slowing down older iPhones to make you buy new one. Another claim has been made by the social news website Reddit’s users at the end of September 2017. They have reported a

⁶⁰Trevor Kalanick, A profound apology, Uber blog, 28 February 2017, <https://www.uber.com/newsroom/a-profound-apology>, (13 April 2018).

⁶¹Reuters, Apple Inc. (AAPL.O), <https://www.reuters.com/finance/stocks/companyProfile/AAPL.O> (17 March 2018).

problem on performance differences on their iPhones due to degrading iPhone batteries. Geekbench (a trademark of Primate Labs Inc.), a benchmarking company has also confirmed that updates purposely slowed performance of iPhones with aging batteries.⁶² The company has finally confirmed that the company has introduced a feature in 2016 to protect against problems caused by ageing batteries. The feature was implemented on iPhone 6, 6S and SE last year during a software update, and on the iPhone 7 as of December with the release of iOS 11.2.⁶³

Following multiple lawsuits has been filed against the company Apple's letter to consumers with a title of "Message to Our Customers about iPhone Batteries and Performance" has been uploaded on the 28th December 2017, a week after Primate Labs announcement, to the company website. In the Apple's anonymous, therefore impersonal statement, 'apology' strategy has been used, and also any wrongdoing and intentional misdeed have been denied by a 'good intention' strategy:

"We know that some of you feel Apple has let you down. We apologize. There's been a lot of misunderstanding about this issue, so we would like to clarify and let you know about some changes we're making. First and foremost, we have never — and would never — do anything to intentionally shorten the life of any Apple product, or degrade the user experience to drive customer upgrades. Our goal has always been to create products that our customers love, and making iPhones last as long as possible is an important part of that."⁶⁴

Apple's rhetoric has also revealed the use of 'corrective action' strategy, as the company announced a new support article to inform users:

"To help customers learn more about iPhone's rechargeable battery and the factors affecting its performance, we've posted a new support article, iPhone Battery and Performance."⁶⁵

However, this new support article cannot completely eliminate users' concerns about the product.

The company has also used 'bolstering' strategy by comparing their products over competitors' and underlining superior features:

"We're proud that Apple products are known for their durability, and for holding their value longer than our competitors' devices."

⁶²John Poole, iPhone performance and battery age, 18 December 2017, <https://www.geekbench.com/blog/2017/12/iphone-performance-and-battery-age>, (14 April 2018).

⁶³Samuel Gibbs, Apple admits slowing older iPhones because of aging batteries, 21 December 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/dec/21/apple-admits-slowing-older-iphones-because-of-flagging-batteries>, (11 March 2018).

⁶⁴Apple, A message to our customers about iPhone batteries and performance, 28 December 2017, <https://www.apple.com/iphone-battery-and-performance>, (11 January 2018).

⁶⁵Loc.cit.

Apple has also offered discount on replacement batteries in order to address accusations and minimize negative perception over the product, therefore over the brand as following:

“Apple is reducing the price of an out-of-warranty iPhone battery replacement by \$50 - from \$79 to \$29 - for anyone with an iPhone 6 or later whose battery needs to be replaced. Early in 2018, we will issue an iOS software update with new features that give users more visibility into the health of their iPhone's battery, so they can see for themselves if its condition is affecting performance. [...] our team is working on ways to make the user experience even better, including improving how we manage performance and avoid unexpected shutdowns as batteries age.”⁶⁶

The discount that Apple has offered can be considered as a ‘compensation’ strategy. However, consumers would be expecting an exchange instead of a discount on battery replacement.

Table 2 represents apologetic strategies used by Facebook, Uber, and Apple during three specific crises on a consolidated apologetic strategy cluster of Ware & Linkugel, Hearit, and Benoit.

Table 2. *Apologetic Strategies in Facebook, Uber, and Apple Crises*

Apologetic Strategies	Facebook	Uber	Apple
Simple denial	X		
Shift the blame	X		
Provocation			
Defeasibility	X		
Accidental			
Good intention			X
Bolstering			X
Minimize			
Differentiation	X		
Transcendence			
Attack accuser/Counterattack			
Compensation			X
Corrective action	X	X	X
Mortification		X	
Apology	X	X	X
Legal			

Discussion & Conclusion

A corporation which faces an attack to its persona reacts via apologetic strategies incorporated in its crisis communication, and therefore in its crisis

⁶⁶Loc.cit.

management. This self-defence strategy is an institutional positioning and is being defined as corporate apologia which aim is to support public persona, therefore corporate reputation.

The discourse analysis has revealed that the ‘apology’ and ‘corrective action’ are two common strategies that are being used in these three crisis communication cases. On the other hand, strategies related to minimize (excuse) or justify the wrongdoing have been used by Facebook and Apple; however, Uber’s corporate apologia is mainly based on full-apology. This research does not aim to examine perception of the crisis by corporations’ publics/stakeholders, therefore does not answer questions about how effective have been these strategies implied by these corporations.

This study has also been revealed that an actual apology is usually delayed until the reactions of the corporation’s public and/or stakeholders have increased to the point of threatening the social and commercial legitimacy of the corporation. Findings supported that decreasing share prices, negative messages and comments of customers/users via new media, law suits, and as in Facebook/Cambridge Analytica case; the government involvement have been pressurised these companies over acceptance, apologising, and taking corrective actions.

Public persona, therefore the reputation is the most valuable asset of the global corporations. In order to restore normalcy and survive the crisis with a minimal damage, a corporation facing a crisis should consider a prompter apology which might have led to an earlier defusing of the crisis.

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