A Crisis of Reputation in a Social Media Environment: A Comparative Analysis of the Crisis Communication Strategies Employed by Jetstar and Air New Zealand in a Severe Weather Event

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Abstract

The significance of social media technologies for the practice of crisis communication cannot be understated. Developments in social media and Web 2.0 technologies have created an unprecedented media environment that enables instantaneous, global and public information sharing. These social media technologies have the potential to foster open and honest discussion, and enable communities of interested and affected publics to gather and publicly discuss organisations, creating new active publics. The technologies that enable such an environment have not been fully integrated into communication practices, despite having been at play for several years. Many practitioners remain wary of the potential challenges associated with the use of social media technologies. As organisations remain hesitant of embracing these technologies to their full potential, it has become increasingly pertinent to assess the effectiveness of communication strategies used in these environments.

This study contributes to the body of knowledge surrounding social media's impact on crisis communication by undertaking a comparative analysis of the crisis communications issued by Jetstar and Air New Zealand in a social media environment. Findings for this project contribute to the growing body of knowledge within social media and crisis communication, outlining successes and failures of the use of current crisis communication practices within a social media environment and providing recommendations for social media crisis communication strategies. Findings indicate that such technologies demand change in current strategies used in social media environments. Key publics increasingly expect organisations to communicate on social media in a timely, honest, accurate and transparent manner, as fits the platform. At the same time organisations must be able to understand and work within the potential challenges that social media platforms present if they wish to continue to maintain and protect a good reputation. Organisations must accept a loss of control previously granted by traditional media and must learn to deal with a hyper-emotive community that could both hinder and help reputation. The complex communication expectations of social media can no longer be ignored by organisations if they hope to remain in-touch with key publics. Social media gives organisations the potential to participate and engage with their key publics on a more personable level than seen before, moving towards a more dialogic form of communication that is more easily facilitated in a social media environment. To do so, organisations must be able to fully understand the challenges and opportunities presented by social media, and also appreciate the communicative demands of the platform. Organisations must give autonomy to those in charge of their social media sites to engage with key publics with empathy and understanding. This study suggests that traditional strategies for crisis communication must change in a social media environment and such change should not be feared. Social media platforms are leading organisations towards a more transparent form of communication in which the best way to safeguard reputation is to engage fully, truthfully and transparently in conversation with key publics in these online communities.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Tracey Jury

July 2014

Signature:

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1. Introduction

1.1   Thesis background

Social media has become the most recent phenomenon to change the communication landscape of the modern world. While social media can no longer be considered a new technology, the capabilities and characteristics of the ever-advancing technologies that make up social media present a new set of challenges and opportunities for those that work within the communication profession. The changes in the current communication landscape demand that practices and models adopted in previous media landscapes must be re-examined within a social media context. This examination evaluates the effectiveness and shortcomings of traditional practices, to better understand the communication expectations of those that use social media platforms and recommend practices to align with such expectations.

Initial analysis of the data gathered for this project suggests that social media groups can encourage hyper-emotive discussion and debate, which is unprecedented in other media environments by both its scale and its publicity. The community-driven and potentially emotive nature of the platforms is of relevance to communication practitioners, as these characteristics present new challenges and opportunities.

Crisis communication practice has been influenced by the changing media landscape that has resulted from social media developments. Crisis, by its very nature, lends itself to social media use as people want to discuss the occurrence of unexpected events by trading stories and sharing information. Because crises are dramatic, sudden and unexpected, they present scenarios for organisations that could challenge the intangible asset of good reputation. People involved, affected by, or merely interested in a crisis are able to use social media platforms to discuss the crisis and share information, opinions and stories in an environment that is filled with others who are also seeking to do the same. These publics also seek out social media platforms to discuss concerns and issues with,

or about, organisations in a way that was not possible with traditional media environments. This includes the ease of use and the public nature of social media platforms. Social media users demand information quickly and may bypass traditional news sources to gain information from elsewhere if the organisations do not supply it immediately. Social media developments have created an environment that has fundamental communicative differences to previous media environments, such as television and radio. Traditional crisis communication strategies were developed in this previous media environment, which typically allowed for organisations to favour one-way or asymmetric forms of communication with their publics. This media environment allowed a highly controlled information flow between organisations and their publics, in which public criticism and feedback was not as prominent. Furthermore, this environment also did not have an instantaneous news cycle. Therefore, it has become imperative to re-consider the use of traditional crisis communication strategies in a social media environment. Organisations were able to carefully craft and disseminate messages between news bulletins, giving time for information to be clarified. Information could also be omitted, both by organisations and by the media who controlled the platforms. These characteristics created a forgiving media platform for organisations to use to communicate with their publics. Social media is not as forgiving to organisations, that now must operate within an instantaneous media environment, where publics expect that all information pertaining to a crisis is published. Traditional crisis communication may not make allowances for the different landscape which social media offers, as it was not designed with social media's communication demands in mind. This thesis assesses the application of the traditional practices used in social media in order to gain insight into their relevance to social media platforms. Such insight helps to ensure that crisis communicators can continue to protect and maintain a good reputation while using social media.

There are still many gaps within the literature of social media crisis communication theory, despite the growing body of research surrounding the topic. Audiences are increasingly turning to social platforms (Adcorp, 2013) and

the expectations held by key publics in a social media age have changed. As social media demands timely, accurate information and ultimate transparency from organisations, the ability for current crisis communication strategies to meet these expectations must be examined. Communication professionals have been hesitant to embrace social media as a communication medium as it presents a loss of control to the organisation (McAllister-Spooner, 2009; Eikelmann, Hajj & Peterson, 2008). However, not participating in these forums for fear of relinquishing control can be far more dangerous than having a well-planned presence, as organisations that are absent leave the community to shape the crisis issue and subsequently their reputation. The intricacies of the social media platform, and the potential opportunities and challenges that this presents, must be considered in depth to ensure that communicators can continue to protect reputation in crisis in a social media age. Therefore this study attempts to provide further insight into the impact that social media technologies have on the practice of crisis communication.

This research focuses on the analysis of managing reputation in a social media environment, through assessing the application of traditional crisis communication techniques in that environment. The concepts of perception, reputation management and organisational image are all critical to this research, as are in depth analyses of social media and crisis communication. Crisis communication literature suggests that perception is a major influencing factor of an organisation's reputation (Benoit, 1995; Coombs, 2007). How key publics perceive the actions of organisations, or the organisation themselves, directly influences the reputation of an organisation. Organisations try to maintain or build good reputation by engaging in processes of reputation management. One of the many processes of reputation management is the application of crisis communication when a potential threat to reputation exists. The ideas of perception, the complexities of crisis communication and its relationship with reputation management are discussed in depth in the literature review. Perception of the organisational image plays a significant role in the formation of reputation. Zarco de Camara (2011) states that organisational image is "the sum of a person's beliefs, ideas, feelings and impressions about an organisation and

results the set of meanings through which people know, describe, remember and relate to an organisation" (p. 49). Effectively, organisational image is concerned with how an organisation presents itself to key publics, including its actions, symbols and ideas. This image influences the reputation of an organisation, and adds to its identity, making it uniquely recognisable. Organisational image plays a strong role in the formation of reputation, so the causal link is acknowledged in this study. However, major focus will be given to the discussion of reputation and perception and the application of crisis communication strategies in a social media environment. The perceived reputation of both Air New Zealand and Jetstar are discussed at length in this study, with participants asked to provide reasons for their perceptions of both organisations. Consumer perceptions inform an organisation of the factors that influence organisational perception and reputation, and by extension how key publics perceive an organisation's image and identity. Therefore, it is imperative to gain insight into the driving forces behind consumer perception.

1.2   Research aims

This research aims to critically analyse the effectiveness of traditional crisis communication strategies, as applied to a social media environment. By comparing the use of crisis communication strategies employed by Jetstar and Air New Zealand on Facebook, the application of traditional crisis communication strategies and their application to a social media environment can be examined. Such an examination will reveal how these traditional strategies work in a social media environment, for which they were not designed, and what key publics who access social media expect from organisations in times of crisis. These findings contribute to the growing body of literature surrounding social media crisis communication.

Potential shortcomings of the crisis communication employed by both airlines will be examined and analysed alongside new challenges raised by social media. These findings will help organisations, in particular other airlines, to take the necessary steps to retain vital positive reputation in times of crisis and

participate in effective crisis communication on social media. Understanding of how social media challenges old practices of crisis communication, and of the potential it provides if used correctly, will help to build a clear picture of how crisis communication can be applied in a social media age. While this study is limited in sampling, future research could further test findings in other scenarios to explore their potential for extrapolation. Therefore, this study aims to provide the initial building blocks for understanding the impact that social media has on the application of traditional crisis communication practices.

1.3   Thesis structure

This thesis first begins by considering relevant literature across a multi-disciplinary field, in order to fully understand the application of crisis communication strategies in a social media environment. The literature review combines knowledge of crisis communication within social media and its application to the field. It also considers past case studies of airline crisis communication situations and the implications of emotion and emotive content. The methodology then outlines the processes involved in the practical section of the thesis, including limitations to the research design. Ultimately, a triangular methodological approach that combines interviews, focus groups and textual analysis is discussed using a thematic analysis that is applied to all three approaches. The findings chapter discusses data, while the analysis chapter provides deeper insight into the implications of the findings and their relevance to initial literature. Lastly, recommendations and a general overview of the relevance of this study within the wider body of research are discussed in conclusions, bringing to light the major discoveries and areas for future research.

1.4   Summary

This thesis adds to the complex field of crisis communication research, while specifically considering the implications of social media developments on traditional crisis communication practice. It is anticipated that an analysis of these practices in a social media environment will yield results that require change to suit the nature of this environment. It is expected that any lack in

crisis-handling has the potential to adversely affect the organisation's reputation in a publicly accessible forum. Traditional techniques will be examined in depth, as will key publics' communication expectations and the opportunities and challenges presented by social media, reinforcing the impact that this media has on current practice. This study allows conclusions to be drawn from a robust, triangulated research method. Ultimately, this research provides a starting point for further discussion into the role that social media plays in crisis communication.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Overview

This section aims to review the theories that are central to the examination and comparative analysis of Jetstar's and Air New Zealand's social media use in times of crisis. Examining social media content before, during and after a severe weather delay will provide an insight into the role of crisis communication strategies in a social media environment, and how these strategies influence the successes and setbacks of two airlines in recovering from crisis and retaining vital positive reputation. Comparing crisis communication strategies employed by Jetstar and Air New Zealand during a crisis event that resulted in delays and cancellations of flights will yield results that demonstrate how these organisations use social media for crisis communication and to what effect. The impact of the global, instantaneous social media environment that allows quick, inclusive crisis communication is further investigated. The impact that prior communication and reputation have on an organisation's ability to effectively employ crisis communication techniques will also be examined, as will the organisation's use of social media.

Crisis Communication, as a field of study, has significantly increased over time to create a large, expanding field of research, addressing how organisations respond to crisis, how their behavior in a crisis impacts on reputation and the strategies that would prove beneficial in crisis situations. Despite the breadth of the field, there are still many areas of crisis communication that demand further research, especially when expectations of publics are changing in the light of developments in information access and media functions. The advancement of media technology has led to the prominence of the internet and social media as a communication medium. Advancement in media technology and the subsequent changes in audience behaviour demand change in communication practices to ensure practices can maximise and control the potential tools and challenges that new media forms pose. Recent statistics show that approximately 50% of New Zealanders are currently Facebook users, and it is the most used social medium in New Zealand (Adcorp, 2013). These statistics highlight the

importance that communication practitioners should put on understanding social media. Crisis communication research into the interplay between crisis communication practices and social media is imperative as audiences increasingly seek out social media sites before, during and after crisis. Social media sites give organisations and consumers alike the ability to shape debate, and offer opinion and feedback. These sites have become a meeting point for opinion leaders; a place that consumers seek out to join with like-minded people in a virtual, instantaneous and global manner that transcends time and space. These same sites have also become platforms for the organisation's voice, offering a chance to counteract negative feedback directly at the source and to directly engage with consumers in a manner that is increasingly expected by the consumer. The existence of social media, and the manner in which they are used by a wide range of general consumers, means that in times of crisis, organisations must have a clear understanding of how social media can help and harm their good reputation and positive perception of their brand.

2.2 Crisis Communication Theory

2.2.1 Defining crisis

Throughout crisis communication literature there is no one single definition of a crisis. However there are several prevalent themes that are consistently used. Zaremba (2010) states, "A crisis is an anomalous event that may negatively affect an organisation and requires efficient organisational communication to reduce the damage related to the event" (p. 21). Coombs (2007) argues that a crisis is "a sudden and unexpected event that threatens to disrupt an organisation's operations and poses both a financial and reputational threat" (p. 164). Schultz, Utz and Goritz (2011) define organisational crisis as "a specific, unexpected and non-routine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty, or threaten, or are perceived to threaten, an organisation's high priority goals" (p. 21). These definitions, and many more like it, draw on the common themes of an event that is out of the ordinary; that either damages or is perceived to potentially damage the important, but intangible asset of good organisational reputation. Authors of crisis communication literature stress the importance of

potential or actual damage to reputation that sparks the necessity of communicative action as a necessary component of crisis communication (Zaremba, 2010; Coombs, 2007; Fearn-Banks, 2011.) Therefore, for the purpose of this study, we can understand crisis to be an event that occurs suddenly, at an unknown time, despite the fact that it may be predicted as a probable potential future threat that either harms, or has the potential to harm, the good reputation of an organisation.

2.2.2 Defining crisis communication

In addressing crisis as a sudden event that threatens an organisation's reputation, crisis communication is the planned systems that enable the essential communicative acts necessary to successfully manage a crisis. As Zaremba (2010) explains, "crisis communication involves planning for crises and responding to various audiences under what can sometimes be severe pressure" (p. 7). Furthering this idea, Fearn-Banks (2011) states that "crisis communication is the dialogue between the organisation and its publics prior to, during and after the negative occurrence" (p. 2). Clearly, crisis communication is concerned with the management of reputation in times of crisis.

A crisis communication situation exists when an event occurs that fundamentally challenges the organisation's image, brand or reputation, demanding that the organisation uses various media to acknowledge and respond to the challenge (Coombs, 2007; Fearn-Banks, 2011). Zaremba (2010) argues that communication before, during and after crisis can have a significant effect on the organisation's ability to recover from crisis. This has led several theorists to conclude that an organisation must prepare and plan for crises, and the necessary communicative acts that must follow crisis, to enable successful crisis communication (Zaremba, 2010; Coombs, 2007; White, 2012; Taylor & Kent, 2007). Crisis Communication, as a discipline focuses on the necessary communicative acts that can occur before, during and after a crisis to enable successful recovery from crisis and minimise potential damage to the intangible asset of good reputation.

2.2.3 Reputation's role in crisis communication

Crisis communication relies on the assumption that organisations are fundamentally motivated to maintain the intangible asset of good reputation. When a crisis poses potential damage to this good reputation, organisations will take steps to repair the damage and maintain or restore good reputation (Coombs, 2007; Benoit, 1995). Coombs (2007) defines reputation as " an aggregate evaluation stakeholders make about how well an organisation is meeting stakeholder expectations based on past behaviours" (p. 164). Therefore, good reputation is built over time, and can be severely damaged by any instance of actions that are perceived to not meet key stakeholders' expectations. Organisations gain either a positive or negative reputation from the outset of stakeholder relations, which then requires maintenance or correction. These reputations are formed by information that stakeholders receive of the organisation from a variety of sources, including news media, word of mouth, organisational communication and direct interaction with the organisation (Coombs, 2007). Stakeholders' expectations are an evaluative measure and are built through comparison to an internalised standard, which comes from comparison with other similar organisations and personal standards (Coombs, 2007). A negative change in reputation may alter stakeholders' interactions with the organisation, causing tangible losses of clientele and also causing the potential for negative word of mouth to be spread through a variety of channels (Coombs, 2007). Lastly, organisations with favourable reputations prior to crisis will be able to better weather a crisis as they will have greater reputational capital, allowing greater levels of acceptance by key, affected stakeholders (Coombs, 2007). Organisational reputation, and the changes that this reputation undergoes during crisis, plays a crucial role in crisis communication as crisis communication only exists if there is a perceived or actual threat to reputation.

2.2.4 Image restoration theory

Though there are many models and theories within crisis communication literature, there are several leading concepts that are repeatedly cited

throughout the literature. One such theory is Benoit's Image Restoration Theory. Although Benoit uses the term image, the image restoration theory is focused on the impact that perception has on an organisation's reputation and the steps that may be taken to reduce negative perception. Therefore, at its very heart, Image Restoration Theory deals with reputation. The foundation of image restoration theory relies on two key assumptions: communication is a goal driven activity and maintaining a positive image is one of the central goals of communication (Benoit, 1995). Benoit (1995) argues that people are concerned with how they are perceived by others, which means that people will logically seek to explain their actions to those who may believe those actions or events to be undesirable. It is human nature to defend slights on reputation, and thus if an organisation believes that there is a potential threat to reputation, then they will work to defend this threat. Benoit's image restoration theory outlines a typology of common acts that seek to explain or justify actions and that is directly applied to the communicative acts of organisations in times of crisis. Benoit (1995) states that an organisation can consider an attack on reputation to exist when relevant and important audiences believe that an undesirable act occurred and that the organisation is responsible for that act. An attack on reputation then leads the organisation to perform communicative acts that aim to repair or protect positive reputation. Relying on these principles, Benoit's (1995) image restoration theory uses five categories of message options for an organisation in crisis. Three of these categories contain sub-categories, to outline potential effective steps for communicating, following a crisis.

2.2.4.1 Denial

Denial can be used to absolve blame from the organisation, by either denying the act occurred or that the organisation was responsible for the act. However the category of denial cannot be appropriately applied to audiences that were injured, or perceive themselves to be injured, by the offensive action (Benoit, 1995).

Shifting blame is a variant of denial as the accused attempts to absolve themselves from blame by providing statements or evidence that someone else committed the act that the salient audiences find offensive. Benoit (1995) suggests that shifting blame may be more effective than simply denying an act, as it redirects the negative perception and allows audiences to continue to blame somebody for the act.

2.2.4.2 Evading responsibility

If an organisation is unable to deny outright that the offensive act occurred, they may be able to take several steps to avoid high attributions of responsibility for the act. Defeasibility is the first variant of evading responsibility. Under the defeasibility variant, the organisation attempts to convey that they lacked information about, or control over, important contributing factors of the offensive action to lessen the organisation's level of responsibility for the action. In another variant, the actor can also claim provocation - that their offensive action was in response to another more offensive action. Organisations can also provide excuses based on accidents, as audiences will be less likely to hold an organisation responsible for the act if the organisation can prove that they could not reasonably be expected to have control over the action. Lastly, an organisation can justify the action on the basis of motives and intentions. In the justify sub-variant, the organisation evades responsibility by accepting that the action occurred and asking the audience to not hold the organisation fully accountable, as the intentions of the organisation were sound (Benoit, 1995).

2.2.4.3 Reducing offensiveness

If an organisation cannot deny that the offensive action occurred, and if they believe that techniques to evade responsibility will be ineffective, then they must seek to reduce the offensiveness of the act. All variants of reducing offensiveness do not deny that the offensive action occurred. The variants instead focus on attempts to reduce negative impact on organisational reputation by increasing the esteem in which the audience holds the organisation or reducing ill-feeling towards the organisation. Benoit (1995) outlines five variants of this category,

which can be employed under different circumstances, the first of which is Bolstering. Bolstering attempts to reduce negative effects of the action by reminding the audience of past positive actions and positive attributes of the organisation. The initial negative feeling that may damage reputation may be able to be offset, mitigating the impact of the crisis, if positive messages about the organisation are conveyed. Minimisation, the second variant, attempts to convince audiences that the negative act isn't as bad as it first appeared so that ill feeling will be reduced. An organisation can also differentiate the action from other similar, but worse, offensive acts taken out by other organisations in the past. Differentiation creates a basis for comparison of negative actions by other organisations. The existence of a similar, but more offensive, past action by other organisations makes it more likely that negative feeling toward the organisation in crisis will be reduced. Transcendence is the fifth variant that can be used to reduce offence. Transcendence is an attempt to place the offensive action in a different context and may attempt to damage the reputation of the source of negative information, thereby lessening the validity and the negative potential of the organisations offensive action. Lastly, an organisation can offer monetary compensation to victims of the offensive action (Benoit, 1995).

2.2.4.4 Corrective action

Benoit (1995) suggests that an organisation can also promise to correct the problem. An organisation can employ corrective action either by promising to restore the state of affairs of the organisation to that of before the offensive action, or by promising to make future changes to prevent reoccurrences of the offensive action. Corrective action differs from compensation by addressing the source of the offensive action, instead of providing gifts that counterbalance the negative occurrence.

2.2.4.5 Mortification

Mortification is the last category within image restoration theory. Mortification, the most accommodating category, is when the organisation admits responsibility for the offensive action and seeks forgiveness from the audience.

Benoit (1995) stresses the importance of perception in crisis. If a salient audience perceives that an organisation or actor has committed a wrongful or offensive act, then it is possible that the organisation's reputation may be threatened, and thus a crisis communication situation would exist. Therefore, any image restoration strategy employed must address perception and fact (Benoit, 1997). The typology outlines a variety of techniques that can be used in response to the existence of a perceived wrongful or offensive action. The categories that comprise image restoration theory are not mutually exclusive, and it is recommended that in some cases a mixture of theories be used (Benoit, 1995). Finally, Benoit (1995) stresses the importance of actions and rhetoric, or messages used, correlating. If actions and rhetoric conflict then the image restoration effort will be undermined. Before image restoration theory can be applied the perceptions of the audience must be fully understood to ensure that the most applicable and appropriate categories can be applied to organisational messages.

Benoit (1997) expands further on the application of image restoration theory to crisis communication, noting that it is imperative to anticipate and pre-plan for crises so that organisations can lessen response times and therefore manage potential negative damage to reputation. It is crucial the image restoration theory messages are tailored to the audience, as it is likely that there will be more than one important audience in times of crisis (Benoit, 1997). Though the message must be tailored to specific audiences, at all times it must never contradict other messages or the actions of the organisation if the attempts are to be successful (Benoit, 1997). Finally, it is important to note that not all image restoration categories can be employed at the same time - and in fact some may contradict others used and therefore undermine the overall image restoration goals of the organisation (Blaney, Benoit & Brazeal, 2002). Image restoration theory has become a popular method of case-by-case analysis within the crisis communication field and is often used alongside attempts to explain successes and failures in organisations' crisis communication efforts.

2.2.5 Situational crisis communication theory

Coombs (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) is another leading, more recent theory in the field of crisis communication. SCCT is a social scientific method and relies on experimental design, rather than case studies. SCCT provides a framework for crisis managers to understand how communication in crisis can be used to protect reputation (Coombs, 2007). This framework aims to anticipate stakeholder reaction to the crisis, thus allowing crisis communicators to plan appropriate responses to a crisis situation as crisis communicators need understanding of stakeholder reactions to correctly inform crisis communication activities (Coombs, 2007). SCCT is receiver oriented as it focuses on the analysis of stakeholder response to crisis by aiming to understand and predict how stakeholders will react and respond to crisis, which then informs crisis communication methods. SCCT allows crisis communicators to plan prior to crises happening, based on the needs and anticipated reactions of stakeholders, instead of being primarily focused on the organisation's own concerns of image and reputation management (Coombs, 2004). SCCT is primarily based around the concept that reputation is an invaluable commodity that is earned and altered by perceptions of an organisation's ability to meet the standards that the stakeholders expect and require (Coombs, 2007). SCCT provides a framework to predict how stakeholders will react in a crisis, and how they will react to various crisis communication in order to manage reputation by meeting the needs and expectations of stakeholders first and foremost (Coombs, 2007).

Situational Crisis Communication Theory's first tenet is that priority in any organisational crisis lies not with protecting reputation but with minimizing harm to stakeholders (Coombs, 2007). If organisations do not take every effort to minimise psychological and physical harm to the affected stakeholders then the communicative acts and actors are fundamentally unethical (Coombs, 2007).

Crisis communicators can use either instructing information or adapting information to fulfill this tenet. Instructing information outlines what stakeholders must do to protect themselves from any physical threat caused by the crisis, while adapting information helps those affected cope with psychological effects of the crisis (Coombs, 2007). As crisis situations create extreme stress for the stakeholders involved, a desperate need for information ensues, in which affected stakeholders want all available information about what just happened and what corrective action is in place to overcome the crisis situation as soon as possible (Coombs, 2007). Expressions of corrective action and concern for victims are both forms of adjusting information, and are expected by stakeholders. A common mistake in crisis communication is to avoid instant promises of corrective action and expressions of concern in fear that they may seem like admissions of guilt when the organisation may not be to blame for the crisis (Coombs, 2007). However, to avoid giving all available adjusting information is to act unethically as the crisis communicator has not taken all steps to reduce psychological harm to stakeholders. The decision to offer all adjusting information and to give promises of corrective action or expressions of concern often conflicts with pressures to minimise potential reputational damage during a crisis, which creates the need for crisis communicators to balance stakeholder and organisation expectations.

2.2.5.1 Attribution theory and reputational threat

The theoretical framework of SCCT lies in attribution theory, which provides the basis for the relationship of the many variables that make up SCCT (Coombs, 2007). Coombs (2007*b*) argues that it is inevitable that attribution theory and crisis are linked, as those that are involved with crisis will automatically seek explanation and assess crisis responsibility. Weiner's Attribution Theory (1985) is based on the assumption that people seek out causes for events, especially those events that are negative or unexpected. Under Attribution Theory, a person will process information about an event by assigning responsibility for the event, and that same person will also have an emotional reaction to the event. Attributions of responsibility and emotion that are formed through the

processing of all available information on the event may motivate action. Negative action is more likely when those forming the attribution believe someone is responsible for the event or action and when anger is the major emotion informing decision-making (Weiner, 1985). In times of high emotion - especially when attributions of anger have been made - audiences will simplify the decision making process and rely on stereotypes to inform decision-making processes (Weiner, 1985). SCCT uses attribution theory to predict possible reputational threat resulting from crisis and to prescribe appropriate crisis communication strategies that are based on predicted reputational threat (Coombs, 2007). Attributions of crisis responsibility have major implications for organisations that have suffered crisis. Coombs (2007) argues that if a stakeholder attributes responsibility of the crisis to the organisation, then that stakeholder will become angry and therefore will become more likely to be motivated to take negative action against the organisation. Such action might include creating negative word of mouth or no longer conducting business with the organisation. The use of Attribution Theory as a fundamental cornerstone of SCCT highlights the importance of emotion and perception in crisis communication, as emotion and perception are the key drivers behind stakeholder perception, and therefore organisational reputation, following a crisis.

The application of attribution theory within SCCT impacts considerably on the importance of understanding and identifying the level of reputational threat present in a crisis. SCCT suggests that crisis communicators will be able to select which crisis communication to employ to best protect reputation, if they understand the potential threat to reputation. Crisis communicators must predict how potential stakeholders may react and what particular attributions they may form to understand the potential threat to reputation. There are three factors which influence reputational threat, and all influence the attributions that stakeholders will form. These factors are initial crisis responsibility, crisis history and prior reputation (Coombs, 2007). Initial crisis responsibility is formed by the perception and attributions formed by the stakeholders about the level of organisational responsibility for the crisis. Coombs (2007) argues that if

a stakeholder perceives a high level of organisational responsibility then the potential threat to reputation will be greater. Depending on attributions of crisis responsibility, SCCT uses three crisis clusters: the victim cluster, which has weak attributions of responsibility, the accidental cluster, which has minimal attributions of crisis responsibility and the intentional cluster which has strong attributions of responsibility (Coombs, 2007). Therefore, depending on crisis type, perceived responsibility for a crisis may alter. Crisis history, secondly, considers whether the organisation has had any similar crises in the past, as a history of crisis may lead to stronger attributions of responsibility (Coombs, 2007). Lastly, prior relational reputation considers the treatment of stakeholders by the organisation in other contexts, which combine to form an overall reputation of the organisation, held by stakeholders. An unfavourable prior relational reputation suggests a negative history of stakeholder treatment; therefore it will be more likely that stakeholders' negative attributions are increased and, thus, the threat to the organisation's reputation also increases. Coombs (2007) argues that to assess potential threat the crisis communicator must first determine the initial crisis responsibility and crisis type to anticipate the possible level of crisis responsibility that stakeholders will attribute to the organisation. Secondly, crisis communicators must then consider crisis history and prior-crisis reputation of the organisation. Coombs (2007) suggests that the appropriate framework within SCCT is to increase the reputational threat to that of the next level of crisis. For example, a victim crisis will intensify to an accident crisis if the organisation holds a history of either negative reputation or past, similar crises. Furthermore, as increased attributions of responsibility have the potential to generate emotions such as anger, and reduce sympathy, it is likely that high crisis responsibility will coincide with severe direct and indirect impacts on positive reputation (Coombs, 2007). Crisis history is a significant exacerbating factor in the perception of responsibility. Coombs (2004) argues that control is a significant factor in organisational responsibility - if an organisation is believed to be able to control the crisis then stakeholders are more likely to attribute higher levels of responsibility, and hold more anger towards the organisation, as the crisis is seen as intentional. This is exacerbated if a crisis is repeated, even if the initial crisis was uncontrollable, as it appears

that the organisation has not taken appropriate steps to prioritise stakeholders and eliminate future crises (Coombs, 2004). Coombs (2004) has found that in the Accidental and Victim clusters of crises there is a strong link between crisis history and organisational reputation and that a history of past crises intensifies attributions of responsibility, lowering perceptions of the organisation and producing real threat to reputation.

2.2.5.2 SCCT'S crisis responses strategies

SCCT outlines a number of communication strategies that can be used to manage crisis situations. Coombs (2007) suggests that there are two categories of response strategies: primary crisis response strategies and secondary crisis response strategies. Primary crisis response strategies deny the crisis, diminish the crisis or aim to rebuild reputation and are outlined below:

Deny Strategies

- Attack the accuser: Confronts those that are claiming that something is wrong
- Denial: Claiming that there is no crisis
- Scapegoat: Blames a person or group outside of the organisation for the crisis

Diminish Strategies

- Excuse: Claim that the organisation did not intend to cause harm or the events that caused the crisis are beyond their control.
- Justification: Minimises the perceived damage by explaining the crisis and the damage caused by crisis.

Rebuild Strategies

- Compensation: Offering gifts to those affected by crisis
- Apology: Taking full responsibility for the crisis and seeks forgiveness from those affected (Coombs, 2007).

Secondary crisis response strategies aim to bolster the reputation of the organisation and take place once the initial response strategies have been used.

Secondary strategies include reminding stakeholders of past good deeds, ingratiation to praise stakeholders and victimage, which shows the organisation as a victim of the same crisis (Coombs, 2007). These strategies are linked to other tenets of SCCT through the notion of responsibility - the level of responsibility determined to be perceived by important stakeholders will impact which crisis response strategy should be used (Coombs, 2007). The greater the perceived responsibility, the more accommodative and concerned the strategy becomes. SCCT's crisis response strategies form three groups: denial, diminish and rebuild. Deny strategies attempt to remove connections between the organisation and crisis, while diminish strategies attempt to reduce the offensiveness of the crisis and state the organisation lacked control over the crisis. Lastly, rebuild strategies present new and positive information about the organisation and remind audiences of the organisation's past good deeds and positive attributes (Coombs, 2007). Coombs (2007) bases these strategies on the assumption that "communication affects people's perceptions in crisis" (p. 171) and that perceptions are the driving force behind shaping stakeholders' emotional responses to the crisis and their future interactions, therefore impacting reputation. Therefore, SCCT's crisis response strategies have three objectives to protect reputation: shape attribution of crisis, change negative perception of the organisation and reduce negative affects generated by crisis (Coombs, 2007). If the organisation is to blame, or is perceived to be blamed for the crisis, then adjusting information and rebuild strategies are the most effective strategies (Coombs, 2007). However, overly accommodative strategies can be costly for organisations and therefore should only be used when the situation demands it.

There are many similarities between the communication strategies adopted by Benoit's (1995) Image Restoration Theory and the more recent SCCT, which suggests the relevance and importance of both to any study analysing crisis communication. The theoretical foundations of the two theories are different, despite similarities in potential actions available to crisis communicators. Benoit's work relies on case by case analysis and application of the typology to test the relevance and uses, whereas Coombs' SCCT is social scientific, and aims

to move the study of crisis communication away from a case-by-case analysis by considering generic, instead of specific, situations. Coombs' SCCT focuses on maintaining good relationships between organisations and key publics in crisis and puts the consideration of stakeholders as the paramount issue to be addressed in such relationships. Benoit's Image Restoration Theory, on the other hand, deals with controlling the organisation's actions in crisis and outlines how to project appropriate behaviour. Both theorists expand on potential crisis communication strategies that can be used, despite the difference in theoretical foundation. Although this analysis is specifically assessing communication strategy by case study analysis, both theories can, and should be applied in any crisis communication analysis. Benoit (1995) provides a reactionary typology, that can be employed by crisis communicators once the perceived threat to reputation has occurred, while SCCT aims to provide a framework of potential actions that can be used by crisis communicators by predicting stakeholder reaction, allowing pre-planning in crisis situations. SCCT and Image Restoration Theory complement each other and both will be employed to compare the use of airlines' crisis communication in social media.

2.3 Social media and crisis communication

Social media technologies have changed the way that the world interacts. Messages can spread globally and almost instantaneously through social media platforms and the internet, creating an unprecedented environment that crisis communication must operate within. Schultz et al (2011) argue that social media play an increasing role in how societies form and shape their understanding of crises. The internet by its very nature accelerates content sharing, acting as a catalyst that results in higher exposure of crisis situations and a potential virality of information that carries increasing risk of damage to reputation (Gonzales-Herrero & Smith, 2010). While social media can be easily accessed and directed by the general population, it can also be influenced by the organisations attempting to control the crisis, therefore creating a platform that is seen as a double edged sword (Schultz et al., 2011; Eikelmann et al, 2008; Schwarz, 2012; Taylor & Perry, 2005). Eiklemann et al. (2008) state that increasingly consumers

can share their honest opinions of behaviour, product performance and service of organisations worldwide. This has led to organisations losing sole control of their messages, as they can no longer rely on one-way forms of communication to influence consumers (Eiklemann et al, 2008). Eiklemann et al (2008) argue that consumer criticism can no longer be ignored and instead consumers expect - and will demand, response and action in an online environment. While many practitioners see this as a challenge, these technologies enable organisations to join the conversation and gain feedback and reputational capital, if used correctly. These changes highlight the unprecedented media environment that communicators now operate in, which requires adaption of traditional practices to suit this most recent media environment (Gonzales-Herrero & Smith, 2010). The interplay between crisis communication and social media is an area that can still be researched further, including the use of traditional crisis communication response strategies in social media platforms. Further research in this field will help to ascertain the impact that social media may have on traditional crisis communication responses.

2.3.1 Defining social media

Social Media has become a buzzword in many fields of research in recent years, partly due to its phenomenal growth and partly due to its increasing prominence in a variety of fields. However, like most blanket terms, there is no one single definition of social media. Liu, Austin and Jin (2011) define social media as "digital tools and applications that facilitate interactive communication and content exchange among and between public and organisations" (p. 346). In a different study the same authors define social media function as "a new platform for online word-of-mouth communication, working as an informal communication channel through which personal, product/service, or organisation information is conveyed, shared and processed" (Austin, Liu & Jin, 2012, p. 190).

Veil, Buehner and Palenchar (2011) state that, "social media is at its core human communication, possessing characteristics of participation, openness

conversation, community and connectedness" (p. 110), while White (2012) defines social media as "forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content" (p. 2). These varying definitions of social media share a common characteristic; this newest method of communication has a different set of characteristics from communication methods of the past that influence traditional organisational-public exchanges.

For this study, social media is seen as having core characteristics, which define how it is used, and how it impacts crisis communication. These characteristics include speed, information exchange, community, user-generated content and interaction enabled by online, internet technologies. Social media, therefore, is defined as a global, instantaneous phenomenon in which the public can form communities for the purpose of interactive, user-generated content exchange across borders and time zones. The speed at which information can travel in social media environments, its global nature and accessibility are the contributing factors that are changing communication as we know it. These changes may have an effect on the practices of crisis communication, creating both a challenge and an opportunity for those who must communicate on behalf of an organisation during crisis.

2.3.2 The use of social media in crisis situations

Perhaps one of the most consequential shifts in consumer behaviour for crisis communicators is the growth of global online communities, that debate issues, organisations and events in real-time. In times of crisis key audiences seek out social media platforms for a number of reasons. Social media offers community, in which affected parties seek emotional support and a place to share emotional experiences. Affected parties can band together, share information that may be relevant to other affected parties and act as a collective to demand resolution and change, by using social media platforms (Liu et al, 2013). The social media environment satisfies the emotional needs of affected parties in a way that other media platforms do not. Key publics will be more likely to turn to social media in

crisis when the situation leads to desires for emotional support, or to vent anger or frustration at the organisation involved in the crisis (Liu et al., 2013). The fact that key publics seek out social media to satisfy emotional needs is of great relevance to crisis communication as crisis communication theory dictates the importance of nullifying negative emotion to protect reputation during crisis (Coombs, 2007; Coombs, 2004). This negative emotion is more likely to be aired on social media forums than on other media platforms. Despite the fact that crisis communication theory dictates that negative emotion must be nullified, this act becomes increasingly more difficult when dealing with social media platforms, as there is no level of control over the debate. Organisations can respond to comments, but they cannot stop key publics from airing negative emotions, therefore making the challenge of nullifying these negative emotions increasingly more difficult, and, in fact, maybe even impossible in a social media environment.

A second reason that publics turn to social media in crisis is to seek out information that the public trusts. Social media is often more trusted by the public than traditional media in times of crisis, and therefore is used as an information source (Austin et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2013; Liu, 2010). Social media's dialogic nature, alongside its potential for interactivity and speed, is making it a preferred information source amongst the public (Schultz et al., 2011). Austin et al (2012) found that key publics often use social media during crisis to communicate with friends and family and seek insider information that has not yet been released on official channels. Passive audiences are also most likely to become aware of crises through social media channels, and once aware of the crisis seek out further information about the crisis (Austin et al., 2012). Key publics are increasingly turning to social media as a key information source during crisis as social media is seen to generate timelier, more trustworthy information that is not affected by gatekeeping processes of traditional media sources.

Online communities enable organisations to speak directly to their audience, without the gatekeeping processes that define traditional media. Gonzales-

Herrero and Smith (2010) argue that the internet gives crisis communicators more tools that can be used before, during and after crisis in order to inform stakeholders and protect organisational reputation. Social media enables organisations to engage with key publics in a manner that builds stakeholder relationships and allows organisations to respond to stakeholder demand for information as soon as possible (Gonzales-Herrero & Smith, 2010). This added dimension of engagement and interaction could help to protect reputation in times of crisis as organisations increasingly have more tools to answer the needs of stakeholders and to build prior reputational capital. Social media forums demand new forms of organisational communication - where organisations speak with a human voice, where employees are allowed to interact with key publics online (Gonzales-Herrero & Smith, 2010) and where transparency and speed are key driving factors for any organisational communication issued during crisis.

Prior to crisis, social media platforms can be used to pre-empt crisis by enabling organisations to adjust policies and actions based on online feedback (Perry, Taylor & Doerfel, 2003; Schwarz, 2012). During crisis social media platforms have the potential to engage publics in a crisis situation, and enable the development and implementation of interactive, virtual graphics that educate and inform, as well as helping the organisation to frame the debate and gain support or forgiveness for their actions (Veil et al., 2011; Perry et al, 2003). Perry et al (2003) argue that interaction, transparency and speed are all key factors to successful use of social media in times of crisis. If an organisation interacts with stakeholders in a timely, honest and transparent manner throughout the crisis, reputational damage can be minimised. The basic principles of crisis management remain the same, despite the many changes and developments that the social media environment demands. Advanced planning, monitoring of stakeholder opinion and perception and timely, and truthful responses are still key tenets of the practice (Gonzales-Herrero & Smith, 2010). Veil et al (2011) argues that there is far more danger in ignoring social media than there is in embracing it. If an organisation ignores social media platforms; it loses the opportunity to contribute to the online debate by adding organisational

information, which may help to nullify negative word of mouth and improve organisational reputation. Stakeholders are already using social media to debate, discuss and deliberate organisations and crisis situations - to ignore the platform is to ignore a chance to use a potential channel to minimise damage, and truthfully communicate messages to stakeholders, leaving the audience to shape and frame the crisis.

2.3.3 Social-Mediated crisis communication model

One of the leading theories that considers the interplay between and implications of social media and crisis communication is the Social-Mediated Crisis Communication Model (SMCC). The SMCC is currently the only known theoretical model that enables organisations to develop crisis communication plans with understanding of how publics use social media (Liu et al., 2011). SMCC seeks to explain the publics' use of social media in crisis, by first stating that social media use during crisis is motivated by issue relevance, information seeking and sharing and emotional venting and support (Liu et al., 2011). SMCC is made up of two major parts: firstly, it explains how crisis communication information source and form affect organisations' responses and secondly, SMCC recommends best practice responses in a social-mediated environment. SMCC posits that publics are most likely to turn to social media in times of crisis as they seek out a shared emotional space, where they can be supported and vent their frustrations in an environment filled with like-minded people (Liu et al., 2011). This emotional connection leads to an environment where it is increasingly likely for people to express negative word of mouth, especially if the crisis sparks anger toward the organisation. SMCC identifies three types of key publics to explain crisis information source, who can both produce and consume crisis communication information across social media, traditional media and word-of-mouth (Liu et al., 2011). The key publics are: influential social media creators, social media followers and social media inactives. Influential social media creators are either individuals or organisations that create crisis information in a social media environment that is consumed by others. Social media followers then consume this information in social media environments, while social media

inactives may consume the information indirectly through word-of-mouth from social media followers or through traditional media outlets who follow social media influencers. All three of these information sources are third party, external sources of crisis information. Lastly, the organisation that is in the centre of the crisis is also a producer of crisis information (Liu et al., 2011). Crisis information form, on the other hand, is the channel through which the crisis information is accessed, such as traditional media, organisational websites or social media (Liu et al., 2011).

The organisations' communication before, during and after crisis is affected by five factors under SMCC. These factors are: crisis origin, crisis type, infrastructure, message strategy and message form. Liu et al (2011) argues that for an organisation to successfully control the flow of crisis information, it must present itself as the preferred source of crisis information. Therefore, it is essential that crisis managers have a key understanding of the impact that source and form can have on the acceptance of particular crisis communication responses (Liu et al., 2011). Tests conducted of the SMCC model have found that crisis communication message form impacts of the acceptance of the message. Liu et al (2011) found that publics were more likely to accept defensive message strategies if heard directly from the organisation, and were less likely to accept the same messages if they came through word of mouth communication. The same study also found the attributions of negative emotion were also greater towards message form if heard through word of mouth communication, as opposed to organisational communication (Liu et al., 2011). There is a strong indication that initial source and form of crisis information affect how audiences seek further crisis information, initially seeking out media that are most relevant to them and using the same platforms that they initially found crisis information to further their knowledge (Austin et al., 2012). The importance of information form and source suggests that it is crucial for the organisation to become the preferred information provider of crisis information. Harmful negative emotions, sparked by information received from other sources, may be lessened and the crisis situation diluted if key publics seek and receive information directly from the organisation, as the preferred information provider (Coombs, 2007). While

the ability to nullify negative emotion may seem to contradict the dialogic nature of social media, where key publics can voice their opinions, it in fact works alongside this dialogic nature, as an organisation can rely on providing factual information which the audience seeks as quickly as possible. Such actions would highlight the organisation's timely, transparent and honest response, thus framing the social media debate and also lessening any initial public anger as the public sees steps being taken to fix the crisis situation.

SMCC also recommends social-mediated crisis responses strategies that are specific to the social media environment. The message strategies adopted by SMCC draw heavily on SCCT's message strategies and applied social media research, and follow the same general guidelines and categories outlined by SCCT (Liu et al, 2011; Coombs, 2007). However, several additions have been made. In the deny category, ignoring a crisis has been added. Using the ignore strategy, the organisation would choose to disregard a crisis situation. Benoit's (1995) message strategy of separation is included in the diminish category, where organisations attempt to disconnect themselves from parties responsible for the crisis within the organisation. In SCCT's rebuild category, transcendence is suggested as another option, once again drawn from Benoit's (1995) Image Restoration Theory, in which organisations shift focus away from the immediate crisis onto a larger issue or problem. Lastly, the strategy of endorsement, in which the organisation highlights independent, third party support for the organisation, is added in the reinforce category of SCCT (Liu et al., 2011). These additions to message strategies suggest that initial social media response strategies are still drawn heavily from traditional crisis communication practice. Further investigation into the application and feasibility of these strategies in a social media age will add to the growing body of research that deals exclusively with how crisis communicators behave within a social media environment.

Further tests of the SMCC model attempt to reveal why key publics seek out certain types of media. Such studies found that key publics communicate about crisis through offline word-of-mouth and Facebook in order to seek further information or to share information with their networks (Liu et al., 2013).

Importantly, participants were also most likely to use the same online, social networks as friends and family (Liu et al., 2013). Many New Zealanders use Facebook as a medium to seek and share information during crisis, as it is the most used social medium in the country (Adcorp, 2013). Issue relevance and the ability to emotionally vent and gain support are primary motivators of social media use during crisis (Liu et al., 2013). Lastly, tests of the SMCC model confirm that information form has a strong impact on what kind of word-of-mouth the public engage in, with publics responding more positively to receiving organisational information of crisis via traditional media as opposed to offline word of mouth communication (Liu et al., 2013). These findings have been further reinforced in other works that investigate the SMCC model, affirming that audiences use social media to gain insider information, and therefore become social media followers. Alternatively, audiences act with utilitarian purposes and share information for the greater good during crisis, therefore becoming influential social media creators (Austin et al., 2012). Once again, these findings emphasise the importance of the organisation becoming a preferred information source and shaping debate in traditional and social media. As a preferred information source, organisations gain a voice and participate in a debate that would otherwise solely be shaped by consumers, who may be fuelled by negative emotion after being impacted by a crisis.

Stemming from the development of the SMCC model, there has been increasing focus on the impact of medium on crisis communication messages, adhering to the old communication adage, "the medium is the message". Utz, Schultz and Glocka (2013) argue that the effects of medium are stronger than that of crisis type, demonstrated by their finding that "crisis communication via social media resulted in a higher reputation and less secondary crisis reactions such as boycotting the company than crisis communication in the newspaper" (p. 40). Utz et al (2013) argue that crises are socially constructed, and therefore are influenced by medium as different media have varying effects on audiences. Organisations that are forthcoming with information on social media platforms show their willingness to communicate with stakeholders, increasing positive attributions following crisis and nullifying negative feeling (Utz et al., 2013).

Social media enables organisations to answer stakeholders' needs in a way that traditional media cannot, as the conversational, instantaneous and transparent nature of the tools available online enables organisations to better meet demands for timely and accurate information (Utz et al., 2013). Schultz et al (2011) have also found stronger correlations between message acceptance and medium, rather than crisis type, with social media crisis communication resulting in less negative crisis reactions, including the spreading of negative word of mouth. The area of research examining the impact of medium on message acceptance and the ability to recover from crisis is a new field; however early research indicates that medium type plays a significant role in how crisis messages are perceived by key audiences. Media types selected to present crisis messages on will have a profound influence on how these messages are perceived by target audiences as social media's role in societal debate grows. Organisations will increasingly be expected to participate, and even try to frame, online debate if they wish to add organisational voice and remain a prominent voice that provides key information and is accountable to the public during crisis situations.

2.3.4 Airlines use of social media: past case studies

From severe weather delays, to flight cancellations, strikes and crashes, the airline industry is inherently fraught with potential crisis situations. Sreenivasan, Lee and Goh (2012) argue that the airline industry invites itself particularly well to the social media environment, in that potential travellers seek out online sources for airline recommendations and travel advice from other, like-minded travellers. It has become increasingly necessary for airlines to join the online community, and engage with their key stakeholders, as airline consumers spend a majority of their time online when purchasing flights and researching travel options (Sreenivasan et al, 2012). Social media pages about airlines tend to be used by consumers to share information, gather information, provide community support and report daily routines (Sreenivasan et al, 2012). Therefore it has become increasingly important for airlines to have a strong social media presence as it has become expected by their key stakeholders - the travellers.

Brand and crisis enjoy a strong relationship, in that in times of crisis, brand capital can be quickly destroyed. This is especially the case if the organisation acts in a manner that is inconsistent with previously portrayed brand values (Grundy & Moxon, 2013). Grundy and Moxon (2013) outline methods that airlines can employ to protect brand and reputation during crisis, by analysing a variety or airline crises. It was found that pre-planning, using the appropriate media channels, including social media, to address key stakeholders and providing important, timely and appropriate information were all crucial factors in protecting brand and reputation for airlines in crisis (Grundy & Moxon, 2013). This general study adheres to many crisis communication guidelines and stresses the importance of using social media to reach the right stakeholders. Grundy and Moxon (2013) found that in the case of airlines it was particularly effective to address passengers through social media channels and online as they often needed information quickly and in its most simple form when about to travel. This general study shows the usefulness of many crisis communication techniques, specific to airlines, including the importance of preplanning for crisis such as weather delays, which allows more in depth and further discussion about specific case studies and events.

One of the more relevant past airline crisis situations to this study is the 2010 closure of the European Airspace, caused by the eruption of the Icelandic volcano, Eyjafallakokull. The volcanic eruption left 100,000 flights cancelled and 10 million passengers stranded between the 14th and 20th April 2010 (Evans, 2011; Miller, 2011). EUROCONTROL's management of flight cancellations and disruptions across the European airspace has been praised as an example of how airlines can best utilize social media during a crisis (Evans, 2011). EUROCONTROL is an intergovernmental body of 38 member states that is responsible for maintaining and updating flight plans across Europe in line with air travel restrictions. Before the crisis situation, it was an organisation that dealt with industry stakeholders - airports, airlines and similar. However, when the crisis struck, EUROCONTROL found itself dealing with the media and public, as it was one of the few organisations who had a clear picture of the extent of the

closures caused by the eruption (Evans 2011). As existing infrastructure could not cope with the volume of enquiries caused by the crisis, the organisation reluctantly turned to social media as functions such as hashtags allowed customers to follow updates and gain all required information about cancellations, delays, rebooking and refunds easily. Although the company had a pre-established social media presence, it had not been a priority as the organisation had very little interaction with the end consumer and therefore sites had grown slowly. However, the crisis saw followers grow exponentially and the variety, and informative nature of updates were well received by the affected public (Evans, 2011). Evans (2011) argues that the EUROCONTROL example teaches the importance of social media becoming an integral and initial part of crisis communication that should exist before the crisis occurs and continue after the crisis ends to continue to build good will.

The example of EUROCONTROL is contrasted with Miller's (2011) study that considers traveller responses to airline and airport conduct during the same crisis. Interviews with affected travellers held a strong negative feeling towards airports and airlines that they had chosen to travel with, indicating the lack of efficient, timely and reliable communication as a dominant factor that caused high levels of stress and negative emotions, such as anger and frustration (Miller, 2011). This is highly relevant, as crisis communication theory argues that effective, supportive communication can often lessen the potential negative impact of the crisis and that ineffective communication often exacerbates the crisis (Miller, 2011). One of the most significant findings was that passengers were most disappointed with a lack of information available on organisational websites and social media pages, as airline passengers increasingly turn to the internet to plan and book their travels and also seek information about potential changes (Miller, 2011). Ultimately, many passengers were left with a strong negative feeling towards chosen airports and airlines, which may be linked to the ineffective communication received, and the lack of information available on preferred media channels, such as the internet (Miller, 2011). Miller (2011) suggests that in the future if airlines wanted to negate this negative attribution they would be best to provide timely communication, that is personalised and

sympathetic and provide periodic updates. The difference between stakeholder interaction with airlines and airports, on one side, and EUROCONTROL, on the other provides an interesting point of comparison. It could be argued that many of the failings of airlines and airports mentioned by passengers, EUROCONTROL addressed effectively, primarily through the use of social media to provide timely, important information and a personable, sympathetic approach. The EUROCONTROL example, and this contrasting study of organisational action and reputation during and after the same crisis, clearly displays how correct use of social media technologies in crisis can help to alleviate negative attributions, and even build positive reputation. On the other hand, social media technologies poorly used or ignored can lead to greater negative attributions as affected stakeholders seek information on their preferred media channels, which have not been effectively utilised by organisations in crisis.

2.4 Grunig's excellence theory, dialogic communication and social media use in crisis situations

Excellence Theory, originally rooted in public relations and developed in 1985, is a study of best practice in public relations headed by James Grunig. It is seen as highly applicable to the field of crisis communication, despite not being originally applied to the field (Fearn-Banks, 2011). Excellence Theory outlines a four-model approach, based on the supposition that public relations is practiced at its best when a good relationship exists between the organisation and its key publics (Grunig, 1992). Excellence Theory argues that best practice public relations works on fostering good relationships with key publics to avoid negative publicity (Grunig, 1992). The four models propose a spectrum of public relations practices, ranging from the least desirable Model 1 to the most desirable Model 4. The four models are as follows below:

- Model 1: Press Agentry/Publicity Model is based around a one-way transfer of information, in which there is little or no feedback and falsehoods are expected.

- Model 2: Public Information Model is when information is presented journalistically, in which truth is essential during a one way transfer of information.
- Model 3 – Two-Way Asymmetric Model is when a company utilises social science theory and research techniques such as surveys and polls to persuade audiences to accept the view of the organisation.
- Model 4 – Two Way Symmetric Model is seen as an ideal in the practice of public relations. In this model true dialogue between key publics, stakeholders and the organisation exist, in which management will respond to feedback received by engaging with audiences. (Grunig, 1992).

Excellence Theory concludes that public relations will be at its best when it is fundamentally integrated into a communication strategy that identifies key stakeholders and aims to resolve issues that are raised by these stakeholders (Grunig, 1992). Therefore, organisations should aim to engage in a symmetric, dialogic exchange with key publics and stakeholders, at all times responding to feedback and making changes appropriately within organisational practices to maintain relationships and reputation capital.

This two-way symmetrical model may be more achievable - and increasingly necessary - given the dialogic nature of social media. Many of the tenets of the Two-way Symmetric Model, as proposed by Grunig, are given greater potential to be fulfilled due to the capabilities of social media and the internet. Social media technology provides the opportunity for real-time, dialogic conversations to take place between organisations and key publics. If appreciated, this opportunity allows organisations to implement feedback and to understand, and be obliged to address, consumer concerns. Kent and Taylor's (1998 & 2002) seminal works on dialogic communication suggest that to truly understand Grunig's two-way symmetrical conversation, one must understand the principles of dialogic communication. Kent and Taylor (1998) state that dialogic communication is "any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinion" (p. 325). Dialogic communication is guided by two principles:

"Individuals who engage in dialogue do not necessarily have to agree - quite often they vehemently disagree - however, what they share is a willingness to try and reach a mutually satisfying position… Secondly, dialogic communication is about intersubjectivity, and not objective truth, or subjectivity" (Kent & Taylor 1998, p. 325).

Alongside these principles, Kent and Taylor (2002, p.24) developed five tenets of dialogic communication:

1. Mutuality - Organisations and publics are equal participants. Therefore, understanding of unique positions should be sought and relationships should also be equal, and display humility.

2. Propinquity - An exchange based on rhetoric. Organisations must consult publics in matters that influence them and publics must be willing and able to express their feedback.

3. Empathy - Participation should be both encouraged and facilitated. Voices in dialogue should be acknowledged, or confirmation should be provided.

4. Risk - Dialogic communication is characterised by some level of risk. These exchanges involve information sharing and put all in vulnerable positions, where conversation could have unexpected consequences. However, coercion is minimised, despite these risks.

5. Commitment - Dialogic communication requires commitment. The good of the relationship must be put before the good to self and those involved should work towards common understanding.

According to Kent and Taylor (1998; 2002), dialogic communication is a process where there is mutual respect and understanding between organisations and key publics. Dialogic communication encourages speaking and requires both listening and speaking from all those involved (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2011). The results of dialogue turn stakeholders into active participants of an organisation, and the organisation into active participants of

the stakeholders' concerns, in which both have influence over the other (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2011). This project supports these views of dialogic communication, interpreting it as a conversation that requires time and commitment, prioritising both listening and talking. In such an exchange, respect is essential as is accepting risks that may arise from participating in such forms of communication. McAllister Spooner (2009) argues that despite the potential for social media to be a platform that promotes dialogic communication, many organisations are slow to use dialogic communication. This may be due partly to a misunderstanding, or partly due to the potential risks seen as arising from dialogic communication. As dialogic communication is a process, dissenting views can arise that may further complicate relationships (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2011). Dialogic communication is still seen as an essential tool for relationship building, despite these risks, as new media technologies allow relationships to naturally form in online communities that by their very nature cannot be controlled in the same way as old platforms used for relationship building were. Dialogic communication demands participation from a myriad of stakeholders in which the organisation helps to facilitate relevant conversation, taking on a responsibility and commitment to those participating in the conversation (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2011). Increasingly, stakeholders expect to be engaged with and listened to on social media platforms, turning organisations to a more dialogic form of communication if they hope to effectively engage with their stakeholders and build positive relationships that meet stakeholders' needs and expectations.

The opportunities that social media presents to crisis communicators have been heavily debated. Fearn-Banks (2011) argues that social media presents the best possible opportunity for organisations to engage with key publics prior to crisis, and also equip them to respond after crisis, in line with the fourth model ideal. Using Excellence Theory, it has been found that developed, strong, positive relationships formed prior to crisis led to less financial, emotional or perception damage to reputation after crisis (Fearn-Banks, 2011). Organisations that practice two-way symmetrical communication prior to

crisis in normal public relations strategies will better weather a crisis when it occurs, and those that have crisis communication plans in place prior to crisis will also suffer less damages (Fearn-Banks, 2011). Fearn-Banks' (2011) findings support organisations striving towards a fourth model of public relations excellence prior to crisis in a social media age, to help organisations effectively manage crises. Social media capabilities and stakeholder demands during crises mean that organisations are more likely to adopt the communication practice of the Two-way Symmetric Model.

Social media enables organisations to better fulfill the tenets of the Two-way Symmetric Model and also makes it increasingly difficult for organisations to justify practicing less desirable forms of communication. Fearn-Banks (2011) argues that due to the two-way nature of social media, the use of these less-desirable models of communication excellence would lead to ineffective crisis communication as they promote one-way communication and do not account for the social media environment in which communication exists today. However, Fearn-Banks (2011) suggests that the Two-Way Asymmetric model is often used in a social media communication environment. Although the organisation seeks audience feedback in the Two-Way Asymmetric Model, it does not change as a result of the exchange of communication and therefore does not fully include the audience, making the model fundamentally ineffective (Fearn-Banks, 2011). Therefore, while social media gives capabilities to achieve the ideals of excellent public relations and the Two-Way Symmetric Model, these ideals will only be met if organisations utilise the full potential of social media. The expectation for honest, transparent and timely communication will only grow, becoming exacerbated during crisis, in relation to stakeholders' increased social media use. These growing demands lead us towards a situation where organisations may best weather a crisis by practicing excellent public relations and engaging in a Two-Way Symmetric model of communication at all times and most especially during crisis.

2.5 The role of emotion

Various crisis communication theories have highlighted the role of emotion in stakeholder responses to crisis, and by default the organisations ability to manage reputation, and minimise reputational damage, in times of crisis. It has been widely accepted that anger, especially, can play a detrimental role in the management of reputation during crisis (Coombs, 2007; Nabi, 2003; Kim & Cameron, 2011; Lerner & Tiedens, 2006; Lerner, Goldberg & Tetlock, 1998). Anger is of particular relevance to the airline industry, as often people grow angry and frustrated when delays and cancellations occur due to events outside the passenger's control. Lerner et al (1998) argue that anger is caused when people identify that a harm or wrongdoing has occurred, which then activates simplistic information processing systems that rely on stereotypes and appointing blame. In a crisis situation, publics are more likely to experience anger when the situation is perceived to have been controllable and predictable, and should not have occurred (Jin, 2010). Those that are angry also tend to seek more punitive measures than those that are not (Lerner et al, 1998). Furthermore, subsequent events become coloured by anger, as strong notions of responsibility and memories of anger remain (Lerner & Tiedens, 2006). This reinforces the elevation of crisis type, outlined in SCCT, which states that past attributions of anger or responsibility for similar crises will influence and elevate the level of the current crisis.

Anger also acts as a strong motivator - the individual, or the collective, becomes more motivated to take corrective action, change the situation or remove the problem if they are angry (Lerner & Tiedens, 2006). Furthermore, key publics will seek out others who are primed by similar emotions and become further convinced and influenced by messages that reflect their emotional state (Lerner & Tiedens, 2006). It is highly probable that angry stakeholders will turn to social media and other platforms to seek to appoint blame and participate in a shared emotional space that aims to address the source of anger, thus creating a situation that poses potential risk to organisational reputation. McDonald, Sparks and Glendon (2010) considered the effectiveness of crisis response

strategies on emotion and found that confession, if at fault, mitigated anger and negative word of mouth and increased sympathy and acceptance of the crisis. Denial, excuses and justifications all make angry stakeholders angrier; therefore these strategies should not be used on anger-primed audiences (McDonald et al, 2010). Lastly, McDonald et al (2010) found that crisis responsibility was the strongest predicator of emotion, and that the greater the perceived crisis responsibility, the higher volumes of negative emotion present in key publics. These findings suggest that, as previously discussed, the understanding of emotion plays a significant role in crisis communication, influencing the appropriateness of strategies used to effectively manage reputation in a crisis communication situation.

Recent studies consider the relationship between emotion and social media, with focus being given to the impact of emotional content and the concept of virality. The presence of emotion, and in particular negative emotions, such as anger, is evident throughout social media platforms. Fan, Zhao, Chen and Xu (2013) found that the emotion of anger was more influential within social media platforms than joy, indicating the cause behind the spreading of negative, or anger-primed, social media posts. While there has been limited research into the motivating factors behind sharing of negative emotions online, Martin, Coyier, VanSistine & Schroeder (2013) suggest that those that posted online rants felt significantly calmed after sharing their experiences. The presence of increased numbers of angry or negative posts on social media, and the immediate satisfaction that those posting negative emotions feel are of significant interest to crisis communicators. Negative or angry posts are an expected part of social media communication, which therefore necessitates training and preparedness on the behalf of the crisis communicators that are tasked with dealing with social media content. Emotions may also impact the virality of certain content. Virality, on social media, refers to content that is shared and spread over and above normal levels. Berger and Milkman (2011) suggest that content that included emotions that evoke high-arousal, such as awe or anger, was more viral. Understanding the role of emotion in social media behaviour is crucial to crisis communicators. The absence of much-needed timely organisational voice in handling these negative

emotions leads to negative impact caused by viral sharing. The more negative emotions are understood and better handled, the lesser the potential negative impact on the organisational reputation.

2.5.1 Emotions as frames

Emotions typically refer to how a person reacts to and feels about any given circumstance, event or organisation. Emotions can shape and alter how that person thinks and acts towards an event. In short, emotions can act as frames for events, privileging certain information and influencing decision-making (Nabi, 2003; Kim & Cameron, 2011). Nabi (2003) argues that emotions are often used in media to "capture attention, influence attitudes, and affect behaviour" (p. 224). A crisis event that is sudden and unexpected often lends itself to dramatic story telling. The desire to use emotion to frame an issue is increased in times of crisis as media vendors attempt to capture attention in original ways. Nabi (2003) argues that the framing function of emotion is caused by the "repeated pairing of certain emotions with particular ideas or events" (p. 227), which shapes how the audience interprets and responds to these ideas and events, and also their decision-making processes. These emotions are garnered from media coverage of an event or organisation, and can span traditional media and social media (Kim & Cameron, 2011).

Varying emotions have different associated actions and these actions act as guides for information processing, having an influence on what information we choose to seek out and what information we choose to ignore (Nabi, 2003). It is imperative that organisations understand the role of emotion before developing crisis communication strategies, as emotions have such an influential impact on the perception of the organisation and the subsequent decision-making processes of the audiences exposed to emotional frames (Kim & Cameron, 2011). Nabi (2003) hypothesised the type of emotional frame adopted will impact what information is sought by the audience. Those that viewed information through an anger frame are significantly more likely to seek out

blame and retribution information, compared to those who have been framed by fear (Nabi, 2003). Kim and Cameron (2011) also found that when an audience was primed with anger, they were more likely to accept mediated attacks on the organisation responsible. Furthermore, Nabi (2003) argues that emotional frames have a strong influence over perception of the event, incident or organisations involved. These findings reinforce the salience of emotion as frames in crisis communication literature, including SCCT and SMCC, as they show that emotion and perception are strongly linked, and that anger in particular invites negative response in an audience. If we accept that emotions have the power to act as frames, then the importance of moderating factors such as prior reputation becomes significant (Nabi, 2003). The presence of emotional frames makes it imperative that organisations understand this connection between media coverage, media frames and public perception.

Due to the significance of emotional frames, Kim and Cameron (2011) argue that organisations must consider emotional framing when planning their crisis communication strategies. An audience that is primed by anger frames will be more likely to be skeptical of organisations perceived to be delivering messages that include intensive emotional appeals without addressing the needs of victims and other stakeholders openly and honestly (Kim & Cameron, 2011). Emotional framing occurs on social media platforms, as the social media environment is a place where people go to seek emotional support in times of crisis. Organisations have traditionally sought control over media messages in an attempt to shape perception and manage reputation. While social media frames limit the opportunities to control the content or discussion, short of simply deleting text off social media pages, they do allow an organisation to respond to emotional content, sharing the organisations view of the crisis and providing information, which can all help to calm emotions. However, if an organisation does not participate in social media, they run the risk of allowing their stakeholders - who may be angry - induce anger frames in others by sharing negative word of mouth and opinion as they seek blame and retribution. Understanding the framing functions of emotions enables organisations that are in the middle of crisis to predict how their audiences filter and process information and the impacts that

this has on the audiences' decision-making processes. This understanding enables organisations to plan crisis communication strategies across varying types of social media in line with emotional framing.

2.6 Summary

Past case studies of airlines in crisis indicate that social media can act both as a key tool that can be employed by airlines to manage the crisis and a challenge that can fuel and exacerbate the crisis. These varying results indicate the necessity of further research into the use of social media in crisis communication, so that practitioners can increasingly use and manage social media in ways that protect reputation in times of crisis and avoid exacerbating already precarious situations. A comparative analysis of the crisis communication of the two major airlines in New Zealand would add to the understanding of social media in handling crisis communication.

Social media increasingly demands organisations communicate with their stakeholders with honesty and good intention. Organisations now engage in conversations with stakeholders that then impacts how the organisation is run, with constant development to ensure that the organisation continuously meets the needs of stakeholders. Organisations build good reputation, which is an invaluable, intangible asset in times of crisis, by meeting stakeholders needs on a continuous basis. This study aims to examine how the symmetric nature of communication in social media gives organisations a chance to achieve communication excellence through dialogic communication, and also explore the applications and relevance of various crisis communication theories and models in a social media environment. By exploring these relationships, further conclusions can be made about the impacts of past crises and prior reputation on the building of future reputation, and the role that traditional crisis communication tactics play in a social media environment.

3. Methodology

3.1 Rationale and scope of the research

Qualitative research methods have been chosen as the most appropriate
methods for this study as it is focused on social media research. Qualitative
research approaches aim to seek out in-depth understanding of the subject that
is being observed (Baxter & Babbie, 2004; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). While
qualitative research only supplies strong evidence and not an absolute proof for
the conclusions that it draws (Baxter & Babbie, 2004), it is nonetheless a method
that provides in-depth analysis and insight into the context of conversation,
perceptions and motivations (Branthwaite & Patterson, 2011). Qualitative
research is a fitting approach as this study seeks to gain an insight into social
media content produced by airlines and consumers in times of crisis. This in-
depth analysis is critical to the comparison of the use, and effectiveness, of crisis
communication strategies applied to social media platforms. Qualitative methods
also enable deeper insight into public perception of the investigated airlines,
which Coombs (2007) suggests should play a part in crisis communication
strategies employed by the organisations.

Social media monitoring is increasingly used during crisis situations to analyse
social media content in real-time, as the crisis happens (Ruggiero & Vos, 2014).
Social media is increasingly seen as a minefield of potentially useful data for
crisis communicators to gauge public mood and reaction to the crisis, and also to
interact with key publics. Social media data allows in-depth analysis of public
needs, such as the level of connection and engagement required, as compared to
other mediums. Therefore, the study of social media use in crisis communication
is increasingly relevant. Such monitoring tends to be quantitative in nature,
whereas textual analysis is not quantitative in nature, despite being one of the
most favoured approaches in recent literature (Ruggiero & Vos, 2014). This
study does not employ traditional, quantitative social media monitoring
techniques, as quantitative methods are used in real-time monitoring of social

media content and the focus of this study is historical. As this study focuses on a historical event, qualitative research methods are more fitting as data is unable to be quantified without losing the necessary richness of information which historical social media content offers. This study borrows from the importance that social media monitoring concepts place on analysing social media content to guide future strategies, and applies qualitative techniques to analyse the data. Social media, at its very heart, is a conversation; to fully understand the implications of social media as a crisis communication medium, the nuances of the conversation needs to be considered. Qualitative analysis enables this necessary insight and allows consideration of intangible areas of communication, such as the presence of emotion. A qualitative analysis of emotion allows phrases and conversations to be considered as a whole, allowing insight into potential escalating or nullifying factors that drive emotions within a conversation. This ability to consider a deeper level of emotion and the connections between actions and reactions enables a greater insight into how communication strategies could be built to handle such emotions. Alternatively, a quantitative method would simply highlight the frequency of occurrence; it does not allow for the level of explanation or interpretation that this study requires.

To compare the crisis communication strategies used by airlines in a social media environment, two key airlines and one recent crisis situation experienced by both airlines were identified. The two airlines chosen were Air New Zealand and Jetstar. These are the two major domestic airlines that directly compete in the same environments for patronage and reputation. Air New Zealand is New Zealand's national carrier, part privately owned and part owned by the New Zealand Government. Air New Zealand has a long established good reputation of reliability, and providing quality service at a higher price point. Jetstar was introduced to the New Zealand market as a budget, no-frills airline. Jetstar have a challenging reputation as they have become known for delays, cancellations and a lack of customer service. Both of these airlines have a strong social media presence: Air New Zealand has 764,072 likes and followers on Facebook, while Jetstar NZ has 54,034 and both airlines post regularly.

The crisis event chosen was the 2013 Antarctic Storm, where both Air New Zealand and Jetstar were forced to delay and cancel dozens of flights nationwide over a period of several days between June 19th-June 23rd 2013. This event was chosen as it caused significant delays throughout the country over a period of days. Literature suggests that air travellers are more likely to seek out online information and in times of crisis, this becomes even more likely (Sreenivasan et al, 2012). It is anticipated that during this event affected travellers and other interested parties would have turned to social media to seek information about delays and cancellations, as both airlines have a significant social media presence and the event caused significant disruption. Therefore, researching the online Facebook content of both Air New Zealand and Jetstar is relevant to gain further insight into how these airlines communicated with the public using social media in crisis, and vice versa.

The research uses a triangular research approach, utilizing three different qualitative research techniques to give a fuller picture, adding further depth and detail to the research and offer differing and vital perspectives. The first method used is a textual analysis. A textual analysis of the Facebook pages of both Jetstar and Air New Zealand was undertaken in order to understand the types of content posted on the pages by members of the public and what crisis communication strategies, if any, were employed by the companies on their social media platforms. Facebook was chosen as the researched social media platform as recent statistics show approximately 58% of New Zealander's are currently Facebook users, and Facebook is the most used social media platform in New Zealand (Adcorp, July 2013). This suggests that a significant proportion of New Zealanders would seek out Facebook regularly to communicate and interact with organisations and friends and family. This, combined with the fact that Jetstar and Air New Zealand both have a strong social media presence in New Zealand, makes Facebook a relevant social media platform to study in this instance. All comments and replies from the pages two week before the event, during the event and two weeks after the initial crisis event was analysed. The event itself is defined as starting on the day the severe weather event began, and ending once the weather event had cleared enough to resume air travel. Content

produced between 1st June 2013 - 7th July 2013 was analysed to comment on crisis communication strategies employed by both airlines before, during and after the event.

The second stage of the triangulated method is a selection of focus groups. Focus group research was chosen as they take advantage of the benefits of interviews, discussed in depth later in this section, while also stimulating discussion between participants to gain rich insight into perceptions and opinions (Hartman, 2004). This research method allows members to stimulate discussion, and often raises ideas that may not otherwise have been raised in standard, one-on-one interviews (Hartman, 2004). This project uses focus groups to give insight into public perception of the airline's and their media use from a group that has not necessarily been involved in a crisis event, but are still key stakeholders as participants are potential future customers. These groups aim to allow further conclusion about the impact of public perception and organisational reputation. Reputation is an intangible asset that can either be positive or negative, built from the perceptions that key publics hold of the organisation's actions. Looking at the publics' perception of the airlines allows further conclusions about how certain actions help or harm reputation and future decisions to fly. For focus groups, employees of either airlines, or those that have direct family members that are employed by either airline were excluded to ensure that there were no conflicts of interest when participants are asked to share their honest opinion of the airline. This exclusion aims to protect the credibility and validity of the focus group findings, as well as protect participants from potential risk to employment. Focus Groups focused more generally on both airlines and how a key stakeholder, the travelling public, perceives them. These focus groups provided feedback on the reputation of both airlines, the participants' expectations of airlines and personal experiences with the organisational brand. Three focus groups were held with a maximum of 15 participants across all groups. This number allows a diverse range of opinion to be sought within the duration of this research. Focus groups aim to give the research insight into general public opinion of the airlines from a group that has not necessarily been affected by a crisis situation. Seeking opinion and

perception from travellers that may not have been directly involved in crisis situations with the airlines, but who still hold opinions and perceptions of the airlines is a critical area of this study. These opinions allow a more objective, unbiased analysis of the airlines' actions and also help to show the importance of reputation on decisions of patrons before and after a crisis situation. Focus group participants were sought from the researcher's extended networks. Focus group questioning followed a semi-structured approach, in which the researcher asked questions with consideration to the answers made by participants. The indicative questions used are attached in Appendix A. These questions give a clear indication of the purpose of the focus groups.

Lastly, travellers affected by the crisis events on both airlines were interviewed to learn more about the experience of affected travellers. Five interviews were conducted, with an even split between those affected by an Air New Zealand delay or cancellation, and those affected by Jetstar. These conditions are in place to gain necessary insight while protecting credibility of feedback and ensuring that data collected fairly reflects the two research areas. Interview subjects had to be users of social media who interact with airlines in a social media environment, as the project specifically focuses on social media. Interaction included, but was not limited to, liking or following a page, commenting on or liking status updates, private messaging the page or writing on the page's public wall. A 'snowball' sampling method is used where interviewees are sourced through the researcher's extended networks. While better research practice would be to seek interviewees at the source of social media participation, restrictions in New Zealand privacy law do not allow researchers to contact and seek participants via social media. This limitation is discussed in depth in the limitations section.

Interviews give further insight into the crisis communication practices of Air New Zealand and Jetstar, how crisis management can have a long-term impact on brand perception and what airline travellers affected by crisis situations expect from their airlines. Qualitative interviewing processes allows further exploration into the motivating factors behind social media use during crisis, enabling

comprehensive and in depth study into the rationale behind participants' specific comments, reactions and expectations during the communication process in crises. Qualitative interviews are described as an interaction between an interviewer and interviewee, allowing interaction and change during the interview process to ensure that the researcher addresses specific avenues that are raised by the correspondent, relating to the general established topic (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). Baxter and Babbie (2004) suggest that qualitative interviews are especially appropriate when a researcher seeks to understand in-depth exactly what an interviewee thinks and feels about a particular event. The emotions of interviewees is particularly important as initial scanning of the data, and literature, suggests that emotional content is common on social media platforms, and that this content can be particularly challenging for crisis communicators (Austin et al, 2012; Jin, 2012; Nabi, 2003).

Interviews followed a semi-structured, conversational approach, the guideline for questioning of which can be found in Appendix B. The researcher asked questions relating to the experiences of the interviewees during the crisis situation, and asked them to consider what kinds of communication they received and how effective this communication was in keeping them informed. Interviews of the affected participants enabled an in-depth understanding of affected travellers thoughts, opinions and perceptions which was invaluable to the comparison of the effectiveness of crisis communication strategies employed in a social media environment. Interviewees were asked to shed light on their perceptions of the airline before, during and after the crisis event as well as give an indication of their perception of the airline's communication during the crisis. Such insight allows further conclusions about the impact of crisis events on the airline's reputation as well as how those specifically impacted by the crisis would prefer to be communicated with. This insight is invaluable in the analysis of current crisis communication strategies used on Facebook, a popular social media platform, and the platform used for the textual analysis.

3.2 Methodological approach

The project uses a triangular research approach. This approach allows validation of results through comparing findings across a range of methods to see if different methods garner similar, or varying results. Triangulation allows multiple avenues of inquiry to be investigated adding depth and validity to the research, as each method used serves different purposes in that they address investigation of different angles within the research. NVivo software was used as a primary tool to analyse all data. NVivo software enables researchers employing qualitative methods to "collect, organise and analyse content from interviews, focus group discussions, surveys, audio, social media, videos and webpages" (*QSR International,* 2014). NVivo software provides tools to classify, sort and arrange information to allow for examination of trends and relationships in the data (*QSR International, 2014*). NVivo was used in this instance to allow in-depth comparison across the three methods employed to gain insight into themes present and similarities and differences across the data-sets examined.

3.2.1 Textual analysis

Textual Analysis of Air New Zealand's and Jetstar's social media pages is undertaken. This analysis will take place through the thematic coding of specific texts sourced from the social media pages. Comments were categorised in threads so that conversation can be tracked, and these were identified by the following notation: Comment1 (Person/Airline), Reply1 (Person/Airline). It is likely that there will be multiple participants in a conversation thread as social media is a public forum. In this case, distinctions will be used to ensure that the conversational flow is clear. The content of these comments will be coded thematically. Evidence of emotional content will be also be sought as literature suggests that social media is a platform users seek out to satisfy emotional needs (Austin et al, 2012; Jin, 2012; Nabi, 2003).   The text will also be analysed for evidence of communication strategies employed by the airlines and how these responses were received. These strategies are categorised by using the typology outlined by Benoit (1995) and Coombs (2007) to see the use, and effectiveness,

of traditional crisis communication strategies in social media. Textual analysis enables further examination into the dialogic nature of social media, as the conversation between airline and consumer can be considered as a whole. Further breakdown of the nature and tone of the language used enables analysis into how consumers are responding to communication strategies used and help to evaluate the effectiveness of such strategies. Finally, time of comments and replies will be noted to measure speed of replies as the literature suggests that, increasingly, consumers seek out social media as it enables organisations to respond in a timely manner. This analysis gives further understanding of how social media was used by the airlines and by their publics before, during and after crisis, and how effective, or otherwise, the strategies employed were in diffusing the crisis situation and retaining vital positive reputation.

3.2.2 Focus groups

Focus groups were undertaken to gain insight into general public perception of the airlines before, during and after crisis. Focus group participants were sought from the researcher's extended networks, and were provided with an initial contact email, attached in Appendix C. If they wished to be part of the focus group process, they were then supplied with an Information Sheet (Appendix D) and a Consent Form (Appendix E). The Consent Forms were then signed and returned to the researcher at the beginning of the focus group. Focus group answers were recorded and transcribed, and in the transcription, the identity of the participants was concealed to maintain confidentiality and privacy. To protect the validity of responses, participants with a vested interest in the airlines, either by working for the airline or being closely related to someone who works for either airline, were excluded.

3.2.3 Interviews

Interviews were conducted to gain insight into the organisation's crisis communication practices and how affected travellers received these responses in practice. The nature of crisis means that airline delays and cancellations

would have had an immediate impact on the interviewee's life, which may have resulted in emotional reactions. Initial literature suggests that emotion is linked to crisis and social media (Austin et al, 2012; Jin, 2012; Nabi, 2003). This enables insight into the impact of emotional content, and also helps to validate memory recall of the event. However, as a significant length of time has passed since the crisis impacted the interviewees' lives, it is anticipated that they would suffer minimal discomfort recalling the event.

Interviewees were once again contacted through the researcher's extended networks, and were required to have been affected by the June 2013 Antarctic Storm. Potential participants were provided with an initial contact email (Appendix F) and were asked to contact the researcher should they require further information. The researcher then supplied potential participants with an Information Sheet (Appendix G) and a Consent Form (Appendix H). Interviews were mostly conducted in person, however, for participants that were not located in Auckland, interviews were either conducted over Skype or via email, as a last resort. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Interviewees were then provided with a transcript for ethical requirements and were given the opportunity to make additions and/or changes to any of their responses up until the end of analysis, 30th May 2014. This allowed interviewees to review any information that they felt was misrepresented, and also to give further, considered responses, with the benefit of time to reflect on questions. While this chance was offered to participants, none requested amendments of their transcript, which allowed authentic data collection as no information initially offered at the time of the interview was retracted.

3.2.4 Thematic analysis and coding

Thematic Analysis is used as the primary method of analysing all data from Facebook, focus groups and interviews. Thematic analysis allows the tracing of themes across the different methodological approaches. This ability to trace reoccurring concepts is crucial to the understanding of crisis communication strategies within a social media environment. Tracing themes across the

approaches allows for a greater understanding of the impact of perception on reputation and the effectiveness of current organisational communication, as each methodological approach offers a different viewpoint of the effectiveness of crisis communication strategies in a social media environment. Braun and Clarke (2006) stated that "thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p.79). Braun and Clarke (2006) also define a theme as "capturing something important about the data in relation to the research question, and representing some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set." (p.82). While it is crucial to have an understanding of what constitutes a theme, thematic analysis remains an inherently flexible methodology.

There are no set rules for determining a particular theme, other than it must be relevant to the questions being asked by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For the purpose of this research, coding schemes and themes were constructed using a mixture of both the inductive and deductive method, with inductive themes and codes being identified from prevalent themes from the literature and deductive themes identified through initial textual analysis. The literature provided inductive coding categories of separate emotions, such as anger, frustration, disappointment and satisfaction. Inductive coding categories also included categories from Benoit's Image Restoration Theory and Coombs' SCCT for classification on the use of current crisis communication strategies in a social media environment. Such categories would include, but are not limited to apology, denial, corrective action, compensation and mortification. Deductive coding categories included 'Bad Customer Service' and 'National Airline'. A full appendix of the coding scheme used can be found in Appendix I.

Thematic analysis must go through several steps to be valid and robust. These steps are:

1. Familiarisation with the data by transcribing and taking notations of initial thoughts.
2. Generating initial codes from this initial familiarisation.

3. Searching for themes and repetition within the data.

4. Reviewing themes to check that they relate to data and to see if any information has been missed.

5. Defining and naming themes with ongoing analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The flexibility of thematic analysis makes it a fitting form of analysis for this project. It also has the ability along with its abilities to provide differences and similarities across data sets and to make broad observations. The ability to compare and contrast themes across widely sourced data enables further evaluations about the comparative use of crisis communication strategies in a social media environment.

Key words and themes are identified and coded throughout the transcripts in order to gain insight into the use of crisis communication strategies in a social media environment. Such key themes included anger, frustration, disappointment and satisfaction. Saldana (2009) defines a code in qualitative research as "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data." (p. 3). Codes, and the coding process, are a common method used in the sense-making stage of qualitative analysis, and is often referred to as a way to track qualitative analysis and the systems employed by the researcher (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). Baxter and Babbie (2004) suggest that the coding process has two steps that must be undertaken before coding categories are formed. The first step is to ask questions of the research that relate to the framework of the project. In this project such initial questions included: what kinds of emotional content is present on the researched social media sites or how do the airlines typically respond to social media comment and opinion during crisis. From these questions, initial coding categories such as emotion and crisis strategies are formed. Further coding categories are then created as the data is collected and themes emerge from the texts involved. Specific codes that emerged as data was analysed included the codes 'National Carrier' and 'Bad Customer Service'. There are a number of different coding

methods that help a researcher form coding categories. While some of these methods, such as Attribute Coding, which provides participant information and context, are appropriate across almost all qualitative studies, other methods used are dependent on the type of study (Saldana, 2009). Baxter and Babbie (2004) suggest that the texts to be analysed must then be broken down, or unitised. These units must be able to provide answers that helps the researcher answer initial questions, that is categorised by the researcher as belonging to a particular question (Baxter and Babbie, 2004). Coding categories can then be created which help to address and make clear relevant meanings of the text in order to ask questions of the research project (Baxter and Babbie, 2004). In the case of this research major questions being asked of the research included:

- What emotions are present?
- What fuels or calms these emotions?
- What traditional crisis communication strategies are used?
- How do the key publics feel about these traditional strategies?

Codes around emotion and traditional crisis communication strategies were developed based on these questions, as discussed earlier. Coding categories can also form with help of various coding methods. This research adopts the following methods:

- Attribute Coding - categorises participant information, such as age group and gender.
- Simultaneous Coding - when content suggests multiple meanings and relates to more than one available code.
- Structural Coding - codes based on questions asked, particularly relevant to interviews and focused groups
- Emotion Coding - explores relationships, and insight into perspectives.
- Provisional Coding - codes that are drawn from initial literature, research framework etc. before the coding process begins (Saldana, 2009).

While the use of simultaneous coding is often seen as indecisiveness on the part of the researcher (Saldana, 2009), in this study it is necessary due to the complex and often overlapping nature of crisis communication theory. Often responses will have both an emotional code, noting the tone of conversation, and then also will belong to another one of the major identified themes. An example of this can be shown in the following exchange:

> ***Client - Jetstar NZ Facebook Page:*** *Seriously. Don't. Fly. With. Jetstar. Ever! Jetstar is the most unreliable airline I have ever flown, with the least regard for their customers. We had flights booked and paid for to Melbourne with two little kids - morning flight there, afternoon return flight a week later. Now an email from Jetstar stating that flight times had changed, so that we are now supposed to arrive in Melbourne at 11pm and out flight home, get this, leaves at 11.50pm and arrives at 5.30am. With a 2 and a 4 year old. Upon reflection, I don't think I have ever had a flight not rescheduled on Jetstar. NEVER NEVER AGAIN. (Jetstar NZ Facebook Page, 9 June 2013).*

This exchange was coded as Bad Customer Service and Anger. Coding in this way allows analysis of what motivates certain emotions, and different elements of the organisations' response strategies. Coding categories develop and change over the course of the research and must always be revisited to ensure that codes help to answer and discuss all areas of the research question.

Initial scanning of the data suggests that the following five broad, emergent themes will be analysed:

1. The Organisation's Communication Strategies
2. Consumers Preferred Communication Strategies
3. Impact of Prior Reputation and Crisis History
4. Emotion
5. Pack Mentality

These themes inform further analysis into the impact that social media has on crisis communication strategies. These themes help to consider the contributing factors behind the formations of key publics' perception of the airlines' reputations. They also allow insight into the effectiveness of crisis

communication strategies used. Lastly, these themes allow conclusions to form about what communication is expected of the airlines from those participating in Facebook forums.

3.3 Limitations

The historical nature of the event examined makes it challenging to find interviewees who clearly recall events of the June 2013 Antarctic storm. However it is highly likely that interviewees who agree to participate in the research will have a clear, general recollection of the events, as crises in their very nature are emotionally charged and memorable. While there is a significant length of time between the event and the interview, it is anticipated that participants will still be able to share helpful and insightful information relevant to the research.

Historical social media information is relatively easy to find on the internet, due to archiving functions employed on websites such as Facebook. The fact that historical information can be found allows analysis of an event that caused severe disruptions that resulted in a crisis communication situation on a social media platform. However, as organisations or others who have commented on social media pages can delete content at any time, analysing a historical event can be limiting if organisations or participants choose to delete content in hindsight, after the event occurring. It is foreseen that the information gained from the textual analysis will still be insightful and relevant, despite limitations presented by the ability to delete content.

While analysing historical events provides specific limitations, it does allow further investigation into Coombs' (2004) claim that past crisis events will impact reputation. Interviewees and focus group participants can be asked to consider one event in light of another, to give insight into how participants feel about repeat crisis events. These questions would also test the level of attribution of memory associated with a crisis event that sparks anger in and causes disruption to key stakeholders. Such insight enables this research to draw

conclusions about the impact of historical events on reputation and perception, which would be invaluable knowledge when devising a crisis communication plan.

Another limitation to the research design is the way that interviewees are sourced. Potential interviewees could not be contacted directly via social media due to ethical constraints and constraints within the New Zealand Privacy Act (1993). The legal academic debate surrounding the issue of whether social media can be defined as a public space with regards to the Privacy Act is still ongoing (Gunasekara & Toy, 2008; *Law Commission Privacy Review, 2011)*. This debate considers whether or not those participating on social media have a reasonable expectation to privacy and whether such expectations would preclude direct contact from users of social media platforms. As these issues remained unsettled, the legal ramifications of contact via social media for the purposes of research are unforeseeable. These constraints led to the AUT ethics committee disallowing the initially proposed methodology in order to ensure the Privacy Act (1993) was not breached. Therefore, interview subjects were not found at the source of the researched topic - social media. However, this limitation is overcome partly in the triangular research design, which allows validation of results across the three methods used, and partly by the selection criteria put in place for the interview subjects. While interviewees were not found by their comments made on the Facebook pages of the two studied airlines, they still had to have been affected by the June 2013 Antarctic Storm and had to be users of social media. This selection criterion enables the best possible sampling in the allowed circumstances. Opinions sourced are still from affected travellers, who use and are familiar with social media. These participants can also give valuable insight into the forms of communication that were used by the airlines during the June 2013 Antarctic Storm.

3.4 Summary

This chapter discusses the relevance of qualitative research methods to this study, which analyses historical Facebook content alongside interview and focus

group transcripts to gain insight into crisis communication strategies. Qualitative methods were used for thematic analyses in a triangulated approach namely textual analysis, interviews and focus groups, in order to understand the complexities of social media communication on Facebook. These methods are adopted to gain a deep insight into the conversations that took place on the analysed social media pages. This in depth analysis enables close examination of the effectiveness of crisis communication strategies in a social media environment, and allows themes to be drawn across all three aspects of the research. This methodology allows the examination of crisis communication strategies on social media platforms, while also examining the experiences, perspectives and expectations of key stakeholders and affected publics. This insight allows examination and critique of crisis communication strategies in a social media environment.

The next chapter outlines and discusses major findings, and the implications of the applied research methods. The prevalence of major emergent themes is discussed, as is the presence of traditional crisis communication strategies.

4. Findings

4.1 Overview

Textual analysis, interviews and focus groups all give interrelated, applicable and varying insight into the application of traditional crisis communication strategies in a social media environment. Findings of evidence of five emergent themes, outlined in the methodology, are discussed through the lens of each approach in turn. The findings demonstrate that while traditional crisis communication strategies have a place in a social media environment, organisations need to have an appreciation of the new demands of the environment. Stakeholders increasingly expect timely, correct information - an expectation that is amplified during a crisis situation. These stakeholders are increasingly turning to social media to gain this information. Interviewees, focus group participants and the textual analysis demonstrated that organisations can no longer control a timeline for crisis. In a social media environment, organisations need to be able

to answer questions and provide information as it is sought, and an inability to do so leaves the organisation unable to handle the crisis. Lack of information, perceived bad customer services and the perception that potentially negative public feedback will force the organisation to respond to complaints are all driving forces behind key publics' participating in social media conversations. In a crisis, this content will increasingly be emotional, and potentially negative and damaging if an organisation does not provide timely, accurate information. The findings indicate that the challenges that crisis communicators face have morphed in a social media environment, demanding different and new crisis communication response strategies, that can work in tandem with the old. The research period selected for the textual analysis (1st June 2013 - 7th July 2013) yielded over 200 pages of raw data, which was tabulated using the NVivo software. Figures discussed are a representative selection of Facebook content sourced over this time.

4.2 Crisis communication strategies in a social media environment

4.2.1 Textual analysis

Textual analysis of the social media pages of Jetstar and Air New Zealand was undertaken over the period of 1st June 2013 - 7th July 2013, during which time the Antarctic Storm caused flights to be cancelled and delayed across the country from the 19th-23rd June 2013. Textual analysis served many functions, the first of which was to give insight into the organisations' use of social media and the adoption of crisis communication strategies in a social media environment. Textual analysis showed that both Air New Zealand and Jetstar used standardised replies before and during the crisis situation. Figure 1 demonstrates Air New Zealand's use of such replies in two different situations, with the airline offering an initial apology and then directing the commenter onto a different channel to have their problem addressed.

FIGURE 1: Examples of Air New Zealand's Facebook response to queries and complaints (2013). Retrieved from www.facebook.com/AirNewZealand?fref=ts&filter=2

Figure 2A and Figure 2B demonstrates examples of standardised replies issued by the official Jetstar NZ Facebook page. Jetstar issues a reply that follows a similar structure to those issued by Air New Zealand. They first initially apologise to the commenter and then provide a link where the complaint must be lodged again for follow up.

FIGURE 2A: Examples of Jetstar's Facebook responses to queries and complaints (2013). Retrieved from www.facebook.com/JetstarNZ ?fref.ts.

In Figure 1, Figure 2A and Figure 2B, Air New Zealand and Jetstar make no attempt to address the specifics of the complaint or offer solutions. The standardised nature of replies, without addressing the specific concerns of commenters, or passing them on to other channels of communication, shows the airlines may be ill-prepared or unwilling to participate in such debate. The fact that the replies shown in Figure 1, Figure 2A and Figure 2B follow similar patterns indicate that the crisis communication plan may not allow for social media managers to elaborate or expand beyond offering initial apology and redirection to a more formal platform for complaints. Standardised replies may spark frustration, if affected publics had turned to Facebook after trying other means of communication and were faced with replies directing them to phone numbers or websites. Standardised answers may escalate issues, especially if affected publics are using Facebook to seek information, as standardised replies do not allow airlines to address the specifics of an issue in a timely and effective manner. Figure 3 also shows that once an initial reply is made by the airlines to a query, they do not follow up and answer further questions on the same post. In Figure 3 Jetstar responds to the commenters initial query about baggage, but does not respond to the second, follow-up query. Figure 3 demonstrates that Jetstar did not engage further with the conversation once their initial replies were made.
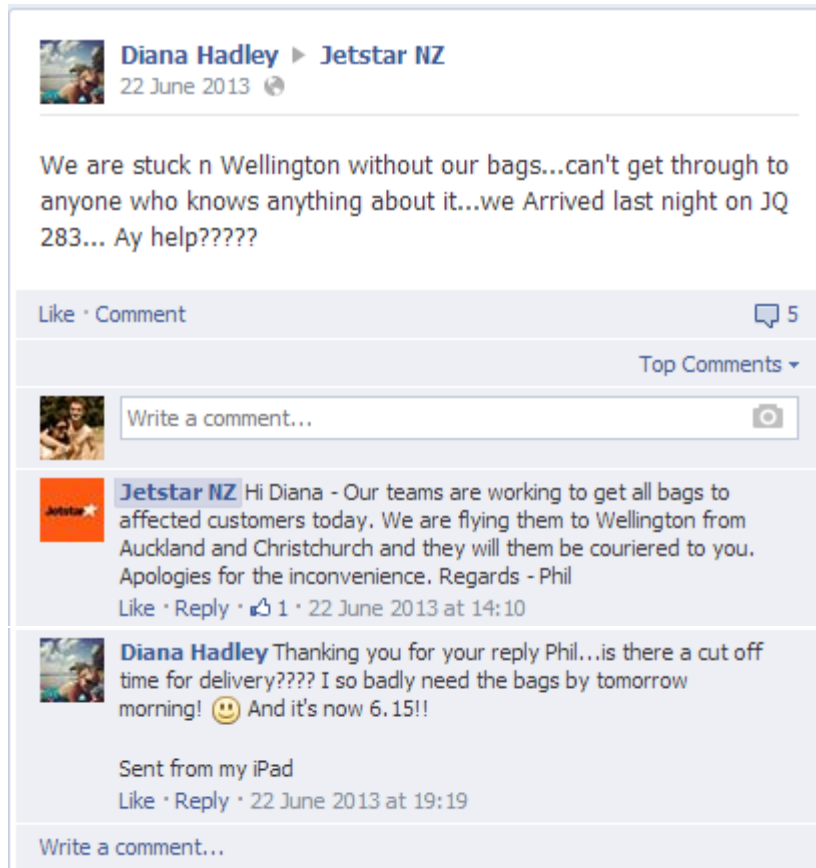
FIGURE 3: Second customer query on Jetstar NZ Facebook comment stream goes unanswered (2013). Retrieved from www.facebook.com/JetstarNZ?fref+ts.

Figure 4 shows that Air New Zealand, once replying to the customer enquiring about delays by redirecting them to a phone number, does not respond to further comments made by the same customer as they become increasingly frustrated. A comment made several months after the initial posting draws attention to lack of further communication from the airline beyond the initial, standard reply.

FIGURE 4: Air New Zealand consumer queries in comment streams go unanswered (2013). Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/AirNewZealand?fref=ts&filter=2

The lack of further engagement with the community beyond responding to initial posts, demonstrated in Figure 3 and 4, shows that these organisations do not currently value the ability to partake in dialogic communication on their social media platforms. They instead use a level of superficial engagement, where standardised replies are issued and further queries are left unanswered. Lack of dialogic communication may leave stakeholders and key, affected publics frustrated as increasingly publics expect to be engaged with and listened to on social media platforms. Social media gives organisations the ability to enter and engage in the debate, and where appropriate, frame the discussion to mitigate

the risk of heightened emotional grievance. Organisations are able to participate within their social media communities, and respond to queries and concerns by taking on board feedback and to take appropriate action (Veil et al, 2011; Perry et al, 2003; Gonzales-Herrero & Smith, 2010). Therefore, by not responding to further queries, or other complaints made by someone other than the initiator of the conversation, the organisation leaves the community to frame the debate (Veil et al, 2011). The lack of organisational voice in challenging circumstances may lead to further reputational complications, as they are seen to be not addressing complaints and not prioritising their social media communities.

During the crisis situation, Jetstar made three general updates about the upcoming storm and its impact on travellers, shown in Figure 5A and Figure 5B. While no specific information was provided via Facebook in regards to what specific flights were affected, travellers could seek general information. General updates provided by Jetstar acknowledged a potential crisis situation. Figures 5A and 5B demonstrate that Jetstar chose to use Facebook to keep affected publics informed. However, in the initial two posts they did not engage further with those that were asking for more information, suggesting token engagement and a lack of dialogic communication. In the third post the social media team aimed to engage with queries, although by that time affected publics were already frustrated by lack of information. The delay in engagement meant that the social media team had to deal with a high number of emotion-filled postings in order the manage the situation and continue to attempt to protect and maintain good reputation.

Jetstar NZ shared a link.
19 June 2013

Hi everyone,

Given the strong cold southerlies spreading over the South Island today and forecasts of snow to low levels about Canterbury and Otago over the next 24-48 hours we'd encourage customers flying to or from our South Island airpo... See more

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Write a comment...

Catherine Gracie hope they meant "cheers" at the end there. god and im flying to chch 2morow.....oh joy
Like · Reply · 1 · 19 June 2013 at 18:20

> **Kaz Kostiuk-Warren** No that's one of the guys names.
> Like · 19 June 2013 at 18:28
>
> Write a reply...

Cheryl Harrison Great customer service from Jetstar
Like · Reply · 1 · 19 June 2013 at 18:56

Anna Curtin No, they mean cheets. That is the name of one of the lovely reps that works on the page 😊 good luck, if only we could control mother nature huh?!!
Like · Reply · 1 · 19 June 2013 at 18:27

Stacey-Lee Poole Hey I was wondering , meant to fly out of Dunedin on Saturday. If we can't get to the airport because of the weather , we don't lose our money and just get transferred to another flight.. Right!?
Like · Reply · 20 June 2013 at 16:33

Krystal Clarke Keep the updates coming Cheets - gotta get to CHCH for my lil bro's 21st Saturday night, have my onesie packed! P.S. Just got my auto email - am I ready to fly? so checked out your travel insurance but the fine print states Australia Only? Any chance you can post the link for me if i can buy last minute insurance...... oh go on 😊
Like · Reply · 19 June 2013 at 20:19

Jetstar NZ
20 June 2013

Hi everyone,

We wanted to give you a further update on the winter storm conditions in New Zealand.

At this stage all Jetstar flights are operating to all New Zealand airports. We continue to keep a close watch on the forecasts, including strong wind conditions, and will provide another update should the situation change.

We know there is snow on the roads in a number of South Island areas so please take care if driving - and stay warm and safe.

- Amanda

Like · Comment · Share   88   10   1

88 people like this.   Top Comments ▾

Write a comment...

Avelyn Holcroft-Lewer Air NZ has cancelled all flights in and out of Wellington airport. Any further updates on flight cancellations?
Like · Reply · 1 · 20 June 2013 at 21:03

Brian Donnelly Michelle Knight
Like · Reply · 1 · 20 June 2013 at 15:17

Sarah Evans Reuben Magdy Mohssen - FLY!
Like · Reply · 1 · 20 June 2013 at 13:44

MacJoan Jame's Cheers jetstar...
Like · Reply · 20 June 2013 at 16:06

Ian Passtoors What about my pet chiwawa gotta make sure she is well fed then
Like · Reply · 20 June 2013 at 14:13

Lynne Jeffries Thanks for that update, have just phoned qstn airport to check Melbourne flight in at 3pm.
Like · Reply · 20 June 2013 at 14:10

FIGURE 5A - Jetstar NZ's Facebook status updates during the Antarctic storm (2013) Retrieved from www.facebook.com/JetstarNZ?fref+ts.

Jetstar NZ
21 June 2013 near Christchurch 🌐

Hi everyone

Due to winter storm across New Zealand some flights were cancelled last evening and there will be delays today on some flights.

If you are flying with Jetstar please check the Flight Status page of our website for the latest departure and arrival times: http://booknow.jetstar.com/FlifoSearch.aspx

– Phil

Like · Comment · Share   👍 19   💬 50

👍 19 people like this.   Top Comments ▾

[ ] Write a comment...   📷

Megan Annear Hey Phil, I know that Queenstown airport closes when it gets dark, there's a wellington flight that's been delayed to get into QT by 4.20pm. How much notice do you give when you decide you need to cancel a flight? Really hoping to see my Mum tonight! Thanks
Like · Reply · 21 June 2013 at 13:06

> **Jetstar NZ** Hi Megan – You are right regarding the required light levels in Queenstown, especially as today is the shortest day. Our team is updating flight status information as soon as they can given the changeable weather so thanks for being patient. I am sure they will have an update soon for you and your Mum. Regards – Phil
> Like · 21 June 2013 at 13:25

> **Victoria Hinson** Yes my husband's been waiting all day for that flight – now it's been cancelled. Auckland wins again – I guess you don't really care, given you're not flying from between here and Wellington from 1 Sept. Thanks for nothing Jetstar.
> Like · 👍 4 · 21 June 2013 at 15:04

Nicola Burford My brother got a txt saying his flight from akl–chc jq247 is cancelled. However online its just delayed. So which one should he go by?!
Like · Reply · 21 June 2013 at 08:53

> **Jetstar NZ** Hi Nicola and Jenny – JQ247 is cancelled and our system has been updated to show that. Apologies for the confusion. We will be trying (weather permitting) to get everyone to their destination as soon as we can on other flights. Thanks for your patience today. Regards – Phil
> Like · 👍 3 · 21 June 2013 at 09:32

FIGURE 5B - Jetstar NZ's Facebook status updates during the Antarctic storm (2013) Retrieved from www.facebook.com/JetstarNZ?fref+ts.

Such posts that seek to inform potential affected travellers demonstrate an efficient use of social media during crisis and shows some understanding of Liu et al's (2013) claims that affected publics turn to social media for information in times of crisis. Social media can provide critical information quickly to affected publics, through a channel that can be easily accessed. Key publics therefore turn to these channels due to their accessibility and ease of use, and organisations would do well to answer their claims directly on these channels. Figure 5B demonstrates that Jetstar worked to provide information and answer queries, displaying good management of a crisis situation on social media platforms. Although Air New Zealand's reputation did not seem to be harmed by not making similar posts, providing useful, timely and accurate information on social media sites is becoming increasingly important during crisis. Affected publics may receive crisis information more favourably if it is presented by the organisation (Liu et al, 2013; Austin et al, 2012). Such posts would be considered useful crisis communication strategies for social media platforms as it enables the organisation to be the first to inform affected publics of a potential situation. The fact that Air New Zealand made no such similar posts demonstrate that they may not have included this initial, information-giving function into their crisis communication plan for social media platforms. Air New Zealand lost a chance to provide information in a way that may help to enhance their reputation moving forward from the crisis event, by choosing not to make information providing posts. Initial posts demonstrated an effective use of social media in crisis situations on Jetstar's behalf. However, the lack of engagement with those that commented on the post seeking more information suggests that these updates were more of a token effort, rather than a true attempt to engage with the community online, suggesting ill preparedness on Jetstar's behalf.

There was also strong evidence of traditional crisis communication strategies being applied to the social media environment. Instructing information, justification and apology were evident throughout content posted by both airlines, and in response to complaints made. Figure 6 shows Air New Zealand using a mixture of apology and instructing information to address a query about flight status during the Antarctic Storm.

FIGURE 6: Air New Zealand uses a mix of Apology and Instructing Information during crisis (2013). Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/AirNewZealand?fref=ts&filter=2.

Figure 7 demonstrates that Jetstar also applied similar traditional crisis communication strategies, using apology and justification to respond to a complaint made about flight cancellations.


FIGURE 7: Jetstar NZ uses a mix of Apology and Justification during crisis (2013). Retrieved from www.facebook.com/JetstarNZ?fref+ts.

The strategies used in Figure 6 and Figure 7 that combine apology with instructing information or justification creates an insincere approach, which is further heightened by the use of standardised responses that redirect the complaint or query to other channels. This suggests that the crisis communication plans used by both airlines do not allow social media responses to address the specifics of each situation. The apologies used in Figure 6 and Figure 7 are not traditional admissions of wrong-doing - they are instead more token statements made before providing information or justifying the airlines' actions. While further information may not necessarily be required to answer the query made in Figure 6, the reply was formal and followed the standardized nature of other replies. This suggests that while traditional strategies of providing information still have a place in social media contexts, crisis communicators that participate in those forums also need to consider tone to address the more personable nature of social media communities. Figure 8 demonstrates that receiving these standardised replies, that contain shallow apologies and information, can cause further frustration and escalate the situation. Figure 8 shows how combining apology with justification or instructing information creates an insincerity which lessens the effectiveness of the crisis communication strategy, as the customer sees such replies as inadequate due to lack of actual information.
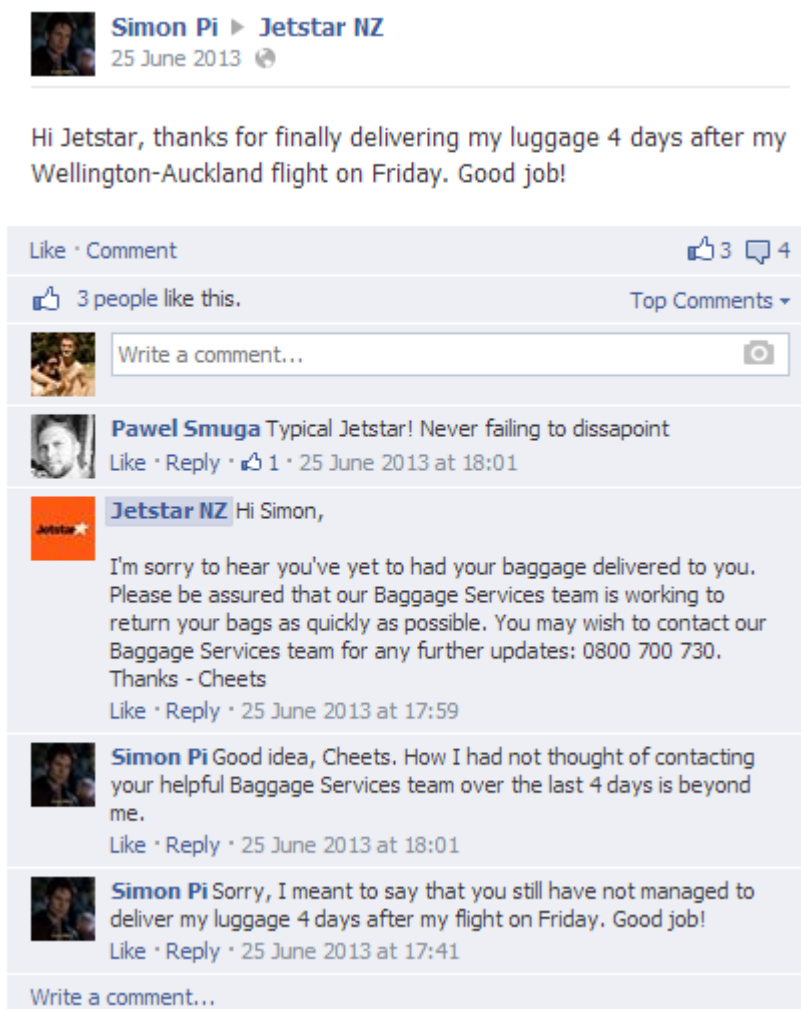
FIGURE 8: Jetstar consumer grows frustrated after receiving a standardised reply (2013) Retrieved from www.facebook.com/JetstarNZ?fref+ts.

Figure 9 shows that reception to standardised replies does not change across the two airlines. In this instance, Air New Zealand redirects the customer to their 'team', when the customer is complaining that the solution that they have already received is inadequate. Air New Zealand's standard reply is met with hostility, as they did not address the specifics of the complaint. The similarities between Figures 8 and 9 suggest that both carriers are working within inflexible social media crisis communication plans, which do not give autonomy to those handling the crisis. Their inability to address specific solutions leads to further negative feedback being posted in an increasingly public forum, as seen in Figures 8 and 9 when the customers point out that the responses received are inadequate.

FIGURE 9: Air New Zealand consumer showing frustration after receiving standardised reply (2013). Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/AirNewZealand?fref=ts&filter=2.

The use of apology is present in Figures 6,7 and 8 as the organisation attempts to engage in different ways in a social media environment. However the insincerity that it creates, coupled with the standardised use of traditional response strategies loses all attempts to connect with the audience at a human level, showing the empathy and humanness that publics expect from a social media environment. The mixed response to these employed crisis communication strategies suggest that social media platforms indeed demand change and ingenuity in the strategies employed by organisations in similar situations.

4.2.2 Focus groups

Focus Group participants were not affected by the June delays. These participants were still customers of both airlines and had received communication under other circumstances, such as weather delays and cancellations or changes to flight times. Participants indicated that they had received communication via several channels, including airport announcements and email and text messaging, during their own experiences with other cancellations and delays. Several participants also indicated that they interacted with the airlines on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.

Participants referred to the fact that Jetstar had poor communication and poor customer service, whereas Air New Zealand provided better customer service and better levels of communication. Participants stated:

> *"They (Jetstar) just cancelled her (my sister-in-law's) flight and then they had to book full-fare and the airline didn't take care of it" (Participant 10).*

> *"The woman at the (Jetstar) counter didn't seem at all apologetic or to really care at all that I was going to be delayed for several hours, and were not helpful in getting me another flight" (Participant 3).*

> *"When my friend missed her (Jetstar) flight after Rapture, she was two minutes late for check in so they wouldn't let her on. When she asked when she could next get out their solution was to fly her out in three days' time. She went to Air New Zealand and they were like, 'Sorry, we are booked up today but can get you out tomorrow'" (Participant 6).*

> *"I have had a flight cancelled on Air New Zealand due to fog in Hokitika, but they're so cool about it. They offered to change both flights, and offered to send a shuttle or could reschedule. They gave lots of options and acknowledged that they are in the wrong, whereas when Jetstar is delayed they are just like, 'It happens, suck it up'" (Participant 6).*

> *"I've had personal experience and you have to chase them up…they weren't good about it, they didn't let me know, I just had to find out" (Participant 9)*

The anecdotes relayed by focus group participants indicate that currently Jetstar especially has poor communication during potential crisis situations. Communication from Jetstar in these anecdotes built a negative perception of the airline and its reputation, discussed in Section 4. Lack of communication and poor customer service from Jetstar was in direct contrast to the communication received from Air New Zealand, which were seen as being informative, sincere and apologetic. These anecdotes reinforce that Jetstar's current communication strategies may be lacking, as they are unable to communicate in a way that helps to protect reputation in times of crisis. Participants referred to Jetstar's communication as being insincere and often non-existent, with references of having to follow up flight statuses. Strict procedures and insincerity of Jetstar's communication suggest that Jetstar's crisis communication plan offers little flexibility to those executing it and does not enable information to be relayed quickly enough, creating a negative perception of the airline.

4.2.3 Interviews

Interviewees directly affected by the delays in June 2013 indicated that there was a lack of communication with travellers and resultant high levels of confusion for those affected during the storm. Participant 11 alluded to such confusion when flying with Air New Zealand during the incident, saying:

> *"When I arrived it was kind of chaotic. I was flying to Christchurch and there was also a flight to Wellington at the same time, and I heard there was delays. I got confused...and I didn't know what was happening." (Participant 11)*

Participant 11 hadn't received any communication from the airline before going to the airport, or while at the airport as to the status of their flight, causing confusion and frustration at the airport. Participant 11 stated that the incident wasn't handled as well as it could have been, and poor communication escalated an already tense situation:

> *"I don't think they (Air New Zealand) handled the situation well. It was chaotic and everyone else around me was confused. No one knew what flights were cancelled. Maybe more staff would have helped to explain the situation. They didn't handle it as well as they could have. They could have avoided so much drama." (Participant 11)*

Participants 13 and 15 also alluded to lack of communication and resultant mixed messages as being a cause for confusion during the event, stating:

> *"The front line staff did have mixed messages at times, which created confusion". (Participant 13)*

> *"There didn't seem to be any communication between Wellington Airport and the Airlines. Wellington Airport was saying it was open but the airlines were still very uncertain even until late in the afternoon about what flights were going and what flights weren't". (Participant 15)*

Participants that referred to confusion and lack of communication also indicated that this confusion resulted in frustration or anger towards the airline that they were travelling with. Participant 16 stated:

> *"They didn't really talk to me or give me any options. They didn't apologise for the confusion, so I felt that was a bit stand-offish, and was left thinking it wasn't that difficult (to supply information clearly)."*

Interviewees also indicated that communication received was very standardised and mainly centred around announcements made at the airport, instead of prior warning. Participants 11, 12, 13 and 14 only received important information once actually at the airport, and by approaching service counters. Participant 15 also struggled to receive information over the phone and was redirected to a website which they could not access. Participant 15 stated:

> *"All I wanted to know was can I get a seat and is it (the plane) going to fly (because of the storm)."*

However, this information was not supplied by the carrier, which in this instance was Air New Zealand, and the Participant was redirected to the website, which they weren't in a position to access. Overall, there was a strong feeling that the airlines' communication strategies relied solely around putting full responsibility for delays on to the storm, which escalated emotion within the participants, especially when they believed they were receiving sub standard customer service. Participant 15 was "particularly irked" by receiving what was seen as a standardised reply. Participant 15 stated:

> *"I was a difficult situation, so I guess in that I understand. I would have liked to see instead of a blanket, unhelpful response, they instead took my details and followed the situation up internally."*

Overall, interviewees indicated that communication received from both airlines was poor during the event - limited to communication issued at the airport to those already there through loudspeaker announcements and changes displayed on flight boards. Lack of communication and resultant confusion and frustration led to ill-feeling and high emotions towards the airlines; the impact of which is discussed in depth in section 4.5.

4.3 Stakeholders preferred communication strategies

4.3.1 Textual analysis

Understanding of key publics' preferred communication methods and styles is essential to those who are responsible for the development of crisis communication plans. Evidence of preferred communication strategies were therefore analysed to see how key publics' communication expectations may have changed with the development of social media technologies. Literature discussed previously suggested that, during crisis situations, affected publics are more likely to seek out social media websites to gain information and link with like-minded communities (Liu et al, 2013). The sheer volume of comments on both Jetstar's and Air New Zealand's pages seeking information before, during and after the crisis situation suggests that airline consumers are increasingly turning to social media pages to gain information that is accurate and timely; especially for information that they may not be able to seek elsewhere (As shown in Figures 10 and 11). Figure 10 demonstrates how the Air New Zealand community uses Facebook to gain information behind reasons for flight delays, and to inquire about the likelihood of flights travelling to Christchurch and Auckland at the beginning of the storm. Air New Zealand attempts to answer these queries, but only does so by providing a link to the flight tracker instead of specific information. Although both commenters get a reply, the replies given by Air New Zealand do not address the specifics of the query, which means that the airline was not able to provide the information sought. In Figure 10, the person making the initial post seeking information about flight statuses is not even flying. He is an active public, who is curious as to specific reasons behind the flight cancellations especially since there is no serious weather issue. Subsequently, a query is made by a concerned customer asking if the incoming storm in 2 days' time, would result in her flight cancellation. The fact that Air New Zealand does not answer the interested, but unaffected member of the public when he makes it clear that he is not directly affected, raises questions about their transparency and reliability. In this example, Air New Zealand are not willing, or an unable to provide specific information, suggesting that crisis

communication plans may not allow for interaction with unaffected parties or an ill-preparedness for queries from unaffected parties. The inability to provide specific information to anyone who queries flight status or rationale for cancellation suggests that the crisis communication plan in use for Facebook pages is ill-equipped to address all concerns on a social media site. If indeed they had a plan, it did not allow for those managing the pages to have access to the latest information, which might have helped Air New Zealand to address these queries.

FIGURE 10: Air New Zealand Facebook fans turn to social media to seek information during crisis (2013) Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/AirNewZealand?fref=ts&filter=2.

Figure 11 shows the Jetstar Facebook community turning to Facebook to gain updates on the status of particular flights during the storm. In these instances

Jetstar replies with the specific information about each flight: one has been cancelled and one is scheduled to depart as normal. Jetstar addressed the specifics on the query to the best of their knowledge at the time, displaying an example of good social media crisis communication. However, the fact that the community turned to Facebook may suggest that information about flight scheduling was not available elsewhere. Figure 11 shows that crisis communication plans for Facebook do allow for some provisions of addressing specific queries and providing information that is useful and applicable to the case at hand.
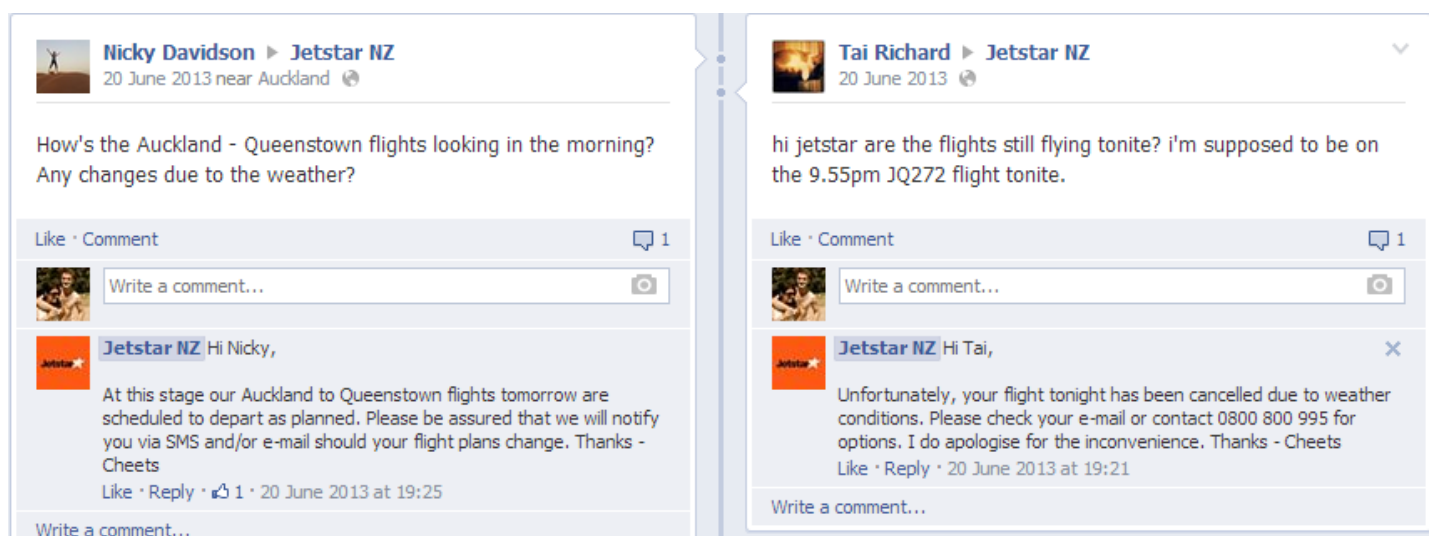

FIGURE 11: Jetstar NZ Facebook community uses social media to seek information during crisis (2013). Retrieved from www.facebook.com/JetstarNZ?fref+ts.

Key publics expect airlines to provide timely, accurate information about flight status, cancellations, re-bookings and other queries that are specific to their individual cases. Key publics may become frustrated if the organisation is unable to provide this information, or redirects the consumer to other media channels, as shown in Figure 12. This frustration may lead to further comments that have the potential to damage reputation.
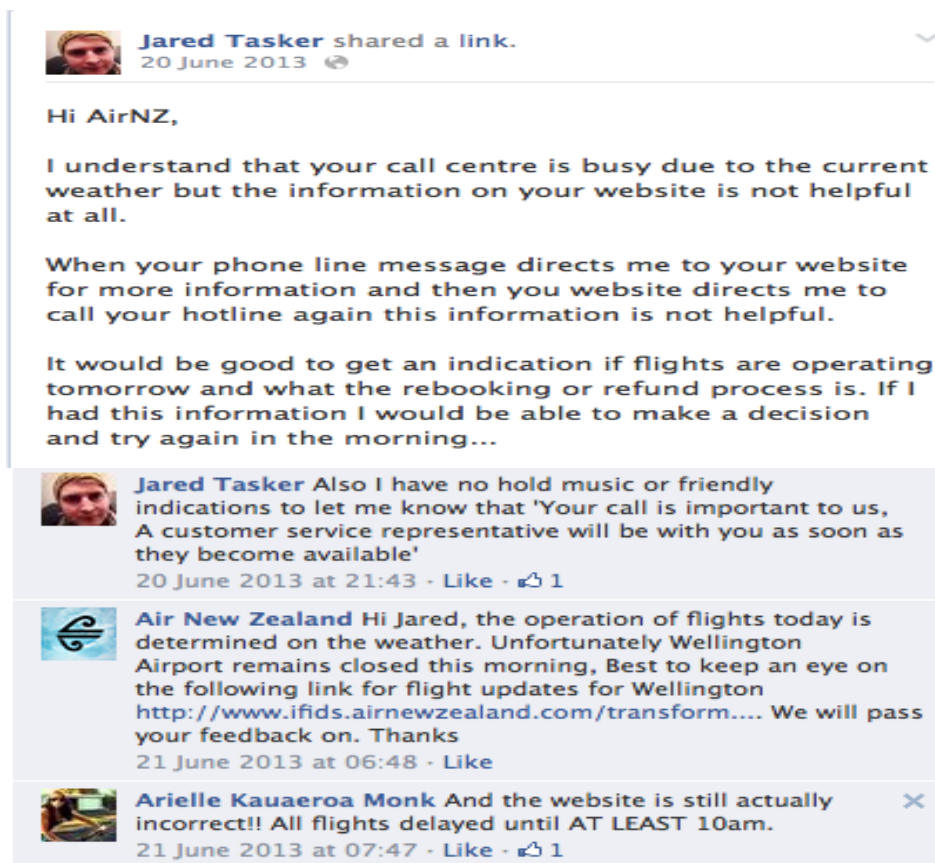
FIGURE 12: Air New Zealand Facebook community express frustration over slow replies and lack of information (2013). Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/AirNewZealand?fref=ts&filter=2.

Figure 13 shows the levels of frustration that can be felt when customers can't receive up to date, reliable information. The initial post made by the customer indicates that they are already frustrated with delays and lack of communication during the storm. Jetstar then replies confirming the flight will go ahead in the next hour, only to have it delayed again. In this instance, those managing the Facebook page may not have had access to the latest information. Providing incorrect information caused further frustration and anger towards the airline when the flight was delayed, as reassurances were given that the flight would depart as scheduled. In the scenarios shown in Figure 12 and Figure 13, the provision of correct, immediate solutions that anticipated and solved problems may have helped to avoid further frustration and anger with the airline provider.

FIGURE 13: Jetstar NZ Consumer grows increasingly frustrated on Facebook due to incorrect information (2013). Retrieved from www.facebook.com/JetstarNZ?fref+ts.

Textual analysis also demonstrated that affected publics wanted to be able to receive their information online, due to failings and overloading of other potential communication mediums. Frustration with inabilities to get through to call centres led to key publics suggesting online communication as a way to get timely information to affected publics, as shown in Figure 14A and 14B. In Figure 14A the customer seeks clarification of wait times, after failing repeatedly to get through to the call centre. In Figure 14B another customer suggests online communication after failing to get through to the call centre and therefore not receiving up to date flight information. People who required information did not receive it, as both organisations provided incorrect information and redirected

consumers to other inaccessible platforms. Using Facebook or updating the airline's website would have helped reduce the load on the call centre, while also ensuring travelling, affected publics could receive all information they needed in a timely manner.

FIGURE 14A: Affected publics air frustration at being unable to access call centre (2013). Retrieved from www.facebook.com/AirNewZealand?fref=ts&filter=2.
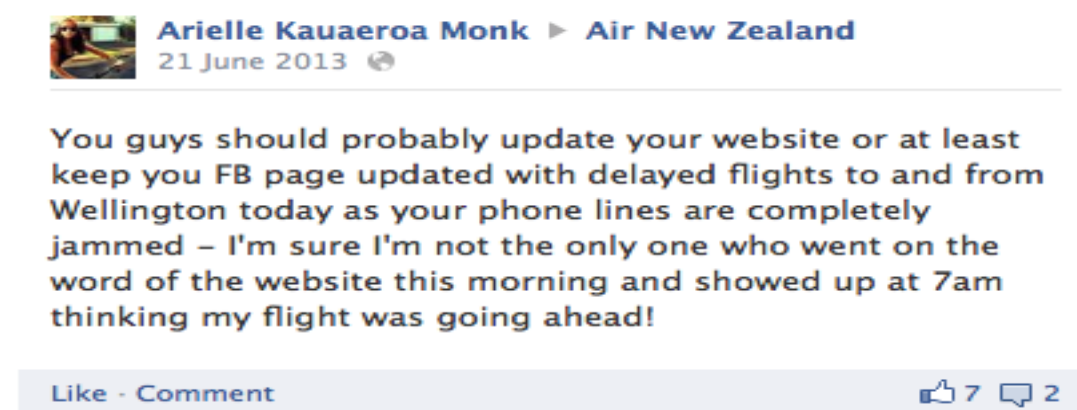

FIGURE 14B: Affected publics recommend online communication to Air New Zealand after other channels fail (2013). Retrieved from: https://www.facebook.com/AirNewZealand?fref=ts&filter=2.

The EUROCONTROL example, discussed in the Literature Review, indicates that to successfully handle a weather-related airline crisis in a social media environment, those that manage social media must be given all available information to answer queries directly, in a timely and accurate manner (Evans, 2011). Figure 14A demonstrates how emotion may have a potentially negative impact on reputation if information is not provided. On Facebook, stakeholders seek personalised, humanised replies to their social media comments, which directly address their concerns, without being re-directed to another avenue of organisation's communication platforms, such as a phone number. These preferences help to shape communication strategies, as organisations should actively work to provide key stakeholders with the information that they seek through their preferred communication medium, to effectively manage a crisis situation.

4.3.2 Focus groups

Focus Group participants indicated that they had several communication expectations from the airlines during times of crisis, including significant delays and cancellations. The first of these expectations is providing clear, concise, reliable, accurate and timely communication to those affected. Participants particularly favoured information that was transparent and information that addressed the situation by providing solutions.

> *"I like it when they are honest and upfront with you. Instead of being like we don't know what's going on, which makes you more frustrated. It's about transparency and clear communication" (Participant 8).*

> *"I expect to be updated on a regular basis if something is not going to plan" (Participant 1).*

> *"(I would expect) easy access to information and staff happy to explain the situation" (Participant 4).*

> *"You want to be warned straight away… you don't want to get a warning two hours late" (Participant 5).*

> *"You want a solution, you don't just want to be delayed for four days because that would just make you angry. You want to be offered solutions to choose from" (Participant 5).*

Participants also expected communication to come across a variety of media channels and platforms, including email, text, website updates and phone calls.

> "(I would be expecting) emails, phone calls or texts" (Participant 8).

> "It's pretty straight forward to inform people, especially with the amount of contact details you've got to give them. It's easy enough for them to send out a mass email" (Participant 9).

> "Given how much personal information they require you to put on the forms when you fly, it would be nice if they used some of it to contact you when there are problems with your flight" (Participant 3).

> "(I would expect) Texts, email, public announcements, press releases and ringing as a last resort" (Participant 10).

> "Getting information from as many different sources would also be good, as long as they are all saying the same thing" (Participant 4).

> "If there is a problem I would want to be told straight away through as many channels as possible" (Participant 5).

Participants indicated that they expected both general updates prior to the crisis event, if possible, and then more specific updates as information becomes available.

> "First off (I would expect) a general message saying flights will be disrupted and providing all information and initial solutions, such as people will be put on buses" (Participant 8).

> "(I would expect a mass email stating) This is the situation, this is what's likely to happen, call this number for more information" (Participant 9).

Focus Group participants also overwhelmingly expressed the opinion that they would seek out social media for information during such events and would expect communication from the airlines if they did so. When Participants 8,9 and 10 were asked whether they would seek out social media to gain further specific information, they replied:

> "Yea, I think you would" (Participant 9)
> "Definitely (Participant 10).

> *"If there was a several day delay I would probably follow their Facebook page so I could see the news immediately" (Participant 2).*

> *"Given how cheap and easy it would be for them to post about that kind of stuff (cancellations and delays) on Twitter and Facebook, I think they would be missing an opportunity not to use them" (Participant 3).*

> *"I would expect to get updates on social media…(that have) specific information about what flights are delayed" (Participant 6).*

Focus Group participants indicated that they would be motivated to use social media to force organisations to respond and to hold them publically accountable for their actions.

> *"I feel like you will get an answer (on social media) because everyone can see it if you don't get an answer" (Participant 7).*

> *"They're like publically accountable" (Participant 6).*

The focus group participants, who clearly indicated that they expected to be informed, believed it was essential for airlines to communicate clearly and concisely across a range of channels. New media technologies allow affected travellers to access the internet, increasing communication options for organisations and at the same time heightening communication expectations of key stakeholders. Understanding these heightened expectations and opportunities caused by a social media developments is imperative in any crisis communication plan that encompasses social media, and especially Facebook.

4.3.3 Interviews

Interviewees indicated that there were several ways that they would have preferred to be communicated with by their airline if they went through the same crisis event again. Interviewees overwhelmingly expressed desire for clear, concise, accurate, timely and synchronised information. Participant 15 stated:

> *"(I would like to see) regular updates and by regular I mean you expect replies on social media in a few minutes. There's no excuse for it be an hour or more until you get a reply…Synchronised answers between all channels is also important so the message is the same."*

"You just want the right information from someone that genuinely wants to be helpful, not just get you off the phone because they're having a bad day" (Participant 15).

"I would like to be informed and know whether or not I was delayed... it would have been nice to get a warning that it could have been an issue" (Participant 11).

"I recall having a level of frustration that the front line staff were dealing with various types of internal communication and I suspect that a single source of information or referring all customers to a social media latest position would have been more positive" (Participant 13).

Participant 15 also believed that, by supplying accurate information - and as much information as possible - an organisation comes across as more sincere and genuine in a crisis situation, stating:

"There is an elements of hesitation to overcommit so they say less, and err on the side of caution. If it is genuine then you accept that but a lot of the time it's just covering themselves... It's no longer your standard call centre and saying 'I don't know' is not good enough."

Interviewees also wanted to receive communication over a variety of channels, keeping in mind that some people may not be able to access internet or other communication channels during the event. All Participants wanted to be contacted via email, text, phone calls or alerts straight to their smart phones.

Interviewees also stated that they expected organisations to have a strong social media presence that enables the organisation to address queries and concerns directly, without redirecting them to other channels.

"(Using social media) gives the perception that they are trying to communicate fast and accurately and they aren't hiding behind media statements and things like that" (Participant 15).

"I would prefer it (information) through either Facebook or Twitter, with specific information and a more general expect delays" (Participant 11).

"I think they should (take social media complaints seriously) because it's one of the best forms of communication so they need to jump on board and sort it out that way...They could have a social media person who sits there and says 'sorry about your complaint, you can do this, this and that," instead of just putting a link" (Participant 11).

"In hindsight I feel social media should have been used as a form of communication" (Participant 13).

"I would like to see airlines to use social media to clearly communicate information. Not necessarily answering comments, but giving general updates about specific flights, they could say 'runway covered in hail, will be delayed until this can be cleared.'" (Participant 14).

Participants strongly believed that commenting on social media channels forced the organisation to respond to complaints, a concept that was initially found during the textual analysis. Participant 15 stated:

"You know if you post there is probably going to be 20 other people with the same story and that's what gives social media power."

Lastly, Participant 11 stated that a strong motivating factor behind social media use was to gauge an airline's reputation. Social media enables potential clients to get a general idea of how an airline might handle a crisis. Participant 11 stated:

"They need to stand up for themselves and I want to see how they address complaints, whether it has been good or bad, and get an idea of solutions that they offer when things go wrong."

Interviewees overwhelmingly indicated that they expected airlines to use social media to provide information. Information received from the airlines should ideally be timely, accurate, synchronised, accessible and provided across a variety of channels. Participants also indicated that they believed using social media to provide general updates and specific information would have been useful in similar circumstances. Airlines were expected to have a strong social media presence and provide solutions and answers in a way that was genuine and displayed sincerity.

4.4 Prior reputation and crisis history

4.4.1 Textual analysis

Textual analysis demonstrated that Jetstar earned a bad reputation for lack of customer service and lack of communication before the crisis event with a significant number of postings about bad service, cancellations, delays and flight

changes before the crisis event occurred. Figure 15 demonstrates the types of complaints present on Jetstar's Facebook page prior to crisis, in which the customer complains about flight changes. The presence of such complaints prior to crisis indicates that Jetstar had a poor prior reputation based on experiences of consumers.

FIGURE 15: Jetstar consumer complains about service on Jetstar NZ Facebook page (2013). Retrieved from www.facebook.com/JetstarNZ?fref+ts.

There were also complaints made on several of Jetstar's official posts that traditionally would be expected to be met with positive reactions from the community. Figure 16 shows a Jetstar NZ post made on the 14th June advertising a Facebook exclusive sale. The comments made by some members of the community are negative, drawing attention to bad past experiences with the airline and highlighting what is perceived as poor customer service to other users who may be considering taking advantage of the sale.
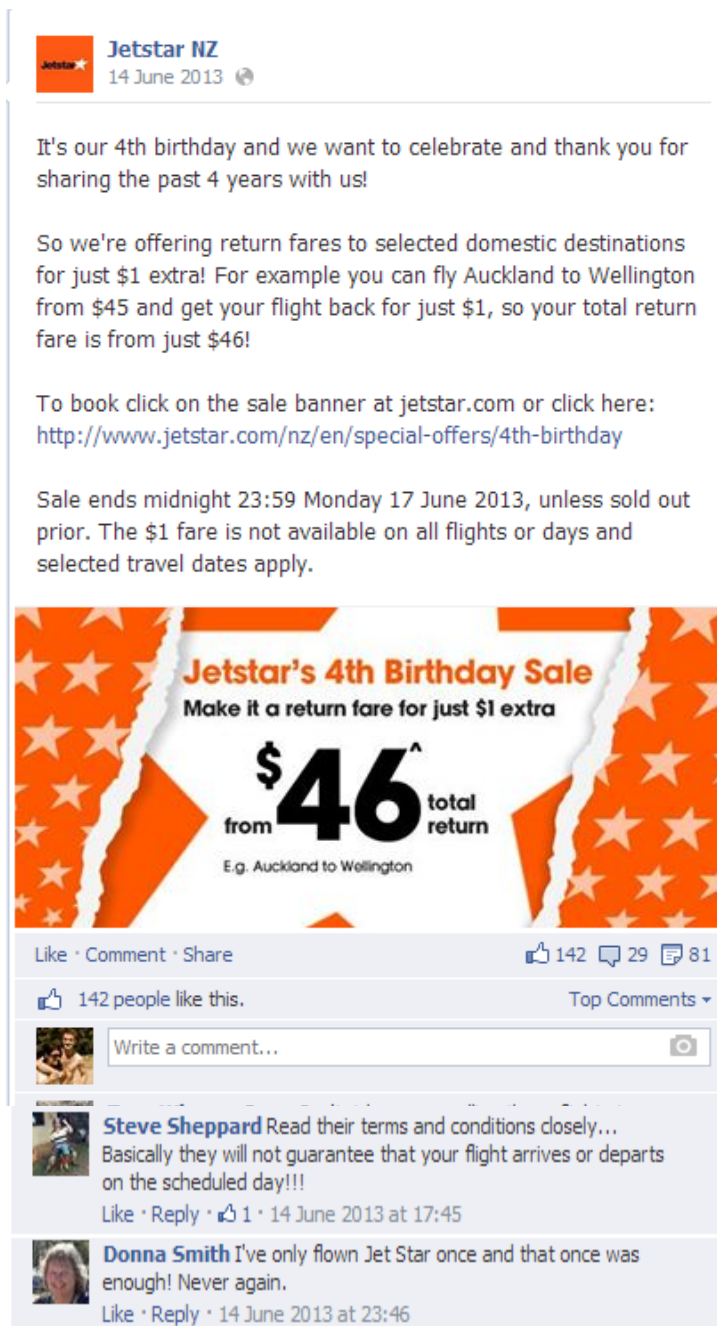
FIGURE 16: Jetstar NZ Facebook posts met with complaints and negative feedback (2013). Retrieved from www.facebook.com/JetstarNZ?fref+ts.

In contrast, in the weeks leading up to the crisis there were many positive comments made by key publics on Air New Zealand's Facebook page; furthermore similar posts made by Air New Zealand on other unrelated matters were met with standard replies, that were significantly less negative about the airline and more related to the post content. Posts such as those shown in Figure 17 were common on the Air New Zealand page, and the community was much more focused around the topic at hand as opposed to commenting on service.

The contrast in community replies between Figure 16 and Figure 17 indicates that difference between the prior reputation of Jetstar and Air New Zealand. Jetstar's Facebook community is more likely to remind the airline of their poor reputation and air their grievances. Air New Zealand, on the other hand, entertains a largely positive prior reputation, explaining the relative lack of negative feedback made by the community on their official posts.

FIGURE 17: Air New Zealand's Facebook community discusses the new livery
(2013) Retrieved https://www.facebook.com/AirNewZealand?fref=ts&filter=1.

The good prior reputation of Air New Zealand is also shown in Figure 18, where

several consumers seek out Facebook to share their positive experiences with

the carrier. The contrast between these and the negative posts seen on the

Jetstar page prior to crisis, an example of which is seen in Figures 15 and 16, demonstrates the significance of prior reputation.

FIGURE 18: Consumers share positive Air New Zealand experiences prior to the crisis event (2013). Retrieved from www.facebook.com/AirNewZealand?fref=ts&filter=2.

The contrast between posts found on Jetstar's Facebook page and Air New Zealand's page suggests that the prior reputation and related crisis history of the two airlines' is very different. Jetstar, struggling with their perception as a budget airline and with perceived poor customer service, had a negative reputation prior to crisis due to recurring delays and cancellations of their flights. Air New Zealand, on the other hand, entertained a strong positive perception of providing quality service at a premium price. The contrast between Jetstar's and Air New Zealand's reputation is displayed in the different nature of comments posted, and also in the sheer volume of complaints on the Jetstar page in comparison with the Air New Zealand page.

Figure 19 shows that during the crisis situation Air New Zealand received positive feedback for their handling of the crisis situation. In this instance, those flying with Air New Zealand express gratitude for the flight arriving - despite being delayed - and recognise the weather event as beyond Air New Zealand's control. The fact that Air New Zealand already had a strong prior reputation

meant that passengers due to travel on Air New Zealand displayed satisfaction despite disruption and delays.


Figure 19: Air New Zealand receives positive feedback for service during the crisis event (2013). Retrieved from www.facebook.com/AirNewZealand?fref=ts&filter=2

Figure 20 shows comments made on Jetstar's Facebook page during crisis. These comments are overwhelmingly negative, referring to poor management of the situation. The difference in how the Air New Zealand Facebook community and Jetstar Facebook community respond to the storm demonstrates the value of prior reputation. In this instance, Jetstar faces a far more negative prior reputation when trying to overcome potential reputational damage during the June 2013 Antarctic Storm.

FIGURE 20: Jetstar receive negative feedback via Facebook during the crisis event (2013) Retrieved from www.facebook.com/JetstarNZ?fref+ts.

The textual analysis also demonstrated that Air New Zealand's long-standing positive reputation helped to build a positive prior reputation. Air New Zealand's reputation of being an internationally recognised, quality award-winning airline, helped to build positive prior reputation. Figure 21 also shows that the positive connotations associated with Air New Zealand's role as New Zealand's national carrier help to build positive prior reputation.

FIGURE 21: Positive references related to Air New Zealand's role as New Zealand's national carrier (2013). Retrieved from www.facebook.com/AirNewZealand?fref=ts&filter=2.

The critically acclaimed group Airlineratings.com recently named Air New Zealand as Airline of the Year in January 2014 (*Airline Ratings*, 2014). Air New Zealand's critical acclaim and national standard allows the airline's reputation to be somewhat protected by crisis situations in a way that Jetstar is not. Jetstar does not entertain the same long-standing regard as Air New Zealand, despite winning the Best Low Cost Airline Category in the same awards for the Asia-Pacific region. Jetstar and Air New Zealand entertain two very different pre-crisis reputations. The above examples indicate that prior reputation may be partly responsible for the stark difference in postings made by affected, key publics during crisis and the inherently more negative response from those affected by the crisis with Jetstar. These findings suggest that prior reputation and crisis history play a significant role in how crises should be managed in the airline industry, with the view of maintaining, or protecting, vital good reputation.

4.4.2 Focus groups

Focus Group participants were asked to share their perceptions of the reputations of Jetstar and Air New Zealand. The perception that participants held of Air New Zealand was overwhelmingly positive, with reference to good customer service, their role as our national carrier and being a quality airline. In contrast, participants referred to Jetstar as being a cheaper airline, known for having a lower level of customer service and frequent delays and flight cancellations. The following quotes clearly indicate that the prior reputations of

Jetstar and Air New Zealand, seen by the general public, are significantly different.

> *"Air New Zealand is a much more reliable character. I avoid Jetstar if I can. While I understand their business model, I prefer Air New Zealand's customer service focus" (Participant 4).*

> *"Jetstar's Cheap. Air New Zealand is quality and comforting. They have a keen, green, kiwi attitude" (Participant 8).*

> *"Jetstar's treatment of their customers is horrendous. High handed really" (Participant 10).*

> *"Jetstar are a shocker for cancelling flights" (Participant 9).*

> *"I've had good stuff with Air New Zealand and bad stuff with Jetstar in cases like that (delays/cancellations). Whereas Air New Zealand offers solutions, Jetstar just makes you wait" (Participant 10).*

> *"I've never flown Jetstar and I never will. It's a risk that I'm not prepared to take, based on other people's experiences" (Participant 10).*

> *"Air New Zealand have the best customer service" (Participant 5).*

> *"Jetstar has a reputation of being a budget airline, more susceptible to time delays and bad service. Air New Zealand is more reliable. This comes from personal experience, word of mouth and I believe Air New Zealand has won awards or at least been recognised in the media as a New Zealand company that New Zealanders are proud of" (Participant 1).*

Participants built their perceptions of the airline from a variety of sources including word of mouth, personal experience and the news media. They also indicated that they would seek out social media to check an airline's reputation by seeing how they have treated other customers. Participant 10 suggested that negative feedback on such pages would change decisions to use the airline in the future.

> *"You see in the media that Jetstar has cancelled tickets, whereas Air New Zealand will go out of their way to fix the situation. Jetstar's ground crews don't seem trained to deal with conflict" (Participant 8).*

> *"Or you could just go on (social media) to check out the reputation if you are going to use them" (Participant 10).*

> *"(I would use social media to) gauge a review of others' experiences"*
> *(Participant 8).*

Focus Group participants also gave insight into how crisis history and crisis type affected their perceptions of the incident and of the airline. It became clear that participants were willing to forgive events outside the airlines control, but handling of the situation and previous experience impacted their reactions. Several participants also indicated that they would be more likely to forgive Air New Zealand than they would Jetstar, if they had a bad experience.

> *"In a delay I am more likely to forgive Air New Zealand as I have come to trust their judgement. If I were travelling with Jetstar I would question the decision and blame myself for choosing to travel with Jetstar as bad things always happen with them" (Participant 1).*

> *"If it (the reason for the delay/cancellation) is outside their control that's one thing. If it is because they're unorganised it's another" (Participant 9).*

> *"If it's weather related you just accept it, there's nothing you can do about that" (Participant 10).*

> *"I'm definitely more likely to be angry at them (if I had several bad experiences previously) and would eventually give up" (Participant 9).*

> *"I understand that stuff happens and sometimes there are delays, but it's how the company handles it that is important" (Participant 3).*

Responses from Focus Group participants indicated that crisis history and prior reputation are strong influencers on current perception, as Coombs (2004) suggests. Participants clearly demonstrated that they held strong views of the reputations both airlines, formed from their own experiences and word of mouth. Significantly, participants also suggested that they were likely to seek out social media channels to gauge an organisation's reputation by looking at how airlines might handle crisis situations. Participants indicated that the organisations, and social media handling of the situation, would impact their perception of the organisation and could be influential when deciding which carrier to fly with. The stark contrast in prior reputation of the two airlines and the perceived superiority of Air New Zealand over Jetstar was clearly demonstrated. The impact of prior reputation and crisis history and the role that social media may have in influencing key publics' perceptions cannot be

underestimated in any study that focuses on crisis communication in social media.

4.4.3 Interviews

Jetstar's prior reputation for providing poor customer service was highlighted by Participant 14, who was due to fly with Jetstar during the Antarctic Storm. Participant 14 stated:

> *"(My perception of the airline before the incident) was of them being pretty poor and unreliable. I have had flights delayed in the past for 30-50 minutes between Christchurch and Auckland. If given the option I would not book with them, even given the price difference."*

Participant 14's bad experience with the airline during the crisis - in which the airline did not clearly communicate delays, only served to lower this perception in the eyes of the participant. Participant 14 stated:

> *"(My perception of the airline during the incident) was low and getting lower as the evening progressed. They were unorganised and were not doing as much to sort the situation as Air New Zealand... I avoid them like the plague and would never book them when I am making the decision to book."*

Prior reputation and crisis history made the current situation less palatable to Participant 14. Delays experienced only helped to fuel the participant's poor prior perception of Jetstar and further lower the reputation of the airline in the eyes of the participant. Participant 14's experience is in contrast to that of Participant 11. Participant 11 was due to fly with Air New Zealand for the first time, after only ever flying with Jetstar. Participant 14 stated:

> *"I usually fly Jetstar. I know everyone has their horror stories and everything but I'm lucky enough that nothing has ever happened, so my perception of Jetstar is pretty good."*

In this instance, Participant 11 is still aware of Jetstar's "horror stories", but as they have never experienced them themselves, they are willing to give the airline the "benefit of the doubt." Participant 14, on the other hand, has a far more negative perception of Jetstar based on personal experiences that reinforce perceived poor prior reputation and crisis history of delays and cancellations.

Participants 12 and 13 both had strong positive perceptions of Air New Zealand prior to their experiences during the Antarctic Storm. These participants then received news of their delays and cancellations with their airline in a more accepting manner. Participant 12 stated:

> *"(Air New Zealand) were doing their best under very trying circumstances."*

> *"I was accepting of the incident - I was appreciative of the fact weather is out of their control. Albeit, the front line staff did have mixed messages at times which created confusion" (Participant 13).*

These two quotes, and especially the second quote by Participant 13, highlight how strong positive perception prior to crisis can help an organisation weather the crisis. Both had strong positive perceptions of Air New Zealand prior to the event, and so were more accepting of the delays, even despite confusion created by poor communication. This clearly displays the fact that prior reputation has a strong influence on how a crisis is received by the audience, and how good reputation can act as a buffer to reputational damage in such events.

On the other hand, Participants 11 and 15 had neutral or negative perceptions of Air New Zealand prior to the events. Therefore the reputational buffer that existed for Participants 12 and 13 did not exist when participants 11 and 15 were affected by the storm. Participant 14 stated:

> *"It (the fact that the participant believed that Air New Zealand did not handle the crisis well) does hinder their reputation in a way that you can't rely on them when the times comes. Normally, you're like Air New Zealand is all good, but in my experience it wasn't, and Jetstar is."*

> *"I possibly disliked them for a long time anyway, they didn't really bother me much anyway…but no, it did put me off because I thought in the circumstances they would have been more compassionate, more considerate because it's what they're known for" (Participant 15).*

The responses from Participants 11 and 15, and the contrast that these present between the perceptions of Participants 12 and 13, demonstrate that prior good reputation helps to ease the potential negative ramifications of a crisis event. This contrast also shows that prior poor or neutral reputation more easily leads

to negative perceptions forming during such events. This demonstrates that prior reputation and reputational capital plays a strong role in such events and the responses the affected publics will have to such events. Prior reputation is built from both word of mouth, but more importantly from personal experience, demonstrating the need for airlines to continuously provide quality service to maintain good public perception and reputation.

4.5 Role of emotion and impact of perception

4.5.1 Textual analysis

There was strong evidence of emotional content in the postings made by the social media community on both Jetstar and Air New Zealand's Facebook pages. Literature suggests that emotion is a strong motivating factor behind social media use (Liu et al, 2013), and that emotional content, and especially negative emotional content, presents a major challenge for crisis communicators (Coombs, 2007; Nabi, 2003; Kim & Cameron, 2011). This study explored the evidence of emotional content and the motivating factors behind emotional postings. Anger, disappointment and frustration were identified as negative emotions that if felt and shared by key publics, may have negative repercussions for organisations. Figure 22 shows that posts on the Air New Zealand Facebook page that displayed these negative emotions were often accompanied with promises to never fly again or showed favour for the competing airline. These posts were often fuelled by clear evidence of a lack of communication from the airline or perceived bad customer service. Evidence of such negative, emotional content suggests that increasingly crisis communicators are facing a community that is hyper-emotive, based on shared experiences that form a community, which is discussed in depth in section 4.6 of this chapter. Crisis communicators are operating within a platform that can be hyperbolic, creating a digitised word of mouth that may create many potential difficulties for those trying to manage reputation, and build positive perception and good reputation.

Philip James Dawrant ▶ Air New Zealand
21 June 2013

Not impressed with air nz's lack of help for their wellington service today. Have had three flight cancelled and transfered, which not once have we been notified about, we found out through their website. And then found out they were flying jet propelled aircraft only which they would not put on any additional flights to get the people who booked phantom of the opera tickets to wellington to see the production. Just a 'well sorry, we have flights on sunday' avaliable. (the day after the show!) Oh and by the way, we booked air nz over jetstar because they were the better more reliable company.......... except jetstar has been flying all afternoon!!!!!!!!!!

Like · Comment   👍 1 💬 2

👍 Possum Combes likes this.

Air New Zealand Hi Philip, thank you for getting in touch and your feedback. I am sorry to hear of your situation. Unfortunately due to the weather there have been many flight cancellations and disruptions. Our team on 0800 737 000 would be the best people to speak to in regards to your options and rebooking.
21 June 2013 at 19:22 · Like

Deharn Peffers ▶ Air New Zealand
10 June 2013

Let me start with saying how much I love Air NZ, because I do. You are my preferred airline. Today however the service I experienced whilst on the phone to one of the customer service staff was extremely poor. The girl on the other end of the phone had attitude from the start and to actually hang up on me was terrible. I did not raise my voice, nor did I use any abusive language at all, I merely questioned what she was saying and responded to her bad attitude. Not at all the type of service I would expect at all from you guys. Pretty annoyed!!!

Like · Comment   👍 2 💬 1

FIGURE 22: Affected travellers air anger and frustration on the Air New Zealand Facebook page (2013). Retrieved from www.facebook.com/AirNewZealand?fref=ts&filter=2.

109

Figure 23 demonstrates that these types of negative, emotional postings are also found on the Jetstar NZ Facebook page. In Figure 23, those commenting turn to Facebook to air their grievances with Jetstar in a highly emotive manner, displayed by comments such as "do something about your effed up business model" (Jetstar NZ Facebook Page, 2013). The types of language used are similar to that used in Figure 22, and complaints are once again fuelled by perceived lack of customer service. This suggests that both airlines are facing a similar challenge, in which some dissatisfied and highly emotional customers are turning to Facebook to complain. These public complaints may damage reputation and perception of the airline, depending on how they reply to the customer and if any other potential customers see the complaints.

FIGURE 23: Affected travellers air anger and frustration on the Jetstar Facebook page. Retrieved from www.facebook.com/JetstarNZ?fref+ts.

Textual analysis also demonstrated that those airing negative perceptions of the airlines were motivated to do so in a social media environment as it was perceived that public complaints would be more likely to be addressed by the airlines. Figure 24 shows a strong belief in the power of public word of mouth, and the added motivation that airlines may feel to address issues if they are publically heard - or seen. Alternatively, those commenting on these pages are also motivated by a need for information that cannot be gained through other channels, as discussed in section 4.3.

FIGURE 24: Frustrated Air New Zealand customer uses social media to spread negative word of mouth and seek resolution (2013). Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/AirNewZealand?fref=ts&filter=2.

Public use of social media to address concerns is concerning to organisations who aim to foster good public perception and positive reputation. The fact that publics perceive that they are more likely to get their complaints addressed, and therefore are more likely to post their negative opinions of the airline in a social media environment, inevitably leads to a greater volume of negative postings on the airline's social media community. This in turn could negatively impact

greater public perception and reputation of the airline. Therefore, public and timely addressing of complaints directly in the social media environment becomes increasingly necessary to manage potential crisis situations and to defend organisational reputation. Conversation streams indicate that timely and appropriate responses, that address concerns, often diffuse emotion-driven complaints, as shown in Figure 25.

FIGURE 25: Air New Zealand addresses query promptly, diffusing frustration (2013). Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/AirNewZealand?fref=ts&filter=2.

Alternatively, not addressing complaints or concerns led to others also sharing their negative experiences - fuelled by the shared emotional experience that social media offers, as demonstrated in Figure 26A and Figure 26B. Figure 26A and Figure 26B show a conversation stream sparked by the initial comment made in Figure 26A. Not responding to emotional content leaves the airline in a position where the community - and the emotions felt by the community, can begin to define reputation and public perception.

Jenny Li ▶ Jetstar NZ
7 June 2013 near Auckland

Jet Star,

Can you please tell me how it is still possible that you are running as a business? I'm appalled at how unreliable your services are. I recently booked a flight with you and I have just been told that it has been delayed – you have notified me today and told me but I'm not happy. And this is not the first time it has happened either. How do you think that this is okay? After reading all the comments below, I'm worried that my flight (on the day) will be delayed again. Not only will my time be wasted but my money too (on accommodation costs).

You state that low costs are your competitive advantage for your services but how can you even run a business if you can't assure your customers are getting the value and service they expect from your business? Low costs do not mean delaying flights whenever the hell you feel like. Costs and time is actually incurred at the customer's expense and you don't seem to understand how this is wrong.

Seriously Jet Star, how can you explain to your customers that what you are doing is okay? An apology is not enough, so quit apologizing and do something about your effed up business model because you are leaving a trail of dissatisfied and angry customers who will never use your services again.

Like · Comment   👍 17 💬 5

👍 17 people like this.   Top Comments ▼

Write a comment...   📷

Jetstar NZ Hi Jenny, we have responded to your post on our Facebook Australia wall. - Thanks Courtney
Like · Reply · 👍 1 · 7 June 2013 at 12:29

Ivan Yumul i just avoid jetstar altogether. nearly every flight has technical difficulties and is delayed, which is a reflection of their lack of quality and professionalism. the low costs are only in place to capture the revenue, and when things turn to custard, they do not even offer a refund or compensate for the inconvenience they have caused for people. ugly as
Like · Reply · 👍 3 · 7 June 2013 at 13:33

Jeanelle Ooi Sujin Flew jetstar to wellington, cancelled our flight with NO explanation, we lost money on our accomodation and Jetstar did NOTHING to compensate. After that, I swore never to fly jetstar ever again, and I never have, not since that trip. They shouldnt even BE a business. They are a constant disappointment to all their customers and they do nothing to ease their customer's stress either. Its time to move on Jetstar.
Like · Reply · 👍 1 · 7 June 2013 at 14:12

FIGURE 26A: A Complaint about Jetstar service sparks further complaints and issues, to which Jetstar does not reply (2013) Retrieved from www.facebook.com/JetstarNZ?fref+ts.
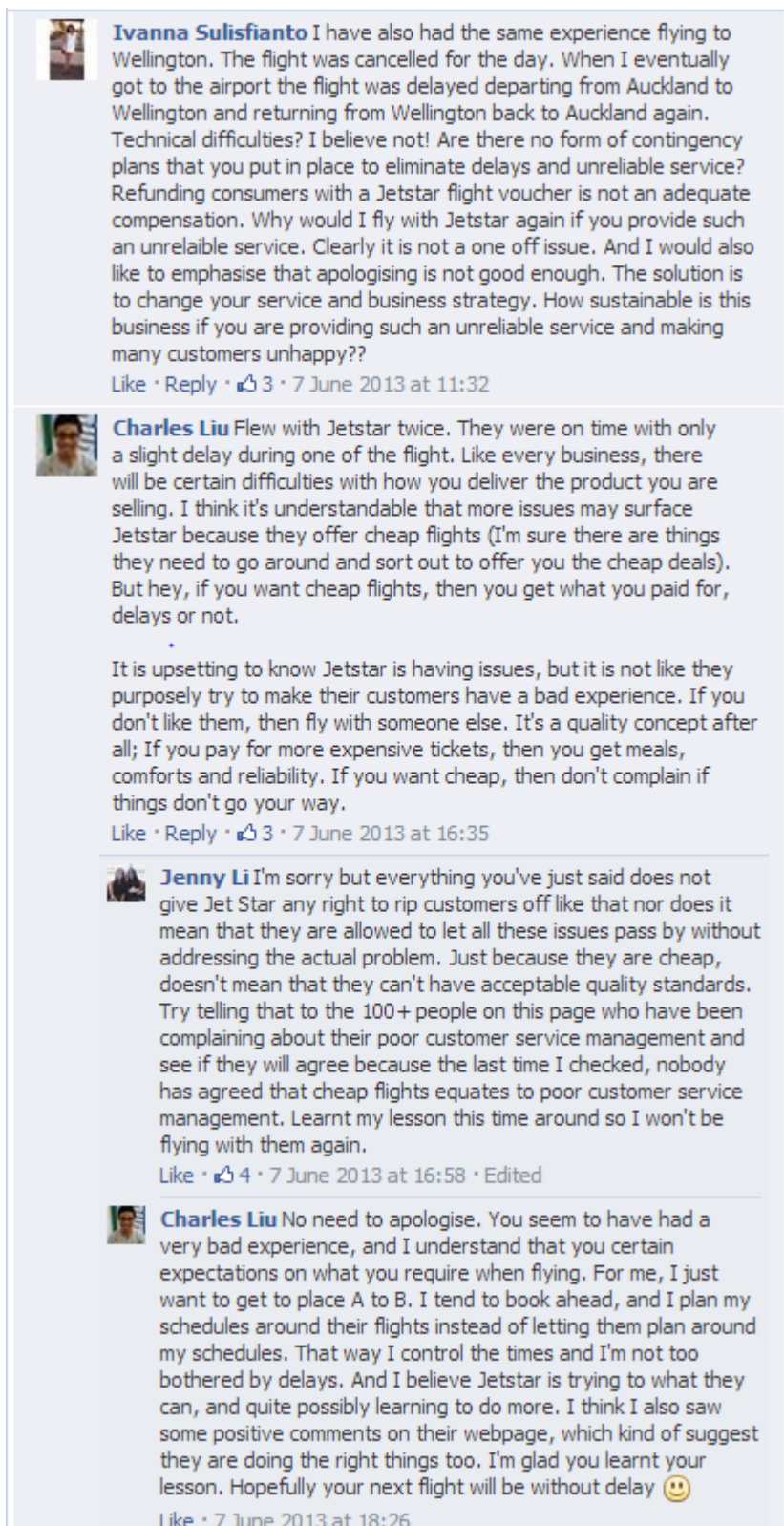
FIGURE 26B: A complaint about Jetstar service sparks further complaints and issues, to which Jetstar does not reply (2013). Retrieved from www.facebook.com/JetstarNZ?fref+ts.

While negative emotional postings evident suggest that crisis communicators must consider emotion in order to understand the potential challenges it may pose, there was also evidence of displays of positive emotion. Happy or satisfied clients expressed their gratitude and displayed positive emotions. These positive

comments could then be associated with building positive public perception and good reputation, as others seek out social media feedback on airlines. Comments displaying satisfaction with both airlines' services were found on both pages, as shown in Figures 27 and 28.

FIGURE 27: Air New Zealand received public positive feedback for their service before and after the crisis (2013). Retrieved from www.facebook.com/AirNewZealand?fref=ts&filter=2.
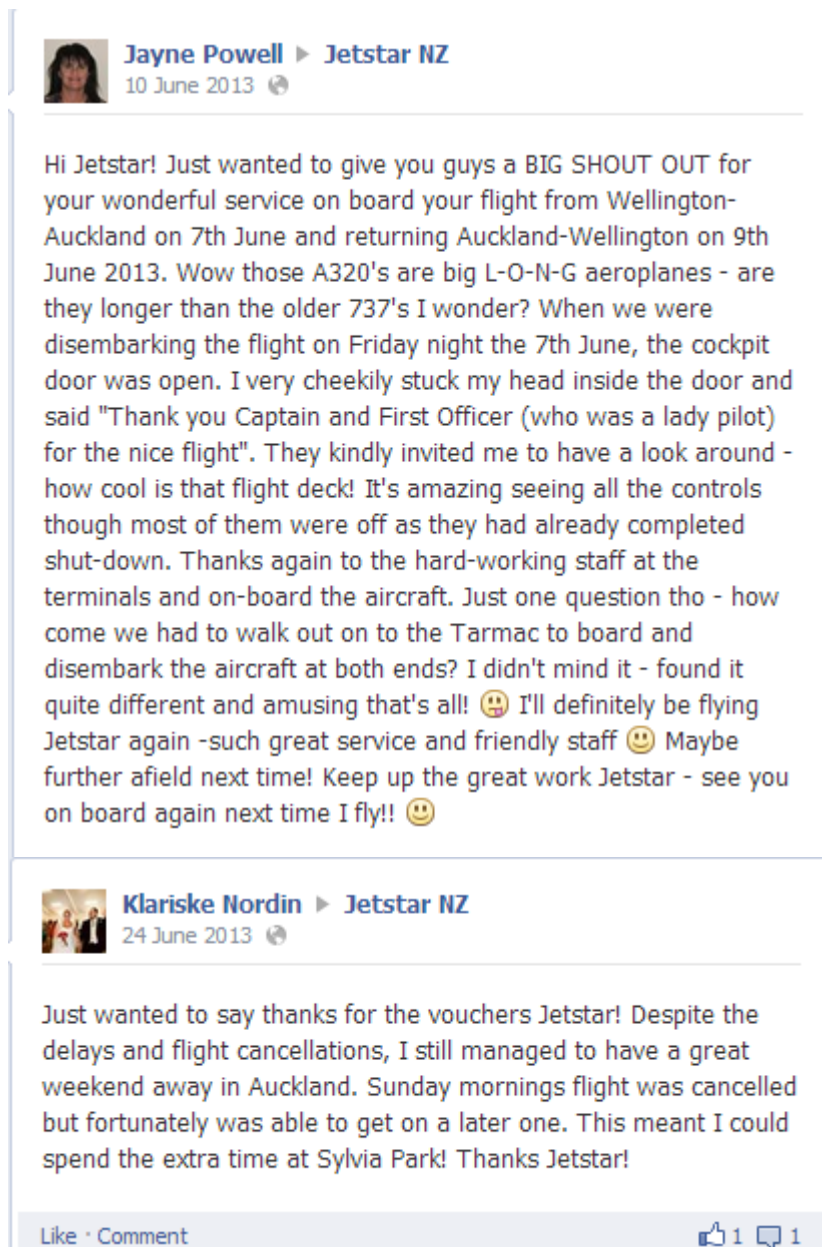
FIGURE 28: Jetstar receive positive feedback for their service before and after the crisis (2013). Retrieved from www.facebook.com/JetstarNZ?fref+ts.

Figures 27 and 28 show that those that shared their good experiences with the airlines often referred to perceived good customer service, and clear address to any concerns that were raised. Such emotional ranges across posts shown in this section suggest that social media communities can have both positive and negative repercussions on reputation. Comments made can be fuelled by anger, frustration or by satisfaction, suggesting that emotion is highly dependent on experience. The presence of such wide-ranging emotions suggest that crisis communicators increasingly need to have an understanding of the motivation

behind affected publics' social media use and how potential negative emotions may be best handled.

4.5.2 Focus groups

Focus Group participants gave critical insight into how emotion motivates social media use. Participants strongly believed that they would be most likely to seek out social media websites only when they held strong grievances - and then to air complaints and vent.

> *"It is the unfortunate thing about social media, people only say mean things, not positive things. You'd never go and say 'hey guys, great flight'"* (Participant 9)

> *"People are more likely to go out of their way to complain, instead of compliment"* (Participant 8).

> *"(If I had a flight cancelled or delayed) I'd do my blog (i.e. turn to social media) and get angry and frustrated"* (Participant 9).

> *"My friends often speak about their bad airline experiences using social media - mainly Facebook. I see regular posts in my newsfeed about delays or bad customer service"* (Participant 1).

> *"I would only use Facebook to vent anger towards airlines if they did something that really annoyed me"* (Participant 2).

There was a strong public service aspect to airing complaints or criticisms after bad experiences, with notions of public shaming and warning others becoming apparent amongst participants.

> *"I'm likely to comment on my own Facebook and vent to my group...to warn my friends and to vent and have a rant"* (Participant 9).

> *"That would be a way for me to vent my frustration, publically shame them and maybe get a small apology out of them too"* (Participant 2).

> *"(I would be motivated to comment on social media pages) to share the experience with other customers"* (Participant 4).

While participants agreed that they were most likely to feel angry or frustrated during flight cancellations, and would turn to social media, they also indicated that organisations could help to diffuse these emotions by providing solutions.

"(They could) sort it out. Like Participant 8 said if they've come up with a solution and get proactive…I'll be happy, but if they don't know what's happening then that's irritating" (Participant 9).

"If the airline tries to fix it then I would be more accepting" (Participant 8).

"(My reactions) depend on what their solution is" (Participant 7).

"It's all about presenting information, if they're like I'm really sorry, no planes are leaving you accept that, but if they're like there's a storm, and present it rudely then you'll be angry…How they present information changes your thoughts on it" (Participant 6).

These responses indicated that social media - as a platform - would likely be highly emotive, a concept which is supported by the literature (Liu et al, 2013). These emotions - fuelled by perceived bad experiences, lack of customer service and poor communication - would most likely result in negative feedback being placed on a very public forum. While this presents obvious challenges for organisations, participants indicated that good customer service and the provision of solutions would likely diffuse emotional situations. There will be potential ramifications if organisations fail to acknowledge and diffuse such situations, creating negative perceptions of their image and thus adversely affecting their reputation. This suggests that the ability to diffuse emotion needs to be a key driving factor behind crisis communication plans in a social media age.

4.5.3 Interviews

Participants 11,12,13,14 and 15 all referred to experiencing varying emotions during the event, influencing their reactions to and perceptions of the airlines that they were due to travel with.

"I think it was the communication (that particularly upset me) and also trying to blame everything on the storm" (Participant 15).

"I was very grumpy with the lack of communication… I was frustrated but resigned that there was nothing I could do to improve the situation" (Participant 14).

"I was frustrated and annoyed (at the situation) but resigned to the fact that nobody could do anything about it" (Participant 12).

Those participants that felt especially annoyed, angry or frustrated at the airline were motivated by what was perceived as poor customer service. Participants indicated that the airlines providing communication and information in a timely, accurate and clear manner would help to diffuse negative emotions.

> *"I was angry and confused, so clarity would have been nice and made the whole experience easier" (Participant 11)*
> *"Kind of diffused the situation" (Interviewer)*
> *"Yea Exactly" (Participant 11).*

> *"You just want the right information" (Participant 15)*
> *"And that information would have calmed you down?" (Interviewer)*
> *"Yea, definitely" (Participant 15).*

Participants 12 and 13, who held mainly positive views of their airline before, during and after the crisis situation, were far more accepting of the delays.

> *"They were doing their best under trying circumstances" (Participant 12).*

Whereas those participants that had negative experiences were far more likely to air negative views of the airline and share their experiences, referring to social media as an outlet to do so.

> *"If I had access to the internet I would have been ropable I think." "If I had my smart phone then I would have been complaining everywhere." "Sometimes you don't need a resolution, sometimes you just need to complain and say your problems out loud" (Participant 15)*

The above indicates that emotions increasingly play a role on perception during the crisis. New technologies enable those that feel an injustice has occurred to share those experiences with others on increasingly public platforms. The motivating power of emotion, and especially negative emotion, to share negative experiences cannot be underestimated in a social media environment. Participants indicated that certain situations could dilute these strong negative emotions, which could help to protect reputation in a social media environment.

4.6 Pack mentality and community voice

4.6.1 Textual analysis

Social media platforms, at their heart, are communities where people go to express shared experiences. The textual analysis demonstrated that Air New Zealand and Jetstar have very different communities, and expressions of community involvement, which may impact reputation and perception. On the Jetstar page, evidence of a pack mentality emerged, whereby one complaint about lack of service or similar sparked other, similar complaints, as shown in Figures 16 and 26. This pack mentality sparked increasingly negative posts, relaying shared experiences of delays, cancellations and other frustrations about Jetstar's experiences. These posts suggest that Jetstar's prior reputation may have caused an increasingly negative and hostile community to form on the Jetstar page, which poses its own risks to reputation. More commonly than not, when these shared experiences were aired in the community, Jetstar would not reply to the complaints of everyone, and would only reply to the initiator. This then allows complaints and shared experiences to be aired that may challenge good reputation without any counter balance provided by the organisation that may help to protect reputation. The challenges of an inherently negative community, that can air complaints and issues at their leisure is further amplified when the organisation fails to become involved in the debate and address issues in a public manner, as no resolution or counter-point can be seen to prevent other key publics from building a negative perception. The power of a community voice, and the potential challenges posed by an overwhelming negative community cannot be underestimated in a social media age, as word of mouth becomes increasingly digitised and accessible to all.

4.6.2 Focus groups

Focus Group participants alluded to the power of a public social media community, and the ability to hold organisations publically accountable through volume and publicness of complaints, as a strong motivating factor behind commenting on social media platforms. When Participants 5,6 and 7 were asked

whether commenting on social media was about being part of a shared experience they nodded in agreement.

> *"I'd turn to social media to see if there are any other people in the same boat as me. To get that group mentality and group pressure going" (Participant 8).*

> *"(I would comment on Facebook about Jetstar and Air New Zealand because) you get other people backing you up as well, people are like yea they did that to me as well" (Participant 7)*

> *"People like to vent and get noticed, saying their opinion in a very public place" (Participant 7).*

> *"It's good for those that feel like you need to vent, and then they get backed up by the rest of the public" (Participant 5).*

The above quotes indicate that the pack mentality that sparked additional complaints on Jetstar's Facebook page would be repeated, as participants were most likely to comment on a page to serve a public function of providing warnings and of letting the public validate their complaints. The desire to be part of a shared experience and have complaints validated would lead to a snowball effect of criticism, which airlines would be expected to respond to, as discussed in section 4.2.

4.6.3 Interviews

Interviewees referred to the community voice and shared experiences of social media as being a strong motivating factor for using it in such events. There were also notions of fulfilling a public service, where others could see if the airlines' had failed in any way and forcing responses by sheer volume of complaints. Participant 11 said:

> *"I feel like more people see Air New Zealand as being great and having a good reputation, and it's not always that great, and I feel like people should know that, and not just hinder Jetstar as being the bad airline, so that's why I feel like I should have said something to Air New Zealand about their flight."*

> *" (Social media is about) the shared experience and getting to vent. And it's transparent. You're not just one caller thinking is this just me and am I the*

only one to have this problem. On social media you know that you're not"
(Participant 15)

*"I'm most likely to post about something that I think is a real injustice, so I
would be quite happy to stir other people up and I think social media can do
that. I would feel quite happy about that (stirring others up) because you
can continue things and get momentum going so I would do that in the
future... It's about holding an organisation accountable and making sure
that everyone is being treated equally and the situation is being dealt with
as a whole" (Participant 15).*

The above quotes indicate that both Participant 11 and 15 see and use social
media as a tool that enables community to have a voice. Participant 15 clearly
stated that they would be happy to fuel discussion and debate on a social media
website if they believe an injustice has happened. This idea of serving a
community and holding organisations accountable may be a strong motivating
factor behind the pack mentality which causes one complaint to spark several, as
the social media community attempts to demand action and recourse for wrong-
doing.

4.7 Summary

Findings demonstrated that crisis communication strategies used by both
airlines were not all encompassing, and did not - for the most part - alleviate the
situation. Standardised replies, lack of communication and the inability to
engage in dialogic communication and respond to queries and concerns are all
emergent issues with the communication used by the airlines. Participants
indicated that they wanted clear, concise, timely, accurate and synchronised
information, received across as many platforms as possible. The insincerity and
repetitiveness of crisis communication messages issued provided a level of token
engagement, that demonstrated both organisations were not participating in the
dialogic communication which social media allows for.

Affected publics were increasingly using social media as an information-seeking
tool and participants expected that these organisations would be able to provide
information over this platform in a timely manner, appropriate to the platform.
Inability to provide this information was met with frustration and anger, and
with key publics turning to other mediums due to a lack of information. Inability

to provide information on Facebook suggests that both organisations have not fully appreciated the fact that key publics will seek out information in this way. Lack of consideration for the provision of information suggests that crisis communication strategies are once again lacking in this area, with spokespeople managing the pages being ill-informed and not being given the autonomy they need to effectively handle the crisis.

Emotion and evidence of pack mentality played a significant factor in social media use and in key publics sharing negative word of mouth. Emotional postings were most evident when a perceived injustice had occurred. Findings demonstrated that such negative, emotional postings could be nullified if a solution was provided. However, the repetitive use of standardised replies indicated that both organisations had not incorporated ways of dealing with this type of content into their crisis communication strategies.

Crisis history and prior reputation also played a role in how the organisations were perceived, and how they are able to weather a crisis, with participants indicating that Air New Zealand would remain in their favour longer than Jetstar in the case of bad experiences. This, and the fact that participants indicated that social media is increasingly being used to judge reputation of organisations, suggests that crisis communication strategies must adapt to enable organisations to protect reputation before, during and after crises. Findings demonstrated that current strategies, in this circumstance, were not adequate, as key publics' expectations require more engagement and less control by the organisations as evident in their limited and unhelpful responses. The implications of these findings, and the changes and adaptations that they demand, will be discussed in depth in the following chapter.

5. Analysis

5.1   Overview

Social media presents a number of new challenges to the practice of crisis communication. Findings highlighted a myriad of salient issues in current crisis communication practices as applied to the social media environment of Facebook. In compiling the findings, it became increasingly clear that current crisis communication practices adopted by both Jetstar and Air New Zealand were lacking. There was strong evidence of ill-preparedness in the crisis communication plans employed by both airlines, which led to the use of standardised replies and superficial engagement. There was also evidence that the airlines were ill-equipped to deal with the highly emotive nature of some of the posts - choosing to either ignore these posts or to only provide general evasive answers. Furthermore, the publicness of social media forums heightened the risks associated with negative prior reputation and crisis history, as people increasingly turn to these forums to inform perceptions of reputation. These issues demonstrate that social media demands change in crisis communication practices employed in that environment. Crisis communicators can work to adapt practices by understanding areas in which current practices lack and ensure their strategies continue to protect and maintain reputation while using social media platforms.

5.2   Social media crisis communication

Findings highlighted that there were several emergent issues with current social media crisis communication practices. There was strong evidence that both Air New Zealand and Jetstar did not have adequate crisis communication plans in place that considered necessary involvement on their social media platform - Facebook. The use of standardised replies across both airlines showed that those in charge of managing the social media pages worked within strict guidelines, and lacked autonomy to respond to specific areas of individual queries or complaints. Such guidelines demonstrated that the airlines did not fully

appreciate the opportunities that social media offers, in terms of engagement, nor the expectations of their social media communities. Evidence of these standardised replies supports previous research on social media and reputation that contained several overlaps with this project, including a brief analysis of Jetstar's social media use (Ott, 2013). This research found other organisations also employed this tactic on social media, despite the fact that such use contrasts dialogic principles (Ott, 2013). Evans (2011) suggests that social media crisis communication plans must give autonomy to those running social media platforms, ensuring that they are well-equipped to answer queries and complaints in a timely manner. Communicators should be given both the resources and the ability to respond to the specifics of every request. These provisions would allow the airlines to avoid the use of standardised replies, which often sparked further frustration with their consumers. Furthermore, by enabling social media managers' full autonomy to move beyond a 'script' of answers - and instead operate within the organisations' values - the airlines would be able to reduce load on phone-lines and other communication mediums, which may fail during crisis situations.

Responses made by those that had received standardised replies help to demonstrate that social media demands a different tone of organisational communication. Findings demonstrated evidence of frustration and cynicism towards the standardised replies, and one even referred to the "robot response" (*Air New Zealand*, 2013) nature of the reply. This suggests that social media communities expect organisations to break out of their formal, organisational voices when participating in social media forums and instead engage with their communities with a human voice, showing empathy and understanding. Evans (2011) argued that in similar circumstances EUROCONTROL was able to successfully manage the crisis situation by using social media to provide timely, accurate information while presenting the organisation as sympathetic and personable. The importance of timely, accurate posts that display genuine engagement is clear. Organisations were able to diffuse negative emotions displayed in the initial complaints by providing the necessary information and solutions to the affected traveller. The cynical, frustrated and angry nature of

consumer replies to standardised organisational responses also highlighted the central role of genuine engagement in effective public handling. The emotion-filled responses of affected publics are challenges in social media that threatens good reputation, and organisations should work to avoid their recurrence by participating in genuine engagement with these publics on social media. Stakeholders increasingly expect empathy and understanding from organisations that they communicate with on social media platforms. Organisations must communicate in a voice appropriate for the platform as social media facilitates a platform for informal conversation between stakeholder and organisation. In this instance, such a voice must be less formal than earlier forms of communication, which may have focused on official statements and press releases. Organisations must give those in charge of social media platforms autonomy to engage with their social media communities in a manner that still displays organisational values, while maintaining a more down-to-earth and personable tone.

The application of traditional crisis communication strategies on a social media platform was also evident, and was met with mixed responses from key publics. Both Air New Zealand and Jetstar employed a strategy for Facebook replies that combined apology with either justification or instructing information. This created juxtaposition between the severely accommodating strategy of apology and the evasive strategies of justification and instructing information. Such juxtaposition created a level of insincerity, heightened by the standardised and repetitive nature of the replies. Coombs' (2007) typology suggests that an apology is out of place in such crisis circumstances, as severe weather events are beyond the airlines control and therefore such severe accommodating strategies should not be required. Instead simple justification or the provision of instructing information should suffice. This suggestion is particularly relevant, as apologies used are not a traditional admission of wrong-doing and are more a token statement, used to appease as opposed to actually apologise. The evident frustration felt at receiving such responses were clear throughout the findings, and participants repetitively referred to insincerity and lack of empathy as motivating factors that helped to build negative perceptions. Therefore, although

the airlines followed a mix of traditional crisis communication strategies that were deemed appropriate, their application on social media and the way that they were used meant that such strategies were inappropriate.

The relevance of traditional crisis communication theory for building new social media strategies cannot be understated, despite the overwhelming evidence that traditional strategies cannot simply be applied to social media platforms. While strategies such as denial and offering justification or excuse (Coombs, 2007) may not be as successful on social media platforms, it is still imperative that organisations aim to communicate clearly with the stakeholders' interests at heart, providing all information in a timely manner that could help stakeholders cope with the crisis (Coombs, 2007). The tenets of pre-planning and stakeholder reaction anticipation, which are fundamental in the theoretical framework of SCCT (Coombs, 2007), become even more important in a social media environment. The ability to pre-plan and anticipate key publics' reaction to the organisation's message strategies become imperative to enable swift action that can help to maintain positive perception, due to the instantaneous nature of social media, and the expectation of speed and accuracy in supply of information.

The Social-Mediated crisis Communication Model builds heavily on the tenets of SCCT and displays how traditional theory can be further developed to apply to new media environments. Findings demonstrated that Liu et al.'s (2011) claims that publics use social media in crisis to seek and share information, vent emotionally and offer support held true. It was clear that both Air New Zealand's and Jetstar's social media communities were using social media to fulfill many, or all of these functions. However, the airlines presented themselves as unprepared, as they failed to provide specific information in many cases, and instead relied on token engagement and standardised replies. The fact that key publics were motivated by a need to seek information and to share emotional experiences could be expected by organisations participating in a social media environment, and therefore should be planned for. Both Jetstar and Air New Zealand need a stronger appreciation of the importance of providing information and engaging with their respective communities in a social media environment. SMCC stresses

the importance of the organisation providing information, in a way that they become the preferred information source in crisis (Liu et al., 2011). Findings supported this argument, and the argument of Coombs (2007), who stated that harmful negative emotions may be lessened if key publics seek information directly from the organisation. Those that complained to the airlines on social media and received resolution were mollified, as discussed in section 4.5. However, both Air New Zealand and Jetstar were not prioritising addressing complaints directly on social media. By not engaging with their audiences and providing specific public recourse, the airlines allow others to become the preferred information source, which may result in the crisis situation escalating. The possible escalation may be attributed to the organisation not giving themselves the opportunity to solve issues, or justify their actions, thereby leaving consumer comments as the only reviewer of reputation and perception on any particular issue. Furthermore, hostility, frustration and anger towards the organisation may build if affected publics receive information from a source other than the organisation, as the organisation may be seen to be withholding information or not attempting to inform affected publics as quickly as possible. Therefore, it is imperative that organisations prioritise engagement on social media platforms in order to protect reputation.

Findings demonstrated that key publics had clear expectations from organisations operating within a social media environment. Findings also indicated that for the most part, both Jetstar and Air New Zealand needed more work in these areas. It was expected that airlines provided clear, timely and accurate information through as many channels as possible. Information was also expected to be available on the internet, through official websites and social media platforms, especially if phone lines are busy or jammed. The inability to provide specific information and delays of an hour or more in official Facebook replies suggest that both airlines have not specifically considered the changes that social media demands in their crisis communication plans. The instantaneous nature of social media offers both an opportunity and an expectation for organisations that use it to provide important information in a timely manner. The demands of the platform necessitate information sharing

almost instantaneously, which means that organisations no longer hold control over the communication timeline of the crisis. Instead, they are expected to provide information as it becomes available, in a completely transparent manner. Although moving away from traditional ideas of control is met with hostility across the industry, it becomes increasingly important for organisations to recognise that the timeline of crisis communication is happening in real-time, and it is an expectation that all information is provided. Therefore, crisis communication plans must include the ability to share all information that comes to light or is available at hand on social media. The findings demonstrated that to successfully manage a social media crisis, organisations must meet expectations of key publics, which have altered with the development of new platforms. Therefore, it has become imperative that these changes are included in crisis communication plans, and that those front staff that are responsible for communicating the crisis issues are well-briefed, and at the same time have autonomy to address almost all issues without delay. While traditional theory still plays a role in developing social media crisis communication plans, consideration of the opportunities and challenges presented by the medium need to be fully understood and accounted for to enable successful social media crisis communication.

5.3 Moving toward excellent crisis communication with dialogic conversation

Social media communication, at its heart, is fundamentally dialogic in nature. Social media communication fosters a communicative environment in which organisations can empathise with their stakeholders by listening, talking and implementing change accordingly, if organisations use the medium to its' full potential. In this same environment, stakeholders and key publics can share issues, concerns and give feedback in a way that may demand change. Such a communicative environment easily fosters dialogic communication principles, as exchanges between stakeholder and organisations are easier to facilitate and increasingly transparent due to the publicness of the forum. Findings demonstrated that while organisations were participating in online forums,

organisations engaged in a token level of superficial engagement, as opposed to practicing dialogic principles. The lack of true engagement, in which the organisation participated fully in the conversation, offering replies, solutions and responses to the feedback supplied by stakeholders suggests that organisations have not prepared to take part in this level of communication. The choice to not participate in dialogic communication, and instead participate in token engagement, suggests organisations are struggling to give up traditional ideas of control over message and discussion about their reputation. The abilities of social media to transparently and publically link stakeholders and organisations may force organisations to adapt dialogic principles in order to maintain reputation, despite the fact that these organisations may not be ready or prepared to fully embrace dialogic communication. Fearn-Banks (2011) argues that social media offers organisations the best available tools to engage with their key publics before, during and after a crisis in a way that can protect reputation by listening and responding to feedback provided, and by providing critical, key information in a timely manner.

Social media, and the ability it fosters for open communication between stakeholders and organisations, also indicate that communication is moving towards Grunig's Fourth-Model Excellence Theory. Grunig's 1985 model, which outlines excellence in public relations as being achieved when two-way, symmetric communication exists between organisations and key publics, is highly applicable to crisis communication. Although the abilities of social media can foster such communication, in which an organisation engages with audiences, responding to feedback and implementing change, findings suggest these abilities are not being realised. At best, both Jetstar and Air New Zealand are currently practicing a Third Model, Two-Way Asymmetric Communication, in which an organisation engages in communication to try and get the audience to accept the organisation's point of view. There is no dialogue between consumer and organisation, and no attempt to engage and respond to feedback. The lack of dialogue is highlighted by lack of further participation in conversation, and the lack of responses that specifically address consumers' queries or complaints. Jetstar and Air New Zealand both responded to a large portion of queries and

complaints using standardised replies. The use of such replies shows that both organisations are choosing not to engage with their audiences at more than a superficial level. Social media increasingly demands that organisations aim to practice two-way communication, despite the challenges that this may present. Consumers are turning to social media and demanding that they be listened to, which is creating a media environment where organisations not only should practice a fourth-model ideal, but instead are forced to practice such an ideal if they intend to foster and maintain positive perception and reputation. As audiences' expectations for engagement grows, organisations need to build this level of engagement into their crisis communication, and also standard communication plans. Social media increasingly enables audiences to hold organisations accountable, forcing an era of communication where the provision of open, honest and most importantly, transparent communication is key. Findings demonstrated that key publics in crisis situations expect the practice of fourth-model ideals. Despite these expectations both Air New Zealand and Jetstar were not employing these ideals. Adoption of dialogue, and embracing the ability to engage in a way that promotes interaction, and encourages both the giving and receiving of information, is an essential contributing factor to an organisations' success in social media forums.

5.4 The impact of prior reputation and crisis history: amplified in a social media age?

Social media has digitised word of mouth, enabling consumers to use social media forums to rate potential organisations. This has made contributing factors to perception and reputation, such as prior reputation and crisis history, increasingly more public and more accessible to key publics. Findings demonstrated that increasingly key publics are turning to social media to share experiences, participating in a name and shame mentality, where they can work as a community to hold organisations accountable for their actions and warn others of bad experiences. While this may not be particularly relevant during crisis, it is highly pertinent after crisis as negative feedback posted on social media sites has a much longer 'shelf-life' than traditional, off-line word of mouth.

Word of mouth, which is one of the major contributors to organisational reputation and audience perception, has become increasingly dynamic and accessible in the social media environment (Dellarocas, 2003). If an organisation suffered widespread negative feedback online during crisis this information will most likely still be accessible after crisis, due to the internet's ability to store information, impacting the organisation's reputation and public perception of it. Furthermore, key publics also indicated that they were likely to turn to social media platforms to seek out reputation and see how organisations have previously handled situations to inform their perceptions. Therefore, as people increasingly rely on these digital word of mouth systems, and draw information from online sources, it becomes increasingly likely that negative word of mouth may last longer, and have consequences that are more wide reaching than before (Dellarocas, 2003). It has become important for the organisation to join the debate and attempt to nullify negative word of mouth as consumers turn to social media to post opinion and feedback (Veil et al, 2011). Public use of social media in crisis occurs for a number of reasons, and the effects of social media feedback can last long after crisis, making it imperative that crisis communicators understand motivations behind social media use and what they can best do to manage reputation and information in a media environment that increasingly nullifies the organisations' ability to control media messages.

Findings also demonstrated that Coombs' (2004) claims of the impact of prior reputation and crisis history hold true. Findings clearly demonstrate the strong contrasting differences between the prior reputation and crisis history of Jetstar and Air New Zealand. Coombs (2004) suggests such contrasting differences would impact on how each organisation manages to handle crisis situations. As Jetstar entertained a more negative prior reputation and a history for delays and cancellations, Coombs (2004) would contend that during the same crisis situation, the perception of Jetstar's cancellations and delays held by key publics would be more negative than that of Air New Zealand. This was particularly evident upon closer analysis of the findings. Jetstar was faced with significant levels of complaints via social media, and received very little positive feedback during the crisis situation. Complaints, as discussed in the findings chapter, were

fuelled by emotion and were accompanied with references to the airlines previous history. Comparatively, Air New Zealand, while receiving complaints, also had positive feedback for their handling of the event. This stark difference suggests that the prior reputation of the two airlines coloured how the delays and cancellations were seen, although the event itself was outside the airlines' control. The differences seen also suggest that additionally, social media forces an honest, albeit at times hyper-emotive portrayal of an organisation's handling of an event. This portrayal is public, due to the nature of open forums, making the knowledge of an airline's crisis history and prior reputation more accessible. This suggests that organisations using social media need to be able to improve their services, and enter debate directly in order to change or safeguard their reputation.

Coombs (2004) suggests that the negative prior reputation that Jetstar holds means that they would face greater challenges during crisis situations, as affected publics attribute higher levels of responsibility to Jetstar than what they would to Air New Zealand; therefore these same publics would be more likely to engage in negative word of mouth and air negative emotion. Displaying understanding of the importance of turning around poor prior reputation, Jetstar has launched their recent 'On Time' Campaign in April 2014 (Venuto, 2014). This campaign aimed to highlight Jetstar's punctuality, despite their previous reputation of having multiple delays or cancellations on their services. However, this campaign was met with derision on their Facebook page with comments referring to past, bad experiences and the more general prior reputation:

> *"Punctual, that's a joke, every flight I have been on that was Jetstar was delayed"*
> *"You're joking right? Last week I had my flight cancelled and changed to a later flight for the second week in a row. Failstar more like it!"* (Jetstar NZ, 2014).

Responses such as these help to demonstrate that poor prior reputation is damaging, hard to change and public in today's social media environment. Therefore, prior reputation and crisis history presents an even greater challenge in this new medium. Organisations need to have a greater understanding of their

social media environment and how their posts may be met, and also address issues and complaints that are raised to manage the perception of prior reputation and crisis history. Emotional content and a negative community cannot be ignored even though they present a challenge to organisations such as Jetstar. Ignoring such a community only allows further negative perception and reputation to form as increasingly publics turn to these forums to help form perceptions of the airline. Therefore, it is imperative that organisations in these situations have a communication plan that enables response and engagement with the community, no matter how challenging or negative the community conversation may be.

5.5   Dealing with emotion on social media platforms

Findings demonstrated that emotion had a significant presence in the social media comments posted, fuelling a desire to share experiences with others. Findings also demonstrated that organisations were ill-equipped to deal with emotional postings, often providing replies which inflamed emotions. Literature demonstrated that displays of particular emotions, such as anger, can be detrimental to those trying to manage reputation in crisis (Coombs, 2007; Nabi, 2003; Lerner & Tiedens, 2006). Therefore, it is imperative that organisations understand the motivations behind publics' displays of emotion and how they can work to nullify emotion in particular circumstances. Findings showed that key publics become angry at airlines when they receive poor customer service and lack of communication in crisis situations. Findings also indicated that those who are feeling angry or frustrated are more likely to turn to social media to air these complaints, in an attempt to force action or participate in a 'name and shame' type of warning to fellow travellers. Therefore, airlines are increasingly being faced with emotive content on their social media pages, which could be potentially damaging to their reputation and perception, due to the highly public nature of social media. Furthermore, findings also showed strong levels of community voice, where one complaint sparked dozens more. The desire to participate in a shared experience (Liu et al., 2013) is a strong motivating factor

in social media participation. Crisis communicators are increasingly faced with a platform that may be filled with hostility caused by hyper-emotive postings made by an angered community. Therefore, organisations need to learn how to respond to such a community to nullify their anger. Findings demonstrated the provision of clear, timely and appropriate responses that helped to diffuse emotion-filled situations.

It is also imperative that organisations participate in debates fuelled by emotion, offering their point of view on the situation and providing solutions in a public forum. The ability to participate in such debates enables the organisation to add their voice to the public debate. Findings demonstrate that those that turn to social media to form their perceptions of airlines would consider the airline's responses to crisis situations to gauge how customers may be treated in the future. Social media users included in this study indicate that they are likely to form positive or negative perceptions of airlines based on the airlines' Facebook responses to queries, and by extension, their treatment of consumers. It is important that organisations ensure that they have a voice in these debates, as consumers are increasingly seeking out, and passing judgment, on how an organisation handles complaints and other situations on Facebook. If an organisation does not reply to the queries or complaints present they lose the ability to publically address concerns and to justify or explain actions, which may help to protect and maintain good reputation.

Understanding the power and impact of emotional content is increasingly important to organisations using social media. Emotions recur in many of the Facebook messages to the airlines, and at times can be very negative as consumers post bad experiences and complaints that they have with the airline. The public nature of social media increases the likelihood that these emotive comments will be seen, and may influence the organisations' reputation and public perception. Organisations need to understand how to handle emotion if they wish to maintain positive reputation and perception, as emotions can act as frames (Nabi, 2003; Kim & Cameron, 2011). While crisis communication plans in such areas were demonstrated to be lacking, the potential damaging effect of

emotion to reputation shows the importance of organisations being able to respond to these types of posts. Emotion, and associated perceptions of organisations fuelled by emotion, is increasingly being played out in public forums, demanding organisations to act in a transparent manner in order to maintain reputation. Organisations must actively participate in these forums in a responsible manner as they then gain an opportunity to diffuse emotions and frame the debate.

5.6 Social media framing and shaping the crisis debate and the impact of community voice

Evidence of pack mentality and the presence of strong community voices across both Jetstar's and Air New Zealand's Facebook pages indicate that the importance of the organisation joining this community must not be understated. Traditional theories behind media framing have become increasingly relevant in a social media age, where communities are given the ability to frame the debate about an organisation on a public, easily accessible forum. Crisis communication theory alludes to the significance of the organisations' ability to shape the debate and the power of media frames in conveying messages. Entman (1993) defines traditional news framing as:

> *"To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality*
> *and make them more salient in a communicating text, in*
> *such a way as to promote a particular problem*
> *definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation,*
> *and/or treatment recommendation for the item*
> *described" (p. 52)"*

Entman (1993) suggests that framing, as a concept, "enables a way to describe the power of a communicating text" (p. 51). Frames define problems and diagnose causes by identifying what has created the problem, making moral judgments and suggesting remedies (Entman, 1993). By deciding which information should become salient, or emphasised, a frame favours certain, selected information over other information and enables the understanding, processing, and recalling abilities of the subject (Entman, 1993). Entman (1993) discusses framing from the perspective of a journalist, as a way to understand

how the selection processes that go behind news bulletins result in a bulletin that is designed to elicit certain reactions from an audience. The significance of the news media's ability to frame stories for crisis communicators lies in the key points of selection and the creation of a perceived reality, which may or may not fully reflect the actual reality of the situation.

The definition of framing is to select, and to omit, key points to create a version of reality, a story that fits into the demands of any particular media. Media decide what issues are presented to mass audiences and how they are presented, in turn influencing the way publics perceive any given issue (Kim & Cameron, 2011). The way information is presented influences how a person understands, evaluates and acts towards an event (Nabi, 2003). The selection and presentation processes that occur during the production of news result in the news media playing an influential role in agenda setting of the public debate and shaping public opinion, as the public tend to learn about key issues from media sources (Valentini & Romenti, 2011). Valentini and Romenti (2011) argue that media form may affect framing tactics; however all media can contain frames that may be presented in different ways. Those who create media frames have power and control over a crisis situation; therefore organisations need to put in place message strategies that monitor and manage the frame that are created on social media environments. Organisations must still have understanding of the frames that are forming around their organisation, despite no longer being able to control their media messages, so that they can enter and participate in debate in ways that protect and maintain good reputation.

From a crisis communication perspective, those that create frames have the power to shape the crisis issue, and therefore invoke emotion and influence stakeholder perception of the crisis. Van der Meer and Verhoeven (2013) argue that framing plays a significant role in the evolution of crisis and attributions that stakeholders attach to the crisis and organisation. Social media gives the public the ability to shape crises in their own way - deviating from or aligning with traditional media and organisational frames as they see fit (Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2013). The instantaneous, mass public communication that is

possible through social media allows for public crisis framing based on assumption and rumour in the initial crisis phase (Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2013). Therefore, if an organisation aims to shape and frame the crisis issue they can insert their frames into a social media environment, providing information as opposed to rumour, which could help to minimise negative framing and emotional attribution occurring.

The significance of an organisation's ability to insert their own social media frames is demonstrated upon analysis of the contrasting communities present on Jetstar's and Air New Zealand's Facebook pages. Jetstar's Facebook community is overwhelmingly negative towards the reputation of the company, with many complaints present about customer service, delays, cancellations and flight changes. Many of Jetstar's posts are met with open hostility. At the same time, Jetstar does not participate in the debate, apart from offering standard replies, and often leaves comments unanswered. Jetstar allows their reputation, as portrayed on their Facebook page, to be framed by dissatisfied consumers by not engaging in the debate. By not participating in debate, and not responding to issues presented to the organisation, Jetstar allows a social media community that has a negative perception of their reputation to frame the debate around their reputation, thus allowing this negative community to frame their reputation. This results in Jetstar losing the opportunity to shape their reputation. The hostility present in the Jetstar Facebook community suggests that if an organisation does not attempt to frame debate via social media or traditional media then they risk allowing media publishers to frame the crisis issue, and allowing publics to gain information from these media frames which may negatively impact organisational efforts to protect reputation in crisis. This study indicates the importance that an organisation must place in participating in crisis-handling on social media platforms by responding to queries and by offering their version of events. Such participation enables organisations to continue to play a part in the media frames that shape organisational reputation, therefore making participation an essential part of any crisis communication plan.

5.7   Summary

Social media inevitably demands change in crisis communication practices. Facebook pages of the two airlines foster a community on a global scale that can communicate instantaneously in ways that surpass previous forms of technology. Fundamentally, social media provides an unprecedented media environment, where public voice is more powerful and more prevalent than ever before. Therefore, practices used by organisations to communicate in older environments need to adopt and adjust to account for such large-scale changes in community voice and potentials for interaction between key publics and organisations. In-depth analysis of findings has made it clear that current crisis communication practices, as employed in Facebook, are lacking. Crisis communication plans of both Jetstar and Air New Zealand used traditional crisis communication strategies, receiving mixed and negative responses. Crisis communication plans must now consider the changing nature of social media. Social media demands organisations to honestly and openly communicate with their stakeholders in a dialogic exchange, putting emphasis on listening, responding and implementing changes and feedback. Social media communication is increasingly forcing transparency, and information must be provided instantaneously. Organisations need to be active participants in social media platforms, adding their voice and opinion to a myriad of others if they hope to maintain positive perception and good reputation. Traditional ideas of message control must be forgotten and instead favour must be given to open, honest and transparent communication. While organisations may not be able to control debate on any issue, they can, and must still participate.

Understanding of the role of emotion and the motivations behind social media communities will enable organisations to build crisis communication plans that enable dialogic conversation in a social media environment. Giving those that act as the organisations voice in social media autonomy to respond and provide solutions is paramount, as is addressing the specific nature of every complaint. Analysis has made it abundantly clear that social media demands change in crisis communication practices, as traditional practices fail in the social media

environment. Understanding of these failures and of audience expectations enables crisis communicators to build new strategies that weave old theory with new, enabling effective crisis communication on social media platforms. Only once crisis communication strategies consider social media by prioritising its potential and letting go of traditional notions of control, will crisis communication be truly effective on a social media platform.

6 Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Overview

The analysis of Jetstar's and Air New Zealand's social media crisis communication during a severe weather event clearly indicates that social media platforms demand change to current crisis communication practices. Social media have changed the dynamic between organisations and key publics, opening communication lines and producing a growing expectation that organisations should provide information quickly and clearly. However, organisations have been reluctant or ill-prepared to fully understand and implement the changes in practices that social media developments demand. Organisations need to appreciate the failings of traditional crisis communication strategies in the social media environment. Understanding these failings would allow crisis communication strategies to be redesigned to suit its media application, ensuring organisations can continue to protect and maintain a positive reputation. Key findings help to build the first level of recommendations for these necessary changes, highlighting problems with the current strategies, and challenges presented by the social media environment that need to be addressed. From that point, several key recommendations can be made to the practice of crisis communication in social media. These recommendations include giving autonomy to crisis communicators to engage at a human level with their social media key publics and accepting that social media communication results in organisations losing sole control over their media messages. The importance of providing information, and acting honestly and transparently are discussed, as is the potential to move toward a more dialogic form of communication. Lastly, areas for future research and limitations of the current research are considered. It would be beneficial if the same, or similar studies were carried out across brands and different social media platforms. Real-time monitoring of social media crisis communication would also be beneficial to further test the results and mitigate current limitations of this research.

6.2   Key findings

This study highlights numerous key findings, which can be broken down into five major points. Figure 29 outlines these key findings, the ineffective communication strategies used by the organisations and their consequences, as well as suggests recommendations.

Key Finding	Ineffective Crisis Communication Strategies Used	Consequences of the Strategies Used	Recommendations for Improved Crisis Communication Strategies
1. **Social Media Demands Change**	Maintain information control through repeating standardised replies; avoid engagement	Customers were frustrated and became increasingly upset, angry and vitriolic in their verbal comments which encouraged a collective backlash	Organisations should interact with key publics with empathy, using a human voice. Front-line staff need to be trained rigorously so that they can act with autonomy within organisational values.
2. **Emotion**	Ignore emotive posts by not engaging with challenging content and not responding when situations escalate.	Further heightened tensions between organisation and Facebook online communities	Organisations must respond to all queries and complaints, even if the post is challenging or negative, to avoid negative emotion being able to define organisational perception and reputation.
3. **Prior Reputation and Crisis History**	Avoid participating and responding to feedback about past bad experiences.	Key publics see examples of bad experiences and these begin to define organisational reputation, as there is no voice to counter complaints.	Organisations must participate and engage fully with their key publics, answering all queries, complaints and concerns.
4. **Community Voice**	Responding only to initial post/commenter and not engaging with other issues raised by other members of the community.	This allows the community, not the organisation, to define organisational reputation and public perception.	Organisations must accept that they have lost control of media messages, but still participate in debate to ensure organisational voice is not lost.
5. **Consumer Expectations**	Information provided is slow to be released, conflicting and does not provide solutions or address	Customers become disappointed , feel pushed around and frustrated	Crisis Communicators need to be given training to ensure they can communicate empathetically without

	queries or concerns. Delay giving information when unsure by repeating same messages. Refer those enquiring for more specific information to other sources and contact points of the organisation. Apologise for situation and inconvenience but does little to alleviate situation e.g. does not offer alternative solutions to some pressing problems	with vague, unhelpful and non-committal replies	compromising organisational values. Training also needs to ensure that crisis communicators are given access to information to enable problems to be solved directly on Facebook, and not redirect customers to other channels. Organisations must always be open, honest and transparent with information. Information must be shared as it is available as quickly as possible. Information must be accurate.

FIGURE 29. Summary of Key Findings and Resulting Recommendations.

One of the first key steps to implementing coherent, cohesive social media crisis communication plans is understanding the differences in dynamics and conversation that social media platforms produce. Findings demonstrated that social media presents a myriad of new challenges and opportunities for organisations' crisis communication. These challenges and opportunities must be fully understood before successful crisis communication plans can be implemented in social media environments.

6.2.1 Social media demands change to crisis communication strategies

Figure 29 demonstrates that current crisis communication plans issued by both Jetstar and Air New Zealand were lacking in several areas. Traditional crisis communication tactics were employed, where both organisations attempted to maintain message control and contain the crisis situation by issuing standardised replies and avoiding further engagement. The use of standardised replies did not address specifics of queries or concerns and also did not engage further with their Facebook communities. As Ott (2013) discusses, use of these standardised replies is ineffective for social media crisis communication and should be avoided at all cost. Both organisations employed tactics that promoted an organisational voice, and did not engage with their social media publics beyond a superficial level. They instead relied on the traditional media message models of SCCT and Benoit's Image Restoration Theory, which resulted in evident frustration from those affected. Traditional strategies of apology, justification and defeasibility were all used, and were often met with frustration and anger from customers who felt the organisation's reply was inadequate. These traditional strategies are highly evasive, with the exception of apology, and were seen to show a lack of sincerity and responsibility for the situation. As Figure 29 shows, the use of standardised replies and lack of engagement led to evident anger and frustration being displayed by the organisations' social media publics. The response to the message strategies used indicated that traditional strategies, when employed in a social media environment, could result in further risk and potential damage to reputation. The increased risk to reputation that results when traditional strategies are employed clearly demands change to

current crisis communication strategies used in a social media environment. The failings of traditional strategies can be largely explained by the change to the communication dynamic that the development of social media technologies prompted. Such change has given rise to new challenges for crisis communication as social media promotes fundamental differences in the communication environment, when compared to traditional media.

The uncontrollable nature and publicness of social media is seen as challenges for communicators who work within the platform. These characteristics, and others, were not present on traditional platforms and therefore the strategies developed do not address said challenges. Social media environments provide opportunity for community engagement and open, honest conversations. Key publics that engaged with the studied airlines did so to share their concerns about issues or give feedback. In return these key public expected timely, open and honest communication from organisations. Therefore it is fitting that the organisational conversation on such a platform aims to also be based on tenets of honesty and transparency, which is consistent with Ott's (2013) findings of organisation-public communication on social media platforms. Traditional practices of organisational message control and a singular organisational voice are increasingly outdated. As Figure 29 shows, those communicating on social media on behalf of organisations need to be able to engage with their communities at a deeper level, offering empathy and a human voice, along with immediate and direct solutions to queries and concerns. The change in nature of the platform that crisis communicators now need to use, understandably dictates changing in practices and clear understanding of the platform. The role of communication staff as technicians who push specific messages is no longer relevant here. Organisations need to have skilled communicators who function in an advisory capacity, offering solutions as well as relaying critical information to affected publics.

6.2.2 Consumer expectations for social media communication

Consumers have clear expectations for how organisations should communicate with them in a social media age. Social media demands that organisations should communicate all information, clearly, concisely and in a timely manner. Figure 29 confirms that many of these consumer expectations were born out of communication failures experienced by participations. Organisations were often found to not provide information in a timely, clear or concise manner. These organisations also referred consumers to other information points, instead of addressing queries directly, and offered what were seen as insincere apologies as they did not provide solutions. Consumers expect organisations to be honest and transparent. Queries and complaints should be addressed, and solutions provided. Communication should be provided by airlines across a number of mediums, but consumers should not be redirected to a variety of channels; their problem should be re solved on Facebook, or over the phone, or via email without having to contact multiple people. In a social media age, these consumer demands are not unrealistic and if they are not fulfilled key publics could grow angry at or frustrated with the organisation, potentially damaging reputation. Therefore, it is essential to understand how key publics demands are changing with media developments, and how these demands impact crisis communication strategies.

Figure 29 shows that organisations must be able to communicate with their key publics in their preferred way and manner, in order to enhance perceptions of their capability, thereby maintaining and protecting their reputation. Organisations need to understand the demands of their social media publics and implement the necessary changes in message strategies in order to maintain or protect their reputation. Findings demonstrate a lack of understanding of what the organisation's communities may demand in a crisis situation. The communication plays adopted by both airlines appeared to not account for requests for information and the ability to respond to feedback, as discussed in the anaylsis. The organisations were ill-prepared to handle demands for information via Facebook, and had not developed strategies which gave front-

line communicators autonomy to respond and engage on a human level. The lack of consideration for how social media might change message strategies led to high levels of frustration toward both airlines as they failed to provide information, address specifics, provide solutions and engage in a timely manner. Organisations should actively work to incorporate key publics' expectations for social media communication into their crisis communication plans, to prevent unnecessary public frustration and anger toward their organisation. The importance of engagement with key publics on social media, and not just providing token responses, cannot be understated as social media enables communication channels between organisations and publics to open. Increasingly, organisations need to be seen to be listening and responding to complaints and queries, at all times honest and transparent, and providing all available information.

6.2.3 Prior reputation and crisis history must not be underestimated

Social media can also amplify the impacts of prior reputation and crisis history on current reputation. Coombs (2004) states that prior reputation and crisis history both directly impact the current reputation that an organisation maintains. Social media increases the accessibility that key publics have to information about the organisation, including past bad experiences of other consumers and how the organisations handle other, similar crisis situations. Crisis history and prior reputation can be openly discussed on social media platforms, which are publicly accessible - in turn amplifying the extent and reach of word of mouth. In such an environment, complaints about previous experiences of flight delays, cancellations or poor customer service add to a public record of what is seen as impartial customer reviews. Those involved in this study indicated that social media platforms are key factors for informing their perception of and decisions about airlines that they may be considering flying with. Social media may amplify the impact of prior reputation and crisis history if organisations do not enter the debate and provide their organisational voice and perspective to consumer queries and complaints. As Figure 29 illustrates, organisations did not respond to challenging content, and often only

offered standardised replies to queries and complaints. By doing so, those seeking prior reputation on social media see an inactive organisation who is unwilling to address complaints, or who is solely defined by consumers' negative experiences. Therefore, increasingly organisations are having to consider the impact that past actions may have on current reputation, and how participating in debate about their failings may in fact help to protect organisational reputation.

Jetstar NZ recognised the increased impact that crisis history and prior reputation of flight cancellations and delays had on their reputation, by launching their Ontime Promotion in April 2014. This promotion aimed to show that although the airline may have had a history of delays and cancellations, their current services surpass expectations and they are now recognised as the most punctual airline in the New Zealand market. However, the reaction to this campaign, which included consumers referring back to previous bad experience to disprove the claims, showed the lasting impact of prior reputation and crisis history. Though Jetstar made correct efforts to try to rectify and change their negative prior reputation by providing fact, the community could still challenge their new campaign and cited previous bad experience to do so. In such instances, social media works to enhance and amplify negative prior reputation and crisis history. The community discussion about negative experiences with the airline contrasted with the intended positive impacts of the Ontime campaign, amplifying the impact of prior reputation on current reputation building.

6.2.4 Emotion - understanding and responding to hyper-emotive media platforms

The presence of emotion, and the fact that social media as a community space fosters sharing emotions, is a significant challenge to crisis communication. Findings support claims made in previous literature that social media fosters a shared emotional space, where affected publics are likely to seek out places to vent and share experiences (Liu et al., 2013). It was increasingly clear that those

that felt wronged by either airline sought out social media to share complaints and frustrations and seek remediation. The public nature of social media heightens the challenge presented by key publics that share negative experiences and emotions held towards the organisation, as this information is easily accessible. Emotions shared on social media are at their most intense due to that fact that these platforms can often be accessed instantaneously by people that have been wronged, through smartphones and other internet-accessible devices. The sense of community spirit and shared experiences that social media fosters enhances the motivations to share emotional content. This community spirit enables the community to publicly band together, where others justify initial comments that share frustration and anger by agreeing or sharing similar experiences. The desire to share experiences, vent and participate in the community creates a hyper-emotive platform, where emotion is at the forefront of comments and feedback posted. The publicness and intensity of emotional content makes it increasingly necessary for organisations to understand what fuels the posting of negative emotional content, and how to handle such posts once they have been made. Figure 29 indicates that organisational practices of ignoring emotional, challenging content was largely ineffective. Instead, organisations should aim to supply informative replies that provide solutions, information and, where appropriate, genuine apology. When these alternative communication tactics were employed, albeit rarely, they helped to diffuse the situation, minimising the challenges presented by emotional content. These findings supported the claims of Veil et al (2011), who argued that organisations must enter and participate in social media debate, no matter how challenging the content may be, or risk their reputation becoming defined without any organisational voice. While emotion, and especially negative emotion, presents a heightened challenge to crisis communicators, findings suggest that participation in these challenging discussions would help to mitigate and manage the challenge. Understanding these challenges is essential to organisations crisis management, as they increasingly turn to social media to communicate before, during and after crisis.

6.2.5 Challenges presented by the strength of community voice

Organisations can no longer underestimate the strength of their community's voice, given the publicness and accessible nature of social media platforms. Though closely linked to findings surrounding emotion and the impact that social media has on prior reputation and crisis history, the strength of social media communities cannot be understated. Figure 29 shows that often both Jetstar and Air New Zealand did not address and answer all specific queries and complaints on their Facebook pages. These organisations both chose not to engage further with their social media communities, beyond replying to the initial commenter. Not replying to complaints or queries that were sparked by other members of the community is problematic for those concerned with reputation building and management on social media websites. Findings demonstrated that both communities around the airlines banded together to offer criticism or compliment, depending on the circumstances. Participants indicated that a strong motivating factor behind their social media use was to warn others of misdemeanors and to publicly hold the organisation accountable in a way that forces them to address perceived wrongs.

The strength of social media was often referred as a tool that enabled communities to force action, by participants and in comments discussed in the textual analysis. These comments showed that there was a feeling that negative public social media discussion led to organisational action due to fear that reputation may be negatively impacted otherwise. Therefore, by not replying to complaints made by other community members, organisations allow their reputation and public perception to be defined by a community who aims to hold them accountable, and therefore want to share perceived wrong-doing. Figure 29 suggests that to not participate in any, and all, debate started by the community would allow the community to define the organisation's reputation, which increases danger to maintaining positive perception and reputation. Furthermore, Liu et al's (2013) claims that social media communities foster conversations about shared experiences were evident during the analysis of Jetstar's and Air New Zealand's Facebook pages. There were several examples of

an initial complaint or comment that sparked several others to comment and share similar experiences. Furthermore, organisational posts about sales or other news would spark communities to share bad experiences, effectively warning others not to take advantage of deals posted. This social media environment, where key publics are actively seeking out social media as a type of weapon that can help to address wrongs, presents it own obvious set of challenges for those who aim to manage reputation. Organisations need to ensure that they are equipped to respond to these communities despite these challenges - answering queries, and seeking to provide solutions in order to diffuse the community, as shown in Figure 29. Community voice, and particularly negative community voice, presents a significant challenge for crisis communication practitioners that cannot be ignored. The stark contrast in the communities found on the Jetstar page, which was predominately negative, and the Air New Zealand page, which was predominately positive, highlight this. While the Jetstar Facebook page was often filled with negative criticism, which challenged all efforts to build reputation, the Air New Zealand page was markedly positive, and therefore the visible community was far less challenging to reputation. This project cannot make assumptions about whether or not either airline moderates comments, as this practice was not observed during the data analysis. However, it is possible that Air New Zealand's community appears to be more positive as a result of moderation of unfavourable comments. The triangulated method helps to nullify this limitation as other methods clearly showed that Air New Zealand had a more positive prior reputation than Jetstar. Moderation of comments and content is not the best social media practice, as demonstrated by Ott's (2013) study, which makes the ability to engage with audiences in an effective way even more critical for organisations. Community voice is increasingly public, and more powerful; therefore understanding of the motivating factors behind the community and how to tackle challenging posts is essential for crisis communication.

6.3 Practical recommendations for public relations

This study makes five key recommendations that can be adopted in the field of crisis communication, which are introduced in Figure 29. These key recommendations are built from apparent failures in the crisis communication analysed by both Jetstar and Air New Zealand, and also from expectations highlighted from the social media communities and other research participants. These recommendations highlight the changes that social media demands to traditional crisis communication practices, as well as the necessity behind a clear understanding of the changing dynamics of communication bought on by social media developments.

6.3.1 Information must be clear, concise, accurate and timely

Social media has revolutionised the demands of information flow from organisations. In crisis times, instead of having hours or even days to formulate messages and gain control over a situation before communicating with stakeholders, key publics expect organisations to be providing relevant information over social media channels instantaneously. Figure 29 shows that there is an expectation that organisations should be able to provide information clearly, concisely, accurately and most importantly, in a timely manner. The instantaneous nature of social media has shaped the definition of timely in this context - information is expected to be provided instantly, within minutes of a query being made or where appropriate, as soon as the required information is available. Getting information from another source may frame an organisation negatively. Organisations also no longer have the luxury of referring those seeking information to official announcements coming in the next hours. Instead, organisations must be communicating with their key stakeholders straight away. Information must also be accurate, as well as timely.

Findings show high levels of frustration from slow or inaccurate replies. Those communicating with key publics at the front line now need to be informed.

Traditionally, information flows have stopped at senior levels. However, Evans (2011) attributes the success of EUROCONTROL to broadening these information flows to include those working with social media even if they do not enjoy managerial status. The findings in this project support Evans' (2011) claim that information flow from management to more junior social media staff must be prioritised to avoid slow and inaccurate replies. Crisis communication plans need to give provision for instantaneous replies, with time standards being limited to minutes between replies and provision of information. Organisations need to engage in thorough pre-planning before crisis so there are clear understandings of how the situation will be managed before it happens, enabling quick, clear and accurate responses. Internal communication channels need to be clear, and communicators need to be included in organisational discussion at the highest level to ensure they can provide the most accurate information possible to external, and internal stakeholders. Social media has made it imperative that crisis communicators are able to interact with their key publics in an informative and accurate way, despite the greater demands that such interaction places on crisis communicators' time. Therefore, pre-planning and clear understanding of the rationale behind these demands is critical in a social media age.

6.3.2 The importance of autonomy and human voice

Findings and analysis also strongly indicate that the crisis communication plans adopted for social media platforms did not allow autonomy to those on the front-line of organisational communication. Figure 29 recommends that this autonomy be given to crisis communicators, to enable them to adopt the human voice and levels of empathy necessary for social media communication. The importance of engaging on a human, instead of organisational, level was first discussed in findings and then later developed in analysis. Essentially this voice refers to moving beyond organisational voice and adopting a more conversational, empathetic, essentially human tone that is more fitting for social media communication. The use of standardised replies, the lack of addressing specific information and the formal language used all indicate that those in charge of

managing both Air New Zealand's and Jetstar's Facebook pages during the crisis situation were following strict templates. These templates constrained the ability of the organisation to engage beyond a superficial level with their audiences, as those managing the Facebook page were simply following what were clearly rigid communication guidelines, frequently repeating themselves. The crisis communication issued did not harness or understand the potential of social media communication, due to these rigid restrictions that do not enable organisations to communicate with the necessary empathy and understanding. Evans (2011) demonstrated the importance of human voice in social media crisis communication, as well as the necessity for crisis communicators to be well-informed, well-briefed and to hold autonomy over the communication that they issue. Social media, at its core, is a social platform and as such organisations must communicate in a social way. It is imperative that communication shows the person behind the organisation, displaying empathy and addressing specifics instead of parroting a company line. To be able to communicate at this human level, new to social media, organisations must trust those crisis communicators working on the front-line of reputation management to engage in a less formal manner while still upholding organisational values. Organisations can no longer provider front-line staff with scripts to follow in crisis events. Instead, staff must still be put through rigorous crisis-handling training prior to crisis. Rigorous training must install the importance of impromptu answers that deal specifically with each complaint or query. These impromptu answers must still adhere to organisational values, without following a script and must prioritise honest, transparent and sincere communication with key, affected publics. Official statements and long-winded, formal communication has no place on social media platforms and instead important information must be presented in the accepted language format of the platform - which is informal and community-driven. Autonomy allows crisis communicators to engage at this deeper level with key publics, and would help alleviate frustrations aired whenever communities feel they are simply given 'company lines,' instead of empathetic acknowledgement and real solutions.

6.3.3 Participation is key

Figure 29 also indicates that organisations can no longer ignore social media platforms. Participation in the dialogic approach on these platforms is no longer a choice that organisations make, and is instead a necessity. Findings clearly demonstrate that dangers of not responding to queries and complaints posted on social media pages, with growing frustration and anger at the organisation, are evident when replies were lacking. Furthermore, it is increasingly important that the organisation offers its voice to debates and discussions, whether the community is offering positive or negative feedback, as participants in focus groups and interviews indicated that they are likely to form ideas about organisational reputation from organisational conduct on social media. The value of participation in efforts to protect positive reputation is documented in literature (Veil et al., 2011; Perry et al, 2003). This view is once again clearly depicted in this study. Key publics demand and expect responses and engagement from organisations. Although organisations may be tempted to simply ignore, or delete negative feedback or criticism, to do so would be akin to allowing the community to shape the discussion, and potentially the organisation's reputation. Therefore, organisations must recognise the value of participating on social media platforms, and must ensure that they are well-versed and well-trained to effectively handle, and foster, dialogic communication. To do so, organisations must ensure that communicators are able to genuinely engage and respond effectively to customer queries, in a manner that is informative and provides solutions.

6.3.4 Honesty is the best policy

Social media, as a community-driven, publicly accessible forum, enables public scrutiny of organisational messages in a way that hasn't been seen before on other media platforms. Communities can challenge, support and publicly disagree with organisational messages issued on social media - and lack of information, standardised replies and incorrect information are all contentious to communities that are increasingly seeking fast and accurate information.

Therefore, social media increasingly demands that organisational communication is transparent and honest about any potential issues. Findings clearly demonstrate the anger shown towards the company when social media communities believed they were being lied to, which would undoubtedly be challenging to any organisation trying to maintain positive reputation, as discussed in the analysis. The public nature of social media communication makes it necessary for organisations to face up to such anger; to do this they need to be honest and transparent in their communication at all times - and especially during crisis. As communities increasingly aim to hold organisations accountable for their actions, organisations need to be able to share their reasons for any particular decision and provide as much information as possible to their social media communities. To be anything less than completely honest and transparent on social media platforms opens the organisation up to public criticism, which may have potentially negative ramifications for reputation building.

6.3.5 Accepting loss of control

Organisations that are participating on social media platforms must accept a loss of control over their media messages. Traditional media channels enabled organisations to project their messages to their key publics, in a way that offered little opportunity for feedback of audience reactions. Media messages were crafted by organisations, and then broadcasted on media platforms that gave the gift of time. Traditional platforms, such as television and newspapers had clear deadlines and clear publishing times. The delay in publishing times of these traditional platforms meant that organisations often had hours, and occasionally even a day, before first messages of a crisis event would be broadcast. These traditional platforms provided a much slower timeline for crisis communication, allowing deliberation over content and control over the level of information released. Social media changes this dynamic, and alters the timeline for crisis communication. Organisations must now issue information instantaneously, offering all information to their communities as soon as it comes to hand. Organisations have effectively lost control over the timeline of crisis situations.

They can still craft a message and place it on social media, but they have to do so in a timely and accurate manner. Once a message is posted it is left to the mercy of the community. The community expects transparency, accuracy and speed, and can give public and instantaneous feedback if organisational messages do not meet their expectations. While many communicators see this dynamic as a challenge, the answer is not to treat social media as a platform of one-way communication, reminiscent of old technology. In the same vein, social media cannot be ignored. Organisations increasingly need to participate across social media platforms and to do so effectively they need to accept the loss of control to which they had previously grown accustomed. Communities can, and will, debate organisational messages in increasingly public and accessible forums. Control over media messages, in the traditional sense of the term, is no longer possible; however carefully constructed social media strategies enable organisations to nullify, contain and manage situations. Perhaps the biggest fallacy of organisations in such an environment is to not participate. Findings clearly demonstrate that organisations must participate in social media platforms, responding to all queries and concerns. Fundamentally, social media platforms demand that organisations move beyond the ideas of control and embrace open dialogue with stakeholders if organisations wish to successfully manage reputation across these platforms.

6.4   Limitations

Major limitations of the research are in its sample size and the limitations placed on the research design. The research only considers two airlines operating in one market. It uses a case-study analysis approach that results in the necessity of further research to allow results to be generalised. Limitations within privacy legislation in New Zealand meant that interview subjects could not be contacted at the social media source, as originally intended. Furthermore, the historical nature of the time period presented its own, unique set of challenges, including sourcing accurate samplings that were true accounts of social media conversations and recollections of the event. Despite these limitations the research still enabled significant insight into the use of traditional crisis

communication strategies on Facebook. The research demonstrates the importance of investigation into this area of crisis communication, by showing several weaknesses with current social media crisis communication practices adopted by the airlines in this study. Such weaknesses included the tendency to reply on standardised answers and the ill-prepardness to supply information and engage with social media communities. Despite the limitations, this research serves as a pilot study for further investigations into this important area of crisis communication research.

6.5   Areas for further academic research

This research raises as many questions as it attempts to answer. Inevitably further research into social media crisis communication needs to take place. From this study, the application of the findings should be tested in other countries, and numbers of textual analysis of interview and focus group participants should be increased. This study should also be replicated in other industries, aside from the aviation industry. Replicating this study in other industries would help to ascertain the application of these findings in other areas not studied here. Furthermore, it would be useful if a similar study could be undertaken as a crisis event unfolds. This would ascertain whether the limitation produced by studying a historical event, and historical social media content, discussed in depth in the Methodology section, affected findings in any significant way. Analysing a crisis event as it unfolds would mitigate this limitation, adding strength to any future study. Lastly, crisis events of different severity could be examined to show how social media crisis communication techniques may change depending on the scale of the crisis. This research ultimately opens many avenues for further research and presents a pilot study that can act as a starting point for exploring the concepts raised.

6.6   Summary

Social media is an unprecedented media environment, bringing its own sets of challenges and opportunities to those that work within crisis communication. It is apparent that traditional approaches to crisis communication from previous

media environments cannot be applied directly to a social media environment without changes being made. It is imperative that organisations understand how and why traditional approaches fail in a social media environment. It is also critical that organisations understand the different challenges and opportunities created by social media crisis communication. Crisis communication, as a field, must understand the impact that social media has on current practices, and the different communication dynamics that have emerged as a result of ever-developing social media technologies. Social media, at its core, is community driven. The multitude of social media platforms are built around notions of community spirit, shared experiences and increased accessibility to information instantly. These communities can be emotional, driven by anger or happiness, and they can openly challenge organisations that they believe are not acting in the publics' best interests. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, provide opportunities for dialogic communication between publics and the organisations that serve them; this dialogue is becoming a core expectation of organisational social media involvement.

Social media has changed the dynamics between organisations and their key publics. Organisations can be held accountable in a more public, more powerful way than ever before, and key publics can demand that their feedback be listened to and changes implemented. Social media effectively enables organisations to move towards Grunig's (1985) communication ideal of two-way communication between organisation and key publics. Organisations must change their current communication practices in order to adopt this two-way model. They must accept that they can no longer have control over their messages - but they still must participate in conversation. Organisations must accept that social media communities may challenge their views and their services, and they must consistently respond to queries, concerns and complaints in spite of this. Organisations must also trust their front-line staff to communicate on a human level while still upholding organisational values. Those communicating must be able to engage, show empathy and respond to highly emotional, challenging content. Most importantly, organisations must act and communicate with honesty and transparency. Social media enables key publics

to publically address organisations' shortcomings, to show others how their service or communication lacks and recommend or warn against the organisation. The publicness of word of mouth created by social media has a greater reach than more traditional forms of word of mouth, resulting in a wider influence on organisational perception held by key publics. The best ways for organisations to counter these challenges is to openly and honestly communicate with their publics, tackling each issue in a genuine attempt at establishing understanding. Organisations must be able to explain, justify and promise to improve - and actually improve. To do anything else will cause public anger or frustration with the organisation, which will have a negative bearing on those trying to maintain positive reputation.

Social media platforms are moving organisations towards an environment where two-way communication and dialogic communication are the best way to manage and protect reputation. Organisations need to fully understand and engage with their key publics in order to maintain good reputation, in such an environment. Organisations ultimately need to deliver on promises, offer apology when they have done wrong and constantly offer explanation and provide information. It is at this point that traditional crisis communication strategies still hold a place in a social media environment. The message strategies of apology, justification and explanation have roots in Benoit's (1995) and Coombs' (2007) typologies but these are not to be deployed as standard stock responses to all public queries in a crisis. The rationale for application, and the appropriate use of such messages must consider the needs of the social media environment if they are to be effective in addressing crisis in the context that they are applied to.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Focus group sample questions

FOCUS GROUPS - INDICATIVE QUESTIONS

1. Do you have a preference between Air New Zealand and Jetstar when flying domestically? Why?
2. Do you frequently fly as a mode of transport?
3. What are your general perceptions about Jetstar? Why?
4. What are your general perceptions about Air New Zealand? Why?
5. What do you expect from your airline if you are delayed or have a flight cancellation?
6. Are you a frequent user of social media?
7. Would you comment on business Facebook pages of Air New Zealand and Jetstar? In what situations would you most likely comment on their pages?
8. What would you expect Jestar and Air New Zealand to do if you posted a comment? Do you expect a reply of any kind? Why/Why not?
9. In June last year there was a severe storm that crossed the country, causing flight delays and cancellations. In this instance, what would your reaction be if you were due to fly on Jetstar during this time and your flight was cancelled? Why would you react that way?
10. In the same situation as above, what would your reaction be if you were due to fly with Air New Zealand? If there are differences, why so?
11. How do you feel when you have a flight cancellation or delay?
12. Are there any particular circumstances that you are likely to make you feel or react differently when your flight is cancelled or delayed?
13. If you had an experience where you faced frequent delays with a particular airline for the same or similar reasons what would your reactions be? Would this impact on your decision to fly with the airline again?
14. You mentioned that you have previously experienced, or know of someone that has experienced delays with Air New Zealand. If this happened to you, or someone close to you, again how would you react?
15. You mentioned that you have previously experienced, or know of someone that has experienced delays with Jetstar. If this happened to you, or someone close to you, again how would you react?
16. How would you feel if you frequently experienced delays due to similar circumstances on Jetstar? Do these feelings change if you were experiencing frequent delays on Air New Zealand?
17. Would experiencing frequent delays with either Jetstar or Air New Zealand impact your decision to fly in the future?
18. What is it about flight delays or cancellations that make you upset or angry?
19. Flights are often delayed for a number of reasons: engineering issues, weather events outside the airlines control, or simply because they are

late. Do the circumstances around flight delays change your reaction at all? Why?
20. What forms of communication/media do you use to find out information about Airline Providers? Is the information useful? To what extent do you trust the information?
21. What forms of communication/media do you use to engage with airline providers or other customers?
22. How do you expect airline providers to communicate with you? How do they communicate with you/what can be improved?

Appendix B - Interview sample questions

<u>INTERVIEWS - INDICATIVE QUESTIONS</u>

1. Name etc.
2. What was your experience with the Airline provider during the June 2013 Antarctic weather delays?
3. What was your perception of the Airline provider prior to this incident?
4. What was your perception of the Airline during this incident?
5. What was your perception of the Airline after this incident?
6. Why did you decide to use social media to contact the airline?
7. In what ways did the airline provider keep you up to date with the situation?
8. What ways would you have liked to receive updates?
9. Do you often use social media? If yes, did you follow and interact with your airline provider before you posted on their page? If no, what motivated you to post on their Facebook page after the delay/incident?
10. If you are not a frequent user of social media, what motivated you to use it during the severe weather event?
11. What did you hope to gain or achieve by posting on the Facebook page?
12. What did you actually gain? Were your issues or concerns addressed at all by the airline?
13. Do you think how the airline communicated with you changed what you thought of the airline, before, during or after the incident?
14. What did you think of the replies and responses made by the airline to your Facebook comments? What else would you have liked to seen in their responses?
15. What perception of the airline were you left with after your social media conversation (or lack thereof)? Was this any different to your perception of the airline before the delays/cancellations? If so, why?
16. What were you feeling when you were delayed/had your flight cancelled?
17. How did you react once you found out that you were delayed or cancelled?
18. What options were given to you by the airline because of the delay or cancellation? What did you think of these options, and how did you respond to them?

Appendix C - Focus group initial contact

Focus Group Initial Contact Flyer

My name is Tracey Jury and I am a Masters student at Auckland University of Technology.

I am currently working on a thesis that focused on airlines' use of social media in New Zealand. As part of this research I will be holding 2-3 focus groups, with a total of 15 participants across the groups, where participants will be asked to share opinions and viewpoints about Jetstar and Air New Zealand. Focus Groups should last no longer than 90 minutes.

If you would like to be involved in a focus group, or would like more information, please email me at tracey.ann.jury@gmail.com

Yours Sincerely,

Tracey Jury

Appendix D - Focus group information sheet

Participant Information Sheet Focus Groups

Date Information Sheet Produced:
31 January 2014

Project Title
A Crisis of Reputation in the Social Media Environment. A comparative analysis of the crisis communication strategies employed by Jetstar and Air New Zealand in a severe weather event.

An Invitation

Hi, I am Tracey Jury, and am currently studying towards a Masters of Communication Studies at the Auckland University of Technology. My thesis is focused on analysing the social media use of Jetstar and Air New Zealand in severe weather events to ascertain the impact that the communication issued by the airlines have on their reputations. As part of this research, I will undertake a series of focus groups to gain insight into perceptions that the general public hold about the two airlines. This information will then be used to contribute towards my Thesis that will be produced to obtain a Masters of Communication Studies.

I am now currently looking for participants for these focus groups. As a participant you would be invited to attend a focus group, held at a central and convenient venue that would last for no more than an hour and a half. During the focus group, you would be expected to answer questions and have a discussion with the other participants. The focus group will be lead by me, the researcher. Participation in such a project is voluntary and participants can withdraw their data at any time up until the completion of data collection.

What is the purpose of this research?

This research is being conducted as the required course work for my Masters of Communication Studies. While the research is primarily being conducted to be used in my thesis for my Masters degree, there is also a possibility that it will be used as research material for an academic journal paper.

This research aims to investigate social media and crisis communication, and more specifically, the presence of emotional content on social media forums during a crisis event. Focus Group material will be analysed, by myself, for recurrent themes about perception of the studied airlines, organisations' crisis responses, social media use and airline reputation.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You, and other participants, were identified through the researcher's extended networks. You are invited to take part in this research to ensure that a wide variety of people are talked to so that I can gain an understanding of general public thought and opinion toward the two airlines being investigated.

Unfortunately, if you work for, or if your spouse or partner works for either Air New Zealand or Jetstar you will not be able to take part in this project.

What will happen in this research?

In this research you will be required to take part in a focus group that will last no more than an hour. During this time I will ask general questions about perception of both airlines' brands, their actions in crisis situations analysed and emotion held towards the airlines. You will be expected to engage in the discussion, led by myself, but will have the opportunity to abstain from answering questions that you do not wish to answer for whatever reason. Once the Focus Groups are over I will transcribe and collate the findings, using them to give further analysis to the final project.

What are the discomforts and risks?
It is not likely that you will face many discomforts and risks during this project. You may feel slightly uncomfortable to begin with sharing your opinions in a group; however the groups will be kept small and are completely confidential. How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

I will manage discomfort by facilitating discussion and making sure all participants get the chance to share their thoughts and opinions without risk of judgement or repercussions.

What are the benefits?

This project is my primary piece of work to gain a Masters of Communication Studies at Auckland University of Technology. Therefore, I am benefited by your participation to gain vital understanding into perception of brands for my thesis. For yourself, the benefits are a chance to air views and opinions about both airlines in New Zealand.

How will my privacy be protected?

Confidentiality is granted to all participants, and you will not be named in any identifying way in the final project. Documents that contain identification will be securely kept at AUT and on an encrypted hard drive. Participants will also be asked to not discuss the focus groups, and most particularly the view points of others participating in the focus groups.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

The participant will need to give approximately one hour of their time. There also may be minor travel costs to the venue, which is predicted to be at AUT.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

If you would like to be involved in this project please contact the researcher at tracey.ann.jury@gmail.com before the 30th March 2014. Focus Groups will then be arranged and take place no later than the 20th April 2014.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Consent Forms will need to be filled out. Please email me to gain a consent form, and then either send it back or bring a signed copy along to the Focus Group.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

You will receive a brief one-page document about major findings of the focus group. These will be distributed via email to all participants.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, *Khairiah Rahman, krahman@aut.ac.nz, 9219999 ext 6223*.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, Kate O'Connor, *ethics@aut.ac.nz* , 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?
Researcher Contact Details:
Tracey Jury
Email: *tracey.ann.jury@gmail.com*

Project Supervisor Contact Details:
Khairiah Rahman
Email: khairiah.rahman@aut.ac.nz

Appendix E - Focus group consent form

Consent Form

Project title: **A Crisis of Reputation in the Social Media Environment: A comparative analysis of crisis communication strategies employed by Jetstar and Air New Zealand in a severe weather event.**
Project Supervisor: **Khairiah Rahman**

Researcher: **Tracey Jury**

○ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 31 January 2014.

○ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

○ I understand that identity of my fellow participants and our discussions in the focus group is confidential to the group and I agree to keep this information confidential.

○ I understand that notes will be taken during the focus group and that it will also be audio-taped and transcribed.

○ I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.

○ If I withdraw, I understand that while it may not be possible to destroy all records of the focus group discussion of which I was part, the relevant information about myself including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will not be used.

○ I agree to take part in this research.

○ I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one):
Yes○ No○

Participant's signature:
………………………………………………………………………………………………

Participant's name:
………………………………………………………………………………………………

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):
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………………………………………………………………………………………………
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Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 6 March 2014 AUTEC Reference number 14/35
Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix F - Interview initial contact email

Interview Initial Contact Email

Dear (Name)

My name is Tracey Jury and I am a Masters student at Auckland University of Technology. As part of my studies I am researching airlines use of social media in New Zealand.

As part of my research I aim to interview affected travellers about their experience with (Jetstar/Air New Zealand) during the 2013 June Antarctic Storm (29th - 23rd June 2013).

I am contacting you as you were delayed in these storms and therefore may like to participate in an interview as part of this research.

These interviews should take no longer than an hour, and if you do not live locally in Auckland the interviews can be conducted via email/Skype.

If you would like to be involved in this project, or would like further information, please email me at tracey.ann.jury@gmail.com with your contact details.

Thank you for your time.

Yours Sincerely,

Tracey Jury

Participant Information Sheet Interviews

Date Information Sheet Produced:
31 January 2014

Project Title

A Crisis of Reputation in the Social Media Environment. A comparative analysis of the crisis communication strategies employed by Jetstar and Air New Zealand in a severe weather event.

An Invitation

Hi, I am Tracey Jury, and am currently studying towards a Masters of Communication Studies at the Auckland University of Technology. My thesis is focused on analysing the social media use of Jetstar and Air New Zealand in severe weather events to ascertain the impact that the communication issued by the airlines have on their reputations. As part of this research, I will undertake a series of interviews of those passengers affected by the major weather events that I have chosen to study: the 2013 June Antarctic Storms. This information will then be used, alongside other interviews, to contribute towards my Thesis that will be produced to obtain a Masters of Communication Studies.

I am now currently looking for participants for these interviews. As a participant you would be expected to attend an interview, held at a central and convenient venue that would last for no more than an hour. During the interview you would be invited to discuss your experiences with the airline, weather delays and, if applicable, social media use.

Participation in such a project is voluntary and participants can withdraw their data at any time up until the completion of data collection.

What is the purpose of this research?

This research is being conducted as the required course work for my Masters of Communication Studies. While the research is primarily being conducted to be used in my thesis for my Masters degree, there is also a possibility that it will be used as research material for a academic journal paper.

This research aims to investigate social media and crisis communication, and more specifically, the presence of emotional content on social media forums

during a crisis event. Interview material will be analysed by myself, for recurrent themes about perception of the studied airlines, organisations' crisis responses, social media use and airline reputation.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You were identified via a call to participate, which was extended to the researchers' extended networks. You are being asked to participate to give unique insight into how affected travellers view current management of crisis situations and the impact that the organisations' communication has on future perception of the organisation and decisions to travel.

Unfortunately, if you work for, or if your spouse or partner works for either Air New Zealand or Jetstar you will not be able to take part in this project.

What will happen in this research?

In this research you will be required to take part in a interview that will last no more than an hour. During this time I will ask questions about your experiences during the severe weather event, your perception of how the event was handled, and general views on social media use. You will have the opportunity to abstain from answering questions that you do not wish to answer for whatever reason. Once the Interviews are over I will transcribe and collate the findings, using them to give further analysis to the final project.

What are the discomforts and risks?

It is not likely that you will face many discomforts and risks during this project. You may feel slightly uncomfortable with sharing your opinions with myself, the researcher; however everything you say will remain completely confidential.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

I will manage discomfort and making sure the participant is at ease, and is aware of their right to not answer questions that they are not comfortable with.

What are the benefits?

This project is my primary piece of work to gain a Masters of Communication Studies at Auckland University of Technology. Therefore, I am benefited by your participation to gain vital understanding into perception of brands for my thesis.

For yourself, the benefits are a chance to air views and opinions about both airlines in New Zealand.

How will my privacy be protected?

Confidentiality is granted to all participants, and you will not be named in any identifying way in the final project. Documents that contain identification will be securely kept at AUT and on an encrypted hard drive.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

The participant will need to give approximately one hour of their time. If you are based in Auckland it is anticipated that the interview will be held at AUT, City Campus. If not, the interview will be held over Skype or Email.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

If you would like to be involved in this project please contact the researcher at tracey.ann.jury@gmail.com before the 30th March 2014. Interviews will then be arranged and take place no later than the 20th April 2014.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Consent Forms will need to be filled out. Please email me to gain a consent form, and then either send it back or bring a signed copy along to the Interview.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

You will receive a brief one-page document about major findings of the interview processes. These will be distributed via email to all participants.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, *Khairiah Rahman, khairiah.rahman@aut.ac.nz.*, 9219999 ext 6223

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, Kate O'Connor, *ethics@aut.ac.nz* , 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Researcher Contact Details:
Tracey Jury
Email: tracey.ann.jury@gmail.com
Project Supervisor Contact Details:
Khairiah Rahman
Email: khairiah.rahman@aut.ac.nz

Appendix H - Interview consent form

Consent Form

AUT
UNIVERSITY
TE WĀNANGA ARONUI O TAMAKI MAKAU RAU

Project title: A Crisis of Reputation in the Social Media Environment: A comparative analysis of crisis communication strategies employed by Jetstar and Air New Zealand in a severe weather event.

Project Supervisor: **Khairiah Rahman**

Researcher: **Tracey Jury**

○   I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 31 January 2014

○   I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

○   I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.

○   I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.

○   If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.

○   I agree to take part in this research.

○   I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): Yes○ No○

Participant's signature:
        …………………………………………...………………………………………………….
Participant's name:
        …………………………………………………………………………………………….
Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):
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Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 6 March 2014 AUTEC Reference number 14/35
Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix I - Coding Scheme

Name	Description
Attributions of Responsibility	Perceived level of responsibility attributed to the organisation for the crisis as determined by the public/key stakeholders
Air New Zealand	For Air New Zealand
Jetstar	For Jetstar
Bad Customer Service	Comments which mention, or allude to, bad customer service which could have an impact on reputation
Bad Experiences	Examples of bad experiences as defined by interviewees
Consumer's Communication Expectations	Examples of how consumers expect the airlines to communicate with them in times of crisis.
Crisis Communication Strategies	Evidence of the use of communication strategies from either Benoit's (1995) Image Restoration Theory, Coombs (2007) SCCT or Liu et al (2011) SMCC.
Image Restoration Theory	
Corective Action	Addresses the source of the crisis by promising to make future changes to prevent reoccurrences or promising to restore state of affairs of that organisation to those of before the crisis.
Denial	Denying the act occurred or the organisation was responsible for the act.
Shifting Blame	Absolving themselves by providing statements that prove someone else committed the act.
Evading Responsibility	Steps that avoid attributions of high levels of responsibility
Defeasibility	Conveying that the organisation lacked control over or information about important contributing factors to the crisis situation
Excuses Based on Accident	Attempts to prove that the organisation could not be reasonably expected to have control over the crisis.
Justification	Accepting that the act occurred and asking publics not to hold the organisation solely accountable as their actions that caused the crisis were sound.
Provacation	The action was in response to another, more offensive action
Mortification	Admits responsibility and seeks forgiveness
Reducing Offensiveness	If an organisation cannot deny that the act occurred and techniques to evade responsibility are ineffective, then the offensiveness of the action must be reduced. Focused on reducing negative impact by increasing esteem of the organisation or reducing ill-feeling.
Bolstering	Reminds audience of past positive actions and attributes.
Compensation	Offering of money, or other items of value, to victims to offset impact of event.
Differentiation	Creating a basis for comparison to show similar, but worse, transgressions by other organisations
Minimisation	The negative act isn't as bad as it first appeared.
Transcedence	Places the action in a different context and may attempt to damage the reputation of the source of

	negative information.
Instructing Information	Providing necessary information to stakeholders so that they might process the crisis situation
SCCT	Coomb's (2007) SCCT is the second method of traditional crisis communication that is explored in this project.
Primary Strategies	Initial strategies for initial crisis response
Deny Strategies	Strategies used to deny the crisis
Attack Accuser	Confront those that are claiming wrong-doing
Denial	Claiming there is no crisis.
Scapegoat	Blames a person or group outside the organisation for the crisis
Diminish Strategies	Strategies used to diminish the significance/impact of the crisis
Excuse	Claim the organisation did not intend to cause harm or events that caused crisis were beyond organisations control
Justification	Minimises the perceived damage by explaining the crisis and the damage caused by the crisis.
Rebuild Strategies	Strategies used to rebuild reputation
Apology	Taking full responsibility for the crisis and seeks forgiveness.
Compensation	Offering gifts to affected parties
Secondary Strategies	Aim to bolster reputation once crisis is over.
Ingratiation	Praises stakeholders
Reminding of Past Good	Reminds stakeholders of past good deeds to rebuild positive feeling
Victamage	Shows organisation as a victim of the crisis
Crisis History	Evidence of similar crises/a history of crisis events
Air New Zealand	For Air New Zealand
Jetstar	For Jetstar
Emotion	Literature suggests that emotions play a strong motivating factor in social media participation, and can be particular challenge to deal with in a crisis situation. Emotional content is examined to understand its prevalence and see what role it plays in crisis sitations
Anger	Anger is a common emotion felt when we believed we have been wronged. Can include annoyance, displeasure or hostility
Disappointed	feeling sad, unhappy etc because the experience wasn't as good as expected.
Frustrated	Related to anger and disappointment, and is often experienced when the individual has no ability to enact change on something that is causing that individual adverse affects.
Satisified	Feeling pleased or content
Good Customer Service	Examples of good customer service, as seen by consumers/air travellers.
Good Experiences	Examples of "good experiences" as defined by consumers.
Great Quotes	Quotes that show a point,that can be used later in the research process.
Lack of Communication	Comments which show a frustration etc. at an evident lack of communication about flight updates
National Carrier	Mention of Air New Zealand being a national

	carrier - to see whether the concept of AirNZ as our national airline impacts perception of the airline
Prior Reputation	How the airline was perceived before the crisis events
Air New Zealand	For Air New Zealand
Jetstar	For Jetstar
Reasons for Social Media Use	Reasons why people commented on social media.
Reputation After Crisis	Evidence of perceptions of Jetstar after the crisis event
Response Strategies - Other	Response Strategies used that don't pertain to a crisis event, but are still relevant for their to understand general practice
Storm Queries and Replies	