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SCRUTINY ON THE BOUNTY:
FROM CRISIS COMMUNICATION TO CRISIS CONVERSATION

A Dissertation in
Information Sciences and Technology

by
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ABSTRACT

Few crisis communication theories have been studied in the last decade with as much rigor as Situational Crisis Communication Theory. With its assertion as a predictive, prescriptive, and evidence-based approach to aid crisis communication managers and professionals, numerous studies have tested facets of this theory with varying degrees of success. However, as crisis communication activity increasingly involves online communication, and social media in particular, new avenues of exploration are opened to examine this theory further as new questions come to light. Such as: what impact does the technology of social media have on the practice of crisis communication? How does the prescriptive format of this theory fit the realities of small business and organizations? As social media invites internal stakeholders and fans into open conversation with organizations, and as fans take it upon themselves to speak in defense of organizations during a crisis event, what is the impetus for this behavior and is there a way to capture and quantify this behavior as it manifests online? Do the older theories of crisis communication have utility when involved stakeholders are increasingly more conversant?

The sinking of the tallship the HMS Bounty and the use of the organization’s Facebook fan page for the purposes of crisis communication sets the context for this research. As the singular point of communication from the organization to the public, the case is examined from the perspectives of the parties of interest using Situated Crisis Communication Theory and Halo Effect as a guide. A mixed method was used for discovery, triangulation, and cross-validation of analysis. Data was collected from the organization’s Facebook status updates and corresponding comments before, during, and after the sinking and assessed each quantitatively and qualitatively. Further, online conversations regarding the event in various forums and community pages were analyzed as well. Lastly, interviews were performed with persons from various stakeholder
groups involved on the online conversations and were reviewed for clarification of events and more in-depth analysis.

Key findings of this research identified a disparity between the applicability of SCCT and the realities of small businesses especially fan-based organizations, that technology has the potential to exacerbate secondary crises, and that there may be a predictive quality of fans exhibiting halo effect behavior. Implications of this research include a more in-depth understanding of technology mediated crisis communication and organizational practices by which to reconsider existing theories as well as design implications for Facebook.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................... viii

LIST OF TABLES ............................................................................................................. x

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................................................. xi

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................... 1

1.1 Social Media and Professional Communication ................................................. 1
1.2 Social Media and Organizational Crisis Communication............................... 3
1.3 Small Business and Facebook ........................................................................... 5
1.4 Online Fandom ..................................................................................................... 6
1.5 Crises and Small Business .................................................................................. 8
1.6 Structure and Overview ...................................................................................... 10

Chapter 2 BACKGROUND ............................................................................................ 12

2.1 Hurricane Sandy .................................................................................................. 12
2.2 The HMS Bounty .................................................................................................. 13
2.3 The Bounty Organization Facebook page ........................................................... 17
2.4 Investigative Hearings ......................................................................................... 21

Chapter 3 LITERATURE REVIEW .............................................................................. 23

3.1 Crisis ....................................................................................................................... 23
3.2 Stages of a Crisis: The Crisis Cycle .................................................................... 26
3.3 Organizational Crisis Communication ............................................................... 29
3.3.1 Theory ............................................................................................................... 30
3.4 Theoretical Approach ......................................................................................... 32
3.4.1 Situational Crisis Communication Theory ..................................................... 32
4.1.1 Examining SCCT .............................................................................................. 37
3.5 Halo Effect ............................................................................................................ 40
4.2.1 Operationalizing Halo Effect ....................................................................... 42
3.6 Information Gaps and Research Questions ......................................................... 43

Chapter 4 DATA AND METHODS ............................................................................ 48

4.1 Case Study ............................................................................................................ 48
4.1.1 Data Collection ................................................................................................ 50
4.1.2 Method: Content Analysis ............................................................................. 51
4.1.3 Method: Interviews ......................................................................................... 53
4.1.6 Reliability ........................................................................................................ 59
4.1.7 Validity ............................................................................................................ 59

Chapter 5 ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS .................................................................... 61
5.1 RQ1 – What crisis response strategies are present in the BLLC Facebook data? ..... 61
5.2 RQ2 – What was the most dominant or frequently used response? ......................... 64
5.3 RQ3 – How did the online environment affect crisis communication for BLLC? .... 68
5.4 RQ4 – How did the online environment of BLLC’s crisis communication affect
reception by various stakeholders? .............................................................................. 75
6.1 Limitations of Small Organizations ....................................................................... 97
6.2 Addressing Multiple Stakeholders ......................................................................... 99
6.3 The Impacts of Technology .................................................................................. 102
6.4 Halo Effect as an Impetus to Act .......................................................................... 107
6.5 Situational Crisis Communication Theory’s Lack of Fit ....................................... 110
6.6 Summary .............................................................................................................. 115

Chapter 7  CONCLUSION ......................................................................................... 117

7.1 Contributions ......................................................................................................... 117
7.1.1 Contribution: Communication Studies ............................................................... 117
7.1.2 Contribution: Methods .................................................................................... 118
7.1.3 Business Studies ............................................................................................. 118
7.2 Implications ............................................................................................................ 118
7.2.1 Implications for Mixed-Methods Research in Social Media ............................ 119
7.2.2 Implications for Online Crisis Communication ............................................... 119
7.2.3 Implications for Online Fandom .................................................................... 120
7.2.4 Implications for Business Studies ................................................................ 120
7.2.5 Implications for Small and Businesses .............................................................. 120
7.2.6 Implications for the Tallship Industry ............................................................. 121
7.2.7 Implications for Crisis Response ................................................................. 122
7.2.8 Implications for Facebook ............................................................................ 122
7.3 Future Research ................................................................................................... 123
7.4 Limitations ............................................................................................................ 124

REFERENCES ............................................................................................................. 126
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Weather map showing the converging weather fronts in Hurricane Sandy..................12
Figure 2: The HMS Bounty.........................................................................................14
Figure 3: The HMS Bounty sinking off Cape Hatteras, NC .........................................16
Figure 4: The number of page "likes" on the BLLC Facebook page.................................18
Figure 5: Surviving crewmembers in a life raft prior to rescue ........................................20
Figure 6: The BLLC website explaining denial service ..................................................21
Figure 7: BLLC first Facebook status update on October 27, 2012 ..............................62
Figure 8: Time series analysis of Halo, Denial, Diminish, and Mixed clusters ..............66
Figure 9: Regression analysis of Halo and Diminish clusters ........................................67
Figure 10: Regression analysis of Halo and Denial clusters ...........................................67
Figure 11: Fans expressing concern in the comments on October 26, 2012 ....................70
Figure 12: Explanation of website issues posted on BLLC Facebook page .................71
Figure 13: BLLC Facebook status update prior to attempts to turn off comments .........72
Figure 14: Surviving crewmember expresses frustration on personal Facebook page .......74
Figure 15: Conversation of Bounty Crewmember page during investigative hearings ....74
Figure 16: Otto pens open letter to the Bounty captain .................................................78
Figure 17: JackTar Private Mariner group discussion ....................................................79
Figure 18: cCaptain forum members criticize BLLC’s website problems .......................82
Figure 19: gCaptain forum members criticize BLLC’s website issues .............................82
Figure 20: JackTar Private mariner group criticize defenders of the Bounty ................83
Figure 21: Picture of Bounty's engine room posted on Woodenboat.com .......................87
Figure 22: Woodenboat.com forum members lost visible problems...............................87
Figure 23: Variables unaddressed by SCCT .........................................................111
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Review of Crisis Lifecycle research 1976-2013...............................................................27
Table 2: SCCT matching process (Coombs & Holladay, 2002).........................................................34
Table 3: SCCT response strategies (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). .....................................................36
Table 4: Comparison of SCCT social media case studies. .................................................................49
Table 5: Halo effect and SCCT coding examples..............................................................................53
Table 6: Halo and SCCT cluster strategy frequencies. ......................................................................63
Table 7: Frequency of message strategies .........................................................................................64
Table 8: Stakeholder groups and their descriptions. ........................................................................75
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

On October 29, 2012, The HMS Bounty, a movie replica of the historic British naval ship made famous by the mutiny of its crew, sank in thirteen thousand feet of water 90 miles off the coast of North Carolina. Despite numerous warnings of an impending hurricane, the vessel left the safe harbor of New London, Connecticut on October 25, eventually colliding with Hurricane Sandy, the largest hurricane ever recorded. Proceeding, during, and following the crisis, the business managing the ship, HMS Bounty LLC, posted regular status updates on the ship’s Facebook fan page. During this time, the number of fans of the page increased dramatically and comments were posted by the thousands. In the incessant and instantaneous global news cycle of the Internet, the organization found the Facebook page becoming part of the crisis narrative in the court of public opinion, and eventually, the federal authorities charged with investigating the sinking entered the page into evidence during investigative hearings. Since the sinking of the Bounty, many operators in the tallship industry have begin to question or rethink their use of social media, and Facebook in particular, and how the medium helped facilitate a secondary disaster for the organization.

1.1 Social Media and Professional Communication

Social media has had a significant effect on professional communication (Landua, 2011). Instead of issuing one-way communication in the form of press releases, news articles, radio, or television, companies now find themselves receiving rapid response from the public and having to engage in ever more dialogue with stakeholders (W. Coombs & Holladay, 2012). With its
ubiquitousness, immediacy and availability (Landua, 2011), posting information on social media can have an instantaneous and far-reaching impact. Gonzalez–Herror states (2012), “Posting a tweet on Twitter is analogous to having a press conference with the world.” Of the current social media platforms available, the two most popular for business are Twitter and Facebook (O’Malley, 2013).

While Twitter is preferred for communication for direct brand information by businesses to consumers (O’Malley, 2013), Facebook is beginning to compete with traditional websites for business information and communication. With over 1.2 billion Facebook users world-wide (Raine, 2011; “Social Networking Statistics | Statistic Brain,” 2012) and the ability to cross-platform different types of the social media with each other, many organizations have found that traditional website traffic for marketing purposes is down by more than 70% as Facebook absorbs that business function (Bullas, 2011). Facebook also has a broader reach than Twitter with more overall users, and where Twitter excels at “pushing” information to its audience, Facebook is better equipped to “pull” in its audience with a more traditional web-like experience (Landua, 2011).

While most Fortune 500 companies have failed to use this medium as anything more than marketing outreach (Knapp, 2012) many organizations and small enterprises are now moving towards a phenomenon called “F-Commerce” (Zimmerman, 2012), where instead of maintaining a traditional website for their organization for in-depth business information and ecommerce while reserving social media for marketing and outreach, some organizations are now moving towards using Facebook as a total provider for all their online needs (Zimmerman, 2012).

This movement away from traditional websites and moving towards Facebook may be a progressive and low-cost way of handling business, but using Facebook to provide an organization’s entire digital business needs is not with out risk. First, Facebook is well known for changing the appearance and functionality of a page with limited to no warning, and always
without a business’s consent (Baer, 2012), couple this with the fact that a business is forced to accommodate Facebook’s design concepts to coincide with a company’s own branding while there is continuing debate as to whether or not Facebook owns all of that company’s digital assets used on Facebook (Zimmerman, 2012). While changing the way a function is performed or the way the Facebook page is administered under normal circumstances, during a time of high stress, such changes can come with a much bigger price than the usual transaction cost of technology change. This would lead to the question as to whether businesses are ceding too much to Facebook over their assets, visual presentation, and control of their online presence.

1.2 Social Media and Organizational Crisis Communication

Hardly a week goes by these days when the news does not feature the faux pas of some company where either offline or online events draw the ire of public opinion in social media. To quickly and effectively address the issue, many companies take to Twitter or Facebook and attempt communicate with the public to diffuse the situation. Careful consideration of the nature of the crisis and a sound communication strategy to the public is required to navigate the event (Schultz, Utz, & Göritz, 2010), and needless to say, some companies perform this task better than others.

An example of handling a crisis well can be seen in the case of fashion house DKNY, when in 2013, a New York-based photographer was informed by a friend traveling in Thailand that a DKNY retail store in Bangkok had hung copies of work without permission or compensation (Cohen, 2013). The photographer took to Facebook and started and online campaign asking that the company make a large donation to a local YMCA (Stanton, 2013). The Facebook status update was liked 34 thousand times, and garnered 4 thousand comments, and DKNY responded quickly via Facebook explaining the circumstances leading to the error,
apologizing to the photographer, and making a donation to the YMCA as the photographer requested (Stanton, 2013). DKNY was noted in the media for it swift and efficient response via social media to diffuse the situation (Cohen, 2013).

Conversely, there are examples of companies handling a crisis poorly. In 2013, when an Applebee’s customer left a meager tip and an insulting comment on a waitress’s receipt, a friend of the waitress took to Reddit, posting a copy of the receipt where thousands of online comments were posted in support of the waitress. The customer came forward in a television newscast and apologized to the server. Applebee’s in turn fired the waitress for violating customer privacy, and defended their actions on their Facebook page (Thompson, 2013). The result was a large online protest of the restaurant with organized campaigns advocating boycott until the waitress was rehired. Instead of responding to the criticism and reconsidering their strategy, Applebee’s persisted in one communication mishap after another until a media frenzy ensued which then lasted for weeks in both the news and social media (Stollar, 2013).

These are only but a few examples of businesses in crisis, and large corporations at that, who experience a crisis that originates offline and then requires handling online. Numerous websites and publications now publish annual articles detailing the “social media fails” of a given year (Feloni, 2013; Fiegerman, 2012; “Marketing’s Biggest Social-Media Blunders of 2011,” 2011). The numbers of these cases are ever increasing as business shifts more activities into social media realm.

However, these reported cases often involve large corporations with the financial reserves, human capital, and technological resources to handle the event. While there are lessons to be learned from these incidents as case studies, they rarely reflect the large majority businesses in the United States, which are mostly small, with limited funds, limited staff with occasionally less than optimal skills, and less technology available to them (Staff, 2013).
1.3 Small Business and Facebook

Organizations with already limited resources, such as small businesses, hardly have tools, persons, or money to spare during a crisis event (Herbane, 2010). However, the term “small business”, as defined by the United States Small Business Administration, can vary depending both on the number of employees which can be as little as 15 persons depending on industry sector, to as many as 1,500 employees, and revenues ranging as high as $32 million annually (Small Business Size Standards, 2014).

Small businesses and organizations are particularly at risk during a crisis due to their inherently fragile nature in the form of a lack economic security, and limited human and technology resources (Herbane, 2010). In fact, most small business, that are either for profit or non profit, do not survive a crisis event, unlike larger businesses and corporations (Runyan, 2006). After the world economic crisis of 2007, larger businesses and organizations were largely recovered by 2010, only in 2014 could small businesses and nonprofits say the same (Mutikani, 2014). During a time of “too big to fail” and large corporate bailouts, the country lost 170,000 small businesses in a two-year period (Thomas, 2012). With small businesses making up 97% of all employers in the United States, this is a tremendous economic exposure not only for the organization at risk during a crisis of any nature, but the employees who may lose their employment should the organization fail to survive (Frequently Asked Questions About Small Business, 2012).

This period of economic crisis served as a boon to Facebook. While technologically removing the middle-man, namely a webmaster in charge of updating and managing online content, the cost of advertising budgets for small businesses and nonprofits were greatly reduced by this free and easy to use technology (De Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012). The adoption rate of Facebook by these entities peaked dramatically with Facebook now serving of 30 million small
business and organizations (Ha, 2014), and diverting consumer traffic away from traditional websites (Neff, 2010). Experts predict that Facebook may soon replace the traditional websites for many small businesses and organizations (Hendricks, 2014), as Facebook absorbs traffic rather than direct traffic to websites. As of 2011, 68% of Fortune 100 companies reported that traditional web traffic down on their company site but that Facebook page traffic was growing exponentially (Bullas, 2011). Where websites served as the main channel for online company communications with social media sites serving as supplementary communication, social media has now become the primary communication tool from companies to the public. However, while social media has removed the proverbial gatekeeper, technologically speaking, the removal of this barrier goes both ways as it allows fans to interact more fully online.

1.4 Online Fandom

Companies seeking to create a Facebook page most commonly use a “fan” page, or what is now referred to as an “official page”, for their business (“Page Basics,” 2014). Facebook pages have been useful to companies seeking to increase engagement between companies and “fans” of their brand, as fans can easily integrate and co-create content for brands that is spread across personal channels thus contributing greatly to word-of-mouth marketing (Kozinets, 2010).

For the purpose of this study, the definition of a fan according to Thorne and Bruner (2006) is a person with “an overwhelming liking or interest in a particular person, group, trend, artwork, or idea. Behavior is typically viewed by others as unusual or unconventional but does not violate prevailing social norms.” People become fans where they have a positive interaction and develop an emotional attachment to sport teams, celebrities, books, or commercial products, and develop a fan base, or community of fans. These communities form a “fandom” which is
defined as “a subculture composed of like-minded fans, typified by a feeling of closeness to others with a shared interest” (Thorne & Bruner, 2006).

Facebook excels at intermixing communities, connections, and conversations, whereby users of the service disseminate information outside of traditional media (Lin & Lu, 2011). For companies with brand recognition, this is beneficial as fans visit Facebook pages more often, “generate positive word-of-mouth and are more emotionally attached” than casual visitors to a page (Dholakia & Durham, 2010). According to De Vries et al (2012), Facebook fan pages reflect the strength of the fan’s attachment to the brand and help strengthen the brand relationship, so much so that Facebook fan pages provide what Lin and Lu (2011) refer to as “social utility”, where the interactive content on the page between the fan community provides general satisfaction to the community of fans involved.

This level of engagement by page fans is not limited to only positive content. Fans who engage in discussion on fan pages feel part of a bigger community (De Vries et al., 2012), and differing opinions have been shown to generate more comments and overall content (Moe & Trusov, 2011). Fan and stakeholder engagement in social media has received little to no study in the context of small businesses and organizations, although small businesses have been shown to be great leaders in corporate social responsibility, or decision that impact activities on society, specifically due to the lack organizational layers stakeholders must navigate to interact with the organization (Jenkins, 2009; Russo & Tencati, 2009).

The amount of interaction small businesses and organization may have with their fans and stakeholders create messy organizational boundaries. While businesses have rushed to Facebook and other social media to encourage more brand engagement with the public, what they failed to realize, as Fournier and Avery note (2011), “social media was made for people, not for brands.” Businesses must relinquish a certain amount of control in social media where fans and
brand loyalists create or reinterpret content or disseminate information about a brand in way outside of the control of the business in question (Laroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2013).

Via social media, and especially in Facebook, fans are given a voice, and highly engaged fans are not put off by conversation that is less than positive concerning the object of their fandom. What is less well understood is the interaction of fans their brands when crises occur.

1.5 Crises and Small Business

Fearn-Banks defines a crisis as “a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting the organization, company, or industry, as well as its publics, products, services, or good name. A crisis interrupts normal business transactions and can sometimes threaten the existence of the organization (Fearn-Banks, 1996). Crises are highly unique events, so much so that it is impossible to list every kind of crisis one could experience (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). Organizational crises are perilous events where production, performance, health of the workers, and public’s trust in an organization becomes severely threatened, and often times with far reaching consequences (Landua, 2011). Crisis events often require businesses to utilize all available resources to properly handle the situation, and good crisis communication is a key to the success of that endeavor.

While the economic downturn may have driven many organizations to adopt Facebook, despite the many benefits Facebook as a social media platform may provide during a crisis, those benefits are twinned with equal pitfalls and even dangers that have received little to no study outside of the large corporate landscape (González-Herrero & Smith, 2008a).

As many organizations continue to engage their stakeholders and the general public via social media, when crises arise, Facebook would be a natural tool to use to communicate with those audiences. Social media has shown to be an effective tool for brand loyalists to come to
defense of the object of their fandom. For instance, when favorite television shows with low audience ratings are under threat of cancellation, their fans have galvanized efforts in social media to either attempt to save the show or encourage its recreation in another format such as a motion picture such as the case for *Firefly* or *Veronica Mars* (Becque, 2007). However the loyalty of fans can also be challenged in such a way as to create highly verbal backlash, such as when Penn State students, who initially supported the university online during a public sex scandal, turned against the university after the firing of a beloved football coach (N. Brown, Brown, & Billings, 2013).

Fans can be a tremendous resource during a time crisis and especially for small business and organizations with already limited and stressed resources. However, in a medium such as Facebook, where business lack certain technological control, how to conduct crisis communication comes into question when both technology and fan communication are outside of the traditional crisis manager’s control. How technology disseminates content across digital mediums is of interest to the crisis response research, but also how technology shapes the message and influences the reception of that message. Facebook has many strengths as a “pull” form of social media (Veil, Buehner, & Palenchar, 2011), but also has many technological limitations, which leads to the question: **How does the technological medium of Facebook affect crisis communication during a crisis event?** Remembering that the communication occurring in this medium is reflective of offline human social behavior, we must also ask: **How is crisis communication in social media perceived by stakeholders?** Through asking these questions, we can gain a new understanding of what it means to be *socially mediated* through technology and how that affects the way we communicate with each other.
1.6 Structure and Overview

To address the questions raised here, this research takes a mixed-methods approach to qualify and quantify the phenomenon discovered. To clarify the process of how this was accomplished this dissertation is broken down into the following chapters:

The second chapter explains the events involving the sinking of the HMS Bounty. This chapter provides the context for this research by explaining the timelines of events and persons involved.

The third chapter is the literature, which examines the definition of crisis particularly for organizations. This review also covers the dynamic stages of a crisis, or crisis cycle. The last section explores crisis communication from the traditional model to the new and emerging model incorporating the use of social media in professional communications. This chapter also addresses the primary and secondary theoretical lens for this study. The first, Situational Crisis Communication Theory followed by Halo Effect. Critique of both theories sets the foundation for the establishment of the research questions that seek to be answered by this work.

Chapter four explicitly describes all the data collected and used in this research and the methods used for analysis and discovery. The data used in this study came in the form of Facebook status updates from the HMS Bounty organization’s page, corresponding comments to those updates, captured conversations from other Facebook pages and online forums, posted media reports, official reports from the United States Coast Guard and the National Transportation Safety Board, and personal interviews from those surrounding the event.

The fifth chapter provides a detailed analysis of findings from the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data, which in turn, formed data themes in answer to the research questions. Each theme is supported by specific pieces of evidence.
The sixth chapter then discusses the data themes, interprets the findings to the research questions, and discusses the theoretical implications.

Lastly, the final chapter concludes with contributions from this work, implications as new questions arise, future research opportunities as a result of this study, and a discussion of the limitations of this work.
Chapter 2

BACKGROUND

2.1 Hurricane Sandy

Hurricane Sandy began as a tropical wave in the western Caribbean that quickly morphed into a named tropical storm only hours later on October 22, 2012. She was deemed a Category 3 hurricane when she passed over the country of Jamaica on October 24, and was downgraded to a Category 1 hurricane when the system passed over Cuba on October 25 (“Hurricane Sandy,” n.d.). The system vacillated between a tropical storm and a Category 1 hurricane as it travelled along the eastern coast of the United States. Eventually, weather fronts converged greatly impacting the size of the storm, allowing it to become the largest hurricane ever recorded (see Figure 1) (Sienkiewicz, 2013).

Figure 1: Weather map showing the converging weather fronts in Hurricane Sandy. Photo Credit: The National Weather Service.
Joe Sienkiewicz of the National Weather Service was tracking the storm during this time and became concerned that the unusually high pressure of the Atlantic jet stream would combine with Sandy. The primary concern was that the jet stream and pull Sandy north resulting in a rare hybrid storm where the late season hurricane would merge with a winter ocean storm and morph into a mature extra-tropical cyclone (Sienkiewicz, 2013). A hybrid storm of this nature carries elevated risks of not only the usual hurricane damage concerns from high winds and tidal surge, but also a possibility for blizzard conditions despite it only being late October. In the final analysis, after Sandy made landfall near Brigantine, New Jersey on October 29, 2012, it became the largest Atlantic hurricane on record with a wind field over 1,100 miles causing more than $75 billion of damage and claiming 285 lives (Blake, 2013).

### 2.2 The HMS Bounty

Late October and early November marks the time of year where most east coast tallships are closing out their sailing seasons in the continental United States (“Sinking of the HMS Bounty Hearing Transcripts,” 2013). American tall ships are large, traditionally rigged sailing vessels carrying anywhere from more than 2,000 to 20,000 square feet of sail and a hull size from 50 to over 400 tons (“What is a tall ship?,” 2014)(see Figure 2). These ships have regained their popularity over the years from exposure in such films as 1989 Treasure Island, to 2003 Master and Commander, and the Pirates of the Caribbean movies. Some boats generate revenue by providing continuous daily sails, days-long voyages, or as school sailing vessels (“What is a tall ship?,” 2014). According to Tall Ships America, the largest domestic training and advocacy group for this industry, summer is the busiest time of year for this $34 million industry, and winter months are usually spent with a boat docked in a port and serviced or sailing in the south of the United States and the Caribbean catering to tourists and school programs in that area.
On October 25, 2012, the tallship HMS Bounty was docked in New London, Connecticut. The boat hosted sailors from the USS Mississippi, a new fast-attack Navy submarine, for a day sail and in turn, the crew of the Mississippi provided the Bounty crew with a tour of the submarine (Miles, 2013). The boat was scheduled to be in St. Petersburg, Florida, 1,500 nautical miles away, for a series of engagements in early November before heading on to Galveston, Texas, where the Bounty would be docked in a shipyard for extended maintenance (Patterson, 2013b).

Robert Hansen, a New York businessman, owned the HMS Bounty since the early 2000, and had nursed the previously neglected boat along financially with the help of the ship’s captain, Robin Walbridge (Patterson, 2013b). The organization managing the boat, HMS Bounty LLC (BLLC), was very small consisting only of the owner, the captain, and an office manager to handle the logistics for the boat (“Sinking of the HMS Bounty Hearing Transcripts,” 2013). By
2012, Robin Walbridge had been captain of the Bounty for more than 17 years and through multiple owners. Despite the boat’s fame from appearing in Hollywood movies, the organization supporting the boat struggled to turn profit and keep the organization afloat (Miles, 2013). The maintenance issues of the boat were slowly being addressed over the years through Hansen’s financing and Walbridge’s management, and over the years, the boat limped along undergoing periodic refits (Kruse, 2013).

It was a great surprise to many when Walbridge announced to the crew on October 25, after their day with the Navy they would be leaving Connecticut within the hour attempting to sail around Hurricane Sandy in order to reach Florida and their November engagements (Ware, 2012). Having previously sailed through hurricanes and fostering the belief in his crew that a ship was safer at sea than in port during such storms, Walbridge made the decision to leave port early and try to get ahead of the impending weather (“HMS Bounty Facebook page,” 2012). Of all the east coast tallships, the HMS Bounty with her 16 crew members was the only ship heading out to sea rather than heading toward port to seek safe shelter (“Sinking of the HMS Bounty Hearing Transcripts,” 2013).

The boat departed in the evening of October 25, and despite the predictions by the National Weather Service and the National Hurricane Center of Hurricane Sandy morphing into what was publicly dubbed a “Frankenstorm,” the Bounty headed out to sea, east-by-south-east into the hurricane’s path (“HMS Bounty Facebook page,” 2012). After a few days of pleasant sailing in an ever-increasing sea-state, the Bounty encountered serious trouble on October 28 when she began to lose the ability to dewater the boat. The seams in the hull that were recently repaired are suspected as the entry point for water to pour into the vessel’s bilges (“Sinking of the HMS Bounty Hearing Transcripts,” 2013). By evening of October 28, the boat notified the shore-based office manager via satellite email they were taking on more water than they were able to
pump out. The office manager contacted the United State Coast Guard (USCG) regarding the situation.

It was during this time that boat turned directly into the path of the hurricane making it impossible for the USCG to airdrop emergency pumps (Jones, 2014). Eventually, the pumps and the back-up pumps began to fail and as the water rose, the engine and the backup engine failed also (Jones, 2014). The boat was not only sinking, but had lost propulsion and the ability to navigate over waves and swells. In the early morning of October 29, the captain made the call to abandon ship but not before the ship capsized, throwing the crew into the water, 90 miles east of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina (Jones, 2014).

![Figure 3: The HMS Bounty sinking off Cape Hatteras, NC. Photo Credit: The United States Coast Guard.](image)

With much difficulty, the crew was able to inflate and climb into life rafts. The USCG already aware that the boat had been abandoned, deployed Search and Rescue (SAR) helicopters against their own internal regulations that stated the conditions were too dangerous to risk USCG assets (“Sinking of the HMS Bounty Hearing Transcripts,” 2013). Within hours, SAR located the
two rafts and rescued 14 of the 16 members (see Figure 3). The two missing were Claudene Christian, who ironically enough was a descendant of Fletcher Christian, the famous mutineer of Bounty’s namesake, and Captain Robin Walbridge (Patterson, 2012). Christian was located hours later, after the initial rescue, but was unresponsive and later declared dead (Patterson, 2012). Walbridge was never recovered and was presumed dead on November 2, 2012 when the USCG called off their search (“Sinking of the HMS Bounty Hearing Transcripts,” 2013).

2.3 The Bounty Organization Facebook page

The BLLC Facebook fan page during this time began to experience an exponential amount of activity. From the day the ship left the dock of New London, Connecticut on October 25, to the day the USCG called off the search for Walbridge on November 2, the fan page grew from just over 2,000 “likes” to more than 29,000 (“HMS Bounty Facebook page,” 2012), most of this growth occurring less than 12 hours after the sinking (see Figure 4). As the crisis struck and the boat sank, persons visiting the page not only commented on current status updates but those dating back to the days before the sinking. Status updates came at infrequent intervals and posted inaccurate information surrounding the sinking of the boat and the status of the crew (“HMS Bounty Facebook page,” 2012). Arguments erupted between commenters on the page, comments began to disappear from the feed, and the Facebook page was not only frequently mentioned in the news reporting of events, but became part of the news narrative (Applegate, 2012; Grier, 2012; Kruse, 2013; Miles, 2013; Patterson, 2012).
Figure 4: The number of page "likes" on the BLLC Facebook page within 12 hours of the boat sinking.

The tallship sailing industry is largely composed of small, independent, non-profit organizations with no overall governing entity ("What is a tall ship?,” 2014). Despite an emphasis on centuries-old technology and sailing methods, serious accidents involving the loss of life are rare ("Ernie Personal Interview,” 2013). Social media and its use was still a relatively new phenomenon in the tallship world in 2012, and very few in upper management positions throughout the industry had either direct personal or professional experience with social media ("Archer Personal Interview,” 2012). Because the last serious accident in the industry occurred prior to proliferation of social media, few in upper management positions throughout the tallship industry saw the amount of activity taking place on Bounty’s Facebook page as serious, and felt there was no cause for concern unless it was being reported in more traditional media ("Otto Personal Interview,” 2012).

“Archer”, a partner captain on an east coast based schooner, was with his boat secured at the dock while watching the activity on the BLLC Facebook page. Archer became concerned when “I couldn’t believe the other captains weren’t paying attention to the page. I contacted every senior person I knew insisting Bounty needed help with managing their page or at least taking it down, but no one seemed to take it seriously” ("Archer Personal Interview,” 2012). When asked why he thought this was occurring, he responded, “Hell, most of them don’t use social media, and the ones that do are so new to it, they don’t know what they’re doing. It’s the
old hammer axiom where you can use a hammer to build a house or you can use it to tear one down. Bounty’s Facebook page was clearly the latter.”

Once Bounty’s Facebook page was widely reported in traditional media, expressly pointing out the fighting occurring within the comments, an opinion shift occurred among those who at first dismissed the Facebook page (“Ernie Personal Interview,” 2013, “Otto Personal Interview,” 2012). According an executive director of a tall ship advocacy group, itself a small organization that assists the tallship community by providing training conferences and coordinating festivals, but also acts as a national spokesperson on behalf of the industry, Bounty’s Facebook page became “a huge turning point for us. Once their Facebook statuses were being reported on the news, we realized this social media thing is something we can no longer afford to dismiss as advertising fluff” (“Ernie Personal Interview,” 2013). When the those in upper management positions saw that there was already an online conversation occurring not only around the accident but bout safety in the tallship industry, they began discussing ways to speak out about the event (“Archer Personal Interview,” 2012).

The last serious accident that occurred on a tallship was in 2006 when a young sailor with a famous parent was swept overboard in the North Atlantic and lost at sea (Associated Press, 2006). Facebook, nor social media in general, had the world-wide audience it has today, and coverage of that 2006 accident, despite the sensationalism of the sailor involved, was relegated to the traditional media of television, radio, and newspapers both on and offline. The 2006 accident did not generate as much news coverage as Bounty did, and the USCG, having embraced social media as a part of their external affairs, was tweeting and releasing regular press releases within minutes of activating their SAR team to rescue the Bounty’s crew, and was posting videos and pictures of the event within hours of rescuing the crew (“Coast Guard News from the Mid Atlantic,” 2012). Many of the online press releases, tweets, pictures and videos of the rescue dominated the news (see Figure 5) (“14 rescued, 1 dead and 1 missing after HMS Bounty sinks

Figure 5: Surviving crewmembers in a life raft prior to rescue. Photo Credit: The United States Coast Guard.

During the crisis, those associated with BLLC repeatedly made efforts to contact the office to offer help, gain information, and even suggest public relations professionals to assist in crisis communication (“Archer Personal Interview,” 2012, “Zaza Personal Interview,” 2013). However, Hurricane Sandy made landfall in New Jersey and the offices of the BLLC were located on Long Island, New York. The office lost power, was threatened by flooding, and the only way to communicate with the larger world was by the office manager using her smartphone at a local coffee shop (“Admin Personal Interview,” 2014). The website, also experiencing increased activity, repeatedly crashed due to lack of bandwidth (see Figure 6) (“HMS Bounty Facebook page,” 2012). The Bounty Facebook fan page became the only means of communications during the crisis, and later, became evidence in not only the hearings conducted by the USCG and NTSB investigating the sinking, but also in a pending civil action lawsuit filed by the deceased crewmember’s parents (Patterson, 2013a; “Sinking of the HMS Bounty Hearing Transcripts,” 2013).
2.4 Investigative Hearings

The USCG and NTSB conducted investigative hearings into the accident during February 2013. Due to the misreporting on the Facebook page of the number of crew aboard the boat, and other posts where the safety of the crew was misrepresented, the BLLC Facebook page was entered into evidence (“Sinking of the HMS Bounty Hearing Transcripts,” 2013). According the lead investigator for the USCG, the Facebook page was also examined for pictures and information regarding the maintenance and handling of the vessel and for establishing a pattern of decision making not only with the captain, but also within the organization (“CDR Personal Interview,” 2014). The BLLC Office Manager, when questioned about the tone and inaccuracies discovered of Bounty’s Facebook status updates, testified that as the organization’s one and only paid office personnel, she did not contribute to Facebook page (“Sinking of the HMS Bounty Hearing Transcripts,” 2013). “Admin”, a volunteer who is also the father of one of the Bounty’s longtime deckhands and who also lives in Illinois, was given full administrative privileges to the
BLLC Facebook page by the organization (‘Admin Personal Interview,’ 2014). Admin was responsible for the majority of posts made on the Bounty’s behalf throughout the year, and entirely during the crisis, by receiving information from either the ship’s captain, Robin Walbridge, via satellite email, or through Admin’s son by test message, or the office manager by either phone or satellite email.
Chapter 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Crises are complex events with many components including temporal, stakeholders, response, and communication. One must understand the various elements of crisis in type, response, and temporal order while also understanding how the concept of reputation affects parties of interest when an organization seeks to communicate during a crisis. Understanding this interplay highlights gaps in the research literature and opens the discussion for more in-depth study in specific social media platforms, message perception, and the how organizations may or may not use these mediums to their advantage during a crisis when communicating with their stakeholders.

3.1 Crisis

Crises are varied and complex events in which no two are alike. As Dilenschneider (2000) contends, each crisis has its own causes, consequences, time frame, and tempo, and come is such variety as it would be nearly impossible to list each type (Regester & Larkin, 2005). Crises can range from the extreme end of the spectrum with hundreds of injured and gross property damage, to no physical or property damage at all, but reputational or emotional damage inflicted (Weiner, 2006). With the variety of research performed in this area, there is no universal definition for crisis holistically describing and event or outcome (W. Coombs, 2007b).

In the business world, crises are typically unexpected, and unpredictable incidents that have the potential to disrupt an organization’s operations (Landua, 2011), permanently mar or the organization’s reputation (Coombs, 2007), and threaten the further existence of the organization
(Gonzalez-Herrero & Smith, 2010). According to Jordan-Meier (2011), crises unfold over a period of time, where an underlying company issue has been left unchecked until it is exposed or an employee reveals potentially damaging information, either or both of which is then made public, or creates a “triggering event”. In some crises, organizations may not even realize they are in the middle of one until such time that managing or controlling the situation is no longer an option to them (W. Coombs, 1995). Fearn-Banks (1996) insists that as a whole, business crises are “a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting an organization, company or industry, as well as its publics, products, services or, good name.”

Each business exists in its own unique space but with complex sets of relationships, and nearly no crises is purely singular event (Mitroff, 2005), where if improperly handled, can set off a chain of events affecting multiple persons or groups involved – essentially, stakeholders. (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). The Collins dictionary defines a stakeholder as a “person, group or organization that has interest or concern in an organization. Stakeholders can affect or be affected by the organization's actions, objectives and policies. Some examples of key stakeholders are creditors, directors, employees, government (and its agencies), owners (shareholders), suppliers, unions, and the community from which the business draws its resources” (Collins, n.d.). When an organization faces a time of crisis, the threat potential to affect not only the organization and its services or offerings, but also any party of interest of that organization: clients, competition, suppliers, and members of their general business community is not to be understated (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). A crisis experienced by one company has the potential to affect its surrounding industry (W. Coombs & Holladay, 2006).

Crisis can have a compounded nature where one event sets off another event and creates a new and separate crisis. Curran et al (1993) describe a specific sort of crisis escalation, what they term a double-crisis or a communications-crisis where the original crisis is overshadowed by a communications-crisis and where the communication crises seemingly takes precedence. A
double-crisis may be exceptionally problematic as a communications crisis, with its own unique nature and factors, and requires special handling (Kyhn, 2008). Crises are, by definition, dynamic unanticipated events, characterized by high levels of uncertainty (W. Coombs, 1995). This ambiguity surrounding a crisis situation creates pressures for explanation or accounts of why the crisis has occurred, and the actions necessary to resolve it (Dutton, 1986).

Crises are also characterized by uncertainty due to the ambiguity of events (W. Coombs, 1995). As previously stated, crises are, by definition, dynamic unanticipated events, which make them very difficult to fully plan for all contingencies (Seeger, Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 1998). The complexity of events and scarcity or lack of pertinent information can increase the ambiguity (Johansen & Frandsen, 2007), and thus the uncertainty, not allowing crisis managers to make fully informed decisions potentially worsening the given situation (W. Coombs, 1995).

Lastly, crisis can be a matter of perception. Although an organization may not feel tangible pressure or effects of a crisis, according to Coombs (2007a), the mere perception on behalf of organizational stakeholders should in fact be a trigger for organizational response. In short, if the stakeholders believe there is a crisis, then the organization is in crisis. The nature of stakeholder perception of the crisis defines or frames the event (Coombs, 2010). Failure to pay attention to stakeholder perception can damage the organization-stakeholder relationship, and further create negative outcomes for the organization.

At this point, several factors become evident when defining a crisis: crises are often complex and evolving events that can have multiple stakeholders and involve multiple organizations. Crises are also a time of uncertainty due to lack of clear information whereby managers can make sound decisions. Crises in context, however, have their own timing and tempo, which require consideration in their own right.
3.2 Stages of a Crisis: The Crisis Cycle

While understanding the type of crisis unfolding, response timing is also critical to the equation. A consistent theme in the crisis research literature is the idea that a crisis has an identifiable life cycle. Understanding the crisis life cycle is important because it can be used to predict occurrences for each stage of the cycle (Gonzales – Herrero & Pratt, 1995). From this, we understand how a crisis unfolds temporally in the eyes of an organization. There are two perceptions one can take from this, first, the events of the disaster as they unfold, also referred to as disaster stages, or second, the response to that the disaster referred to as the stages of crisis management. Research in crisis and disaster research, however, show multiple opinions of describing events and predicting response.

Crisis research since 1976 through 2001 reflect a multiphase approach to conceptualizing the description the events of a crisis or a description of the response actions or some mixture of the two (see Table 1). This period of research focuses on a mix between the descriptions of a specific stage of a crisis, and the description of a specific action to be taken in a given time frame. Since 2003 the research literature has reflected a shift from a comprehensive range to mid-crisis to post-crisis rationale. Pre-crisis consideration is not addressed.

One of the most enduring models is Faulkner’s (2001) definition of disaster lifecycle, where the crisis unfolds into six temporal modes. The first is the Pre-event stage, where preparation for the crisis is performed. The second stage, the Prodromal stage, is when a looming disaster is deemed unavoidable. The third stage is the Emergency stage, is the acute stage usually characterized by search and rescue and emergency medical relief activities. The fourth, or Intermediate stage, is when short-term needs are met and those affected attempt to return daily activities to normal. Faulkner’s fifth stage, Long-term or Recovery, is characterized by post-hoc analysis of events, where the possibility of changes may occur to prevent future
disruptions. The final stage in the disaster lifecycle is *Resolution*; routine business is restored, and hopefully, new and improved processes are established to avoid further disruptions.

Table 1: Review of Crisis Lifecycle research 1976-2013.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
<th>Phase 3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Crisis incubation</td>
<td></td>
<td>6. Readjust belief system</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Precipitating event</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Chronic</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Probing and prevention</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. Recovery</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Pre-crisis</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Prodromal</td>
<td>4. Intermediate</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Long-term/Recovery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Rike</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Assess damage</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Stabilize environment</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Activate crisis managers</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Restore area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Aba-Bulgu &amp; Islam</td>
<td>1. Assess event</td>
<td>2. Crisis planning</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Resume operations</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Repair tangible assets</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Marketing and promotion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6. Resume normal operations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Coombs</td>
<td>1. Pre-Crisis</td>
<td>2. Crisis</td>
<td>3. Post-Crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Jordan-Meier</td>
<td>1. Fact finding</td>
<td>3. Assessment &amp; blame game</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Unfolding drama</td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Resolution or fallout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>FEMA</td>
<td>1. Threat or impact</td>
<td>4. Recovery</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Initial Assessment</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Response</td>
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How a company or organization responds to a disaster also has temporal aspects, or stages of crisis response. Rike (Rike, 2003) and Abu-Bulgu and Islam (2008) see crisis response mainly from a post-hoc perspective by which to inform future crises. Jordan-Meier (Jordan-Meier, 2011) shifts crisis communications response with her four stages being understood as: *Fact-Finding*, where initial data and information is gathered to understand the current context of the problem; *Unfolding Drama*, where fact gathering continues but crisis events are still unfolding, *Assessment and Blame Game*, where the crisis may be over and attention is shifted from the crisis incident and towards affect on company and victims; and lastly, *Resolution or Fallout*, where final damage and liability are assessed. In Jordan-Meier’s understanding, some of these stages may be unavoidable, but proper communication with stakeholders is a company or organization’s best opportunity to mitigate potential liability and reputational damage. FEMA likewise has a similar understanding of this placing action firmly in the middle of the crisis and lessons learned in post-hoc analysis ("Stages of Crisis Response," 2013).

In Coombs’ model (W. Coombs, 2007b), a crisis unfolds in a pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis stage. Pre-crisis, where actions occur before the crisis is in effect, has three sub-stages: signal detection, prevention, and preparation. Crisis, where a triggering event signals the crisis has begun, has two sub-stages: crisis recognition, and crisis containment. The final stage, post-crisis has three sub-stages for ongoing crisis management: evaluating the crisis response, learning from the crisis, and post-crisis communication.

The issue with the majority of recent academic work on the crisis lifecycle is the lack forethought given to preparation as a part of daily operations, it only advises end-action analysis in the case of future events. Further, none of the literature reviewed her allows for the reiterative nature of learning new information mid-crisis and adjusting mid-stream strategy. For the purpose
of this study and due to its simple and concise description of stages of temporal events, despite lacking in the aforementioned reiterative analysis, Coombs three-stage approach will be utilized when describing the temporal aspects of crisis.

3.3 Organizational Crisis Communication

From speaking to stakeholder, consumers, or vendors, proper communication is valued by every corporation. However, when an organization is under duress, effective communication is even more crucial. The basic goal of crisis communication is to deflect or reduce any potential negative impact an issue may have on a business entity and that entity’s business objectives (González-Herrero & Smith, 2008a). The value of protecting reputation and other organizational assets, whether tangible of intangible, may be monumental to the survival of an organization, which emphasizes the importance of properly navigating a crisis through proper crisis communication with stakeholders. Carrying out good crisis communication is matter of enacting strategies which best suit the needs of the situation (Fearn-Banks, 1996). Different crisis may have different needs, which means communications from crisis may not work within the confines of another (W. Coombs, 1999). However, quickly determining the factors and variables of a crisis event better allow crisis managers to thoroughly and quickly set the crisis narrative on their own terms (Regester & Larkin, 2005).

The literature of crisis communication largely reflects two approaches: theory and application. Application addresses a prescribed list of actions, or best practices, while theory focuses on the content of that message.
3.3.1 Theory

Johansen and Frandsen (2007) see theory research divided into two different approaches: rhetorical or apologia, which includes defense strategies and reputation management; and crisis context, where the specific circumstances of a crisis are considered for timing of crisis communication. Two opposing theories meeting Johansen and Frandsen’s criteria have dominated the spectrum of research: Benoit’s Image Restoration Theory and Coombs’ Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Avery, Lariscy, Kim, & Hocke, 2010).

William Benoit’s Image Restoration Theory (IRT), falls under the aspects of rhetorical apologia where communication is a goal directed activity and that the goal of communication is maintaining a favorable reputation (Benoit, 1995). Benoit’s theory asserts that acts of “image restoration focus on identifying options rather than prescribing solutions” (Benoit, 1997). An organization’s reputation is considered threatened when a stakeholder perceives an action to be offensive and the organization to be responsible. This perception should prompt the organization to being image restoration by utilizing on of 5 broad response strategies that may employ any one of 14 specific responses (Benoit, 2000). Many qualitative and quantitative studies examined the merits of IRT, however few could address the question as to whether crisis managers actually used the strategies as theorized (Ferguson, Wallace, & Chandler, 2012).

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), falls under the auspices of crisis context, where theory seeks to be both predictive and prescriptive through research and development of “empirical evidence based” crisis management (W. Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Though SCCT builds upon many elements of Image Restoration and shares many response strategies, the two theories are divergent in their approaches to crisis communication. SCCT places great importance on matching the crisis type with the correct crisis response, “correct” being the most effective response determined through controlled experiments. As Johansen and
Frandsen contend, where Benoit focuses on the “what and the how” while Coombs focuses on the “where and when” (Johansen & Frandsen, 2007).

In examining the body of literature in crisis communication, Image Restoration and SCCT have dominated the field of research. In a quantitative analysis of 18 years of crisis communication research and 66 published articles in crisis communication, the majority of research has focused on either IRT or SCCT as a lens for study. Avery et al, finds this troublesome as this hyper-focus on the two theories may limit the overall field of crisis communication research with its lack of theoretical diversity (Avery et al., 2010). Further, the lack of theoretical diversity directly impacts the field of practical application of crisis communication or best practices without more depth of cases analyzed and information gap identification (Kim, Avery, & Lariscy, 2009). As professional communication shifts from traditional communication practices to include more online conversations, new theories and models are needed to address previously unseen dynamics between organizations and stakeholders.

Crises are complex events characterized by times of great uncertainty due to the lack or ambiguity of information. While crisis events follow in a linear fashion, crisis management and information communication throughout the event may require constant re-assessment and revision as actions unfold. If uncertainty is best mitigated through the constant exchange of information, then the practice of crisis communication must reflect these attributes. Crisis managers should understand that crisis preparation does not begin after a crisis is resolved and analyzed but should also be a constant and daily part of business operations.

For two decades, two theories have dominated the crisis communication research landscape, Image Restoration Theory (IRT) and Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). Image Restoration purports to provide communication options, while SCCT contends
that crisis communication should be predictive through a matching process of various crisis factors.

In the age of social media, with its persistent communication flow and massive global reach, can one theory truly be predictive given all the complexity of a crisis event and especially when no two crises are alike or do new models need to emerge? A thorough examination of such a theory is required in the context of social media during a complex crisis event.

### 3.4 Theoretical Approach

Due to the complexity of events, and the multitude of participants involved in this case study two theoretical approaches were used: Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), and Halo Effect. SCCT, the primary theory in question, will be further examined for issues pertaining to small organizations, multiple and vocal stakeholders, and the impact of the technological environment of Facebook. To further expound upon vocal stakeholders, particularly internal stakeholders, Halo Effect, the subordinate theory, is examined as an impetus for internal stakeholder action, and to examine if the fan response matches that of the organization. These theories are examined in conjunction to each as the subordinate theory informs the growing phenomenon of fan-enacted crisis communication, an issue SCCT, in its current form, does not address.

#### 3.4.1 Situational Crisis Communication Theory

The primary theoretical approach for this research utilizes Coombs and Holladay’s (2002) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). Building on Benoit’s image restoration theory that postulates that strategies can be used to alleviate damage to image in an event where
reputation has been damaged (Benoit, 1995), the researchers developed an empirical, evidence-based theory that seeks to match crisis response to the situational needs of an organization. The goal of SCCT seeks to “test recommendations and integrate findings” where crisis response is matched to the unique needs of the current state of crisis (2007).

Coombs and Holladay ground SCCT in Weiner’s interpretation of Attribution Theory, which posits people seek for causes of events, particularly when events have extreme unexpected consequences (Weiner, 1985). People under these circumstances will make highly emotional attributions of responsibility (Weiner, 2008). Working from this theoretical viewpoint, Coombs and Holladay hold that the mere perception of crisis and perception of responsibility by an organizational stakeholder, no matter if an organization is in fact at fault, is valid and a threat to an organization’s reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2002)

SCCT advises three broad types of responses: first, Coombs and Holladay (2002) contend crisis managers should provide instructing information that allow persons affected by the crisis to cope and protect themselves physically during the event; and second, adjusting information then follows and assists affected persons to cope psychologically. When physical and psychological needs have been met, Coombs and Holladay (2002) advise a third response, which is the heart of SCCT, where the organization issues information that focuses on reputation repair to an appropriate level. SCCT stresses an ethical approach to crisis communication by first communicating information that addresses the physical and emotional needs of those affected by crisis before then addressing the reputational threat to an organization.

In focusing on the third phase of response, crisis managers must assess both the level of perceived responsibility and the level of perceived reputational threat to the organization by looking at both the type of crisis and factors that may magnify feelings of attribution in the minds of stakeholders (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). First, it is paramount that a crisis manager performs a correct assessment of the type of crisis an organization is facing. Crises are defined as three
types of clusters: victim, accidental, and preventable (see Table 3) (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). In a victim cluster, the organization is also perceived as a victim as well, and as such, the level of threat is mild to both assessed level of responsibility and reputational threat. This type of crisis may include rumors, natural disasters, workplace violence, or product tampering (Coombs & Holladay, 2002).

In the accident cluster, organizational actions are involved but were unintentional such as in product recalls, technological mishaps, and accusation of inappropriate behavior on behalf of an organization. Moderate levels of responsibility are assessed to both responsibility and reputational threat (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). In the last cluster, preventable, the organization may have knowing placed people at risk or have broken the law. This type of cluster is high risk to both perceived responsibility and reputational threat. Activities in this cluster may include: human-error causing, either an accident or malfunctioning product, intentional misleading or deception of stakeholders, misconduct in the breaking of laws or regulations, or misdeeds with injuries (Coombs & Holladay, 2002).

Table 2: SCCT matching process (Coombs & Holladay, 2002).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crisis Cluster</th>
<th>Crisis Type</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>Natural disaster</td>
<td>Acts of nature</td>
<td>Low responsibility, Low threat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Violence in workplace</td>
<td>Employee attacks another</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Product tampering</td>
<td>Outside actor damages company</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rumor</td>
<td>False information about company</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accident</td>
<td>Error accident</td>
<td>Equipment failure with accident</td>
<td>Moderate responsibility, Moderate threat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Error product harm</td>
<td>Equipment failure product recall</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Challenges</td>
<td>Stakeholder accusation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preventable</td>
<td>Human-error accident</td>
<td>Human caused accident</td>
<td>High responsibility, High threat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Human-Error product harm</td>
<td>Human caused product recall</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Company misdeed</td>
<td>Stakeholders deceived</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Company misdeed, misconduct</td>
<td>Company violates law</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Company misdeed with injury</td>
<td>Stakeholder at risk by management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second step in assessing overall reputational threat is to examine intensifiers. Intensifiers are factors that affect the intensity of attribution on responsibility and reputational
threat. The stakeholders’ initial attributions of responsibility to the organization, the organization’s history with crisis, and past reputation all serve to either mute or intensify reputational threat (Coombs, 2007a). By understanding these intensifiers, crisis managers are better able to predict the appropriate level of reputational threat and respond accordingly.

How the crisis is framed has an impact on initial stakeholder attribution. Frames in communication involve the way words, phrases, images, and media are presented in communications or messages and how people interpret that information (Druckman, 2001). According to Cooper (2002): “The way a message is framed shapes how people define problems, causes of problems, attributions of responsibility and solutions to problems.” If an organization can properly frame the initial parameters of a crisis, then the organization can respond with the appropriate message to minimize reputational damage.

Taking into account a good or poor history or reputation will serve as an intensifier to level of current attribution of responsibility assigned to the organization in question. If an organization has had prior accidents or poor reputation, the public may automatically blame them in the current crisis, adversely, if there is no prior case of crises or a good reputation was established, the organization in question might then experience sympathy on behalf of the public or stakeholders involved (Coombs & Holladay, 2002).

From here there emerges a model of factors that in determining the correct crisis type, the organization can then match with the appropriate response strategy. Crisis managers are advised to employ one of three primary clusters of strategies: deny, diminish, and rebuild (see Table 4). Denying tactics may involve denying there is a crisis, verbally attacking accusers who criticize or blame the organization, or scapegoating someone or group outside the organization by blaming them for the event.

Diminishing tactics include providing excuses for the company or extenuating circumstances that lessen responsibility for the company, or justifying the actions of the company
by providing reasons that condone the company’s actions. Rebuilding tactics refer to either compensating those injured by company actions, offering an apology on behalf of the company, or both.

Table 3: SCCT response strategies (Coombs & Holladay, 2002).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Strategy</th>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>Tactic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Deny</td>
<td>Attack accuser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Deny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Scapegoat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diminish</td>
<td>Excuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Justify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rebuild</td>
<td>Compensate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Apology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Bolster</td>
<td>Remind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ingratiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Victimage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An organization’s good or poor crisis history or prior reputation will serve as an intensifier to level of current attribution of responsibility assigned to the organization in question (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). If an organization has had prior accidents or poor reputation, the public may automatically blame them in the current crisis, adversely, if there is no prior case of crises or a good reputation was established, the organization in question might then experience sympathy on behalf of the public or stakeholders involved (Coombs & Holladay, 2002).

Taking into consideration the factors of prior history and reputation, and next determining the correct crisis type the organization is experiencing, the crisis manager can then match with the appropriate response strategy. Crisis managers are advised to employ one of three primary clusters of strategies: deny, diminish, and rebuild. Denying tactics may involve denying there is a crisis, attacking accusers, or scapegoating someone or group outside the organization. Diminishing tactics include providing excuses for the company or justifying the actions of the
company. Rebuilding tactics refer to either compensating those injured by company actions, offering an apology on behalf of the company, or both (Coombs & Holladay, 2002).

Secondary strategies are minimal attempts at bolstering the company’s reputation by reminding stakeholders or the public of past good deeds, ingratiating the company with stakeholders by praising them, or reminding stakeholders that the company may in some part be a victim of the crisis as well. These strategies are best considered supplementary to initial response and primary responses and are not recommended for immediate use in initial stages of a crisis (Coombs, 2007c).

Lastly, Coombs (2007b) recommends that crisis managers maintain consistency in their crisis response and to not mix strategies such as deny with diminish or rebuild, however, be prepared to change crisis response strategies if the situation evolves in order to best protect the organizations reputation.

3.1.1 Examining SCCT

SCCT has been operationalized for further testing and research in both offline the offline environment via controlled experiments and case studies, and online environments such as Facebook and Twitter. Results have either confirmed various aspects of the theory or have discovered issues in the application of the theory.

3.1.1.1 SCCT Offline

Studies testing specific aspects of SCCT have affirmed various parts of the theory and called into question others. In examining SCCT through stakeholder response through newspaper articles, research showed, a misalignment of crisis communication strategies between stakeholder
and organization (Kyhn, 2008). A 2009 experiment gauging the public response to an oil spill affirmed that a negative reputation resulted in higher attribution of responsibility (Jeong, 2009) showing that reputation does serve as an intensifier to a crisis event. In a controlled experiment, Claeys, Cauberghe, and Vyncke (2010) expanded the understanding of Attribution Theory as it applies to SCCT whereby personality type of an observer or stakeholder affects the level of attribution bestowed on an organization and suggested strategy for moderating negative attribution. In a case study analyzing offline news media representation of the American Red Cross during two specific periods of crisis and utilizing SCCT as a lens, researchers found that a misalignment between crisis type and crisis response suggesting that SCCT is a good fit for strategic crisis communication (Fussell Sisco, Collins, & Zoch, 2010).

4.1.1.2 SCCT Online

With social media becoming a dominant news source across the age spectrum (Madden, 2013), researchers have turned their focus to examining SCCT in the social media environment. Using SCCT as a lens for analyzing electronic bulletin boards during a product harm crisis, research showed attribution of crisis responsibility was a strong predictor of emotional response (Choi & Lin, 2009). Walton et al. (2012) analyzed social media feed during the British Petroleum (BP) oil spill in the Gulf Coast in 2010, using the digital paper trail from both Twitter and Facebook posts by three different BP spokespersons. Researchers assessed crisis response strategies by spokesperson according to the SCCT model, and through statistical analysis, showed that crisis type predicted the strategic response (Walton et al., 2012). Walton et al (2012) concluded the social media environment not only works well in conjunction with SCCT but also generates a wellspring of data in the initial disaster phases.
Researchers have discovered internal stakeholders or “fans” of business entities, organizations, or institutions will come to an entity’s defense. In examining Twitter feed during the 2011 NCAA investigation of the University of Miami sports program, researchers found that fans organically and unofficially took up crisis communication on behalf of the school (N. a. Brown & Billings, 2012). In matching crisis type to response, researchers found fans not only closely aligned with the SCCT model but also immediately disseminated information in the form of news updates from official channels and did so in magnitude and longitude (N. a. Brown & Billings, 2012). When analyzing fan response from the sex abuse scandal at the Pennsylvania State University, Brown et al (2013) discovered while fans may utilize SCCT strategies according to how they frame the crisis event, researchers also showed how fans can also hurt the organization’s reputation as fans did when they turned against school administration upon the firing of long-term coach Joe Patterno (Brown et al., 2013).

Utz et al (2013) examined the volatility of emotions per crisis type and medium (either online or offline) using the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster as the crisis scenario and determined that research and development of a more complex model of crisis communication is needed with regards to the online environment. Aside from findings that recommended reducing anger in order to limit secondary crisis communication, and how Facebook resulted in a more positive reputation and less secondary crisis reaction, the study suggests crisis managers employing SCCT response strategies need to pay attention to medium as choice of medium affects the success of crisis communication.

SCCT is a strategy to preserve, repair, or mitigate damage done to organization reputation. With the new paradigm of social media and its use in crisis communication, and the recorded instances where stakeholders may act on behalf of the organization, it worth examining what compels online stakeholder behavior and its potential effect on organizations.
3.2 Halo Effect

Reputations are important to an organization’s survival during a time of crisis. An organization may cease to exist when their reputation becomes severely threatened or damaged due to the stakeholder’s re-evaluation of that organization (Coombs & Holladay, 2006a). This threat occurs because when faced with a crisis, stakeholders or persons with a vested interest in the organization who suffers the crisis, will use information available to them to arrive at a conclusion or a causal judgment of why the accident happened, even if the stakeholder’s perception of the information is not entirely correct or corresponds with the facts (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Stakeholder Theory posits businesses should not run for the sake financial gain but for the sake of the stakeholders of that business (Sternberg, 1996). Stakeholders also hold and intangible asset: their opinion. Stakeholder opinions are often considered a form of social capital (McDonald, Sparks, & Glendon, 2010). In a time of crisis, this capital may manifest in the form of word-of-mouth opinion about the organization at hand. Therefore, it is key, particularly during a crisis, that business managers take special care to address the concerns of the various competing interests of their organization’s stakeholders. However, the prior relationship the organization at risk has with its stakeholders may determine how the organization navigates the crisis and finds resolution at the crisis’ end (Coombs & Holladay, 2006).

A possible explanation for this exchange of good will during a crisis for a favorable past reputation is the Halo Effect, that is, the stakeholder’s positive view of the organization will protect that organization from reputation loss until the crisis is over (Ulmer, 2001). “Halo effect” derives from halo error, a term coined by Edward Thorndike in 1920, that posits the human tendency to make specific inferences on the basis of general impressions (Thorndike, 2001). When a relationship is favorable, people develop a bias where the favorable measure, “spills over” onto another measure (Klein & Dawar, 2004). Halo error is a function of rater error or rater
inability and that those impressions are based on both true and illusory facts (Murphy, Jako, & Anhalt, 1993; Solomonson & Lance, 1997). Years of research focused on distinguishing whether halo was a rating error that occurs when correlations are inflated or rather a rater error that is thought to be responsible for this effect (Fisicaro, 1988). However, a series of studies has since shown both are independent phenomenon that occur in conjunction with overlapping effects, so in this sense, halo rater error is a phenomenon should be defined as the influence of a rater's general impression on ratings of specific qualities of a person or organization and both the ratings assigned to them (Lance, LaPointe, & Stewart, 1994).

While previous halo effect research has focused on the fact that the effect detracts from data quality (Murphy et al., 1993), since the 1980s, the business community has embraced this concept as a part of reputation building and branding with stakeholders (Rosenzweig, 2007a). On the surface, stakeholder halo effect may appear to be a harmless exaggeration of qualities one assigns to another but it can affect attribution, which can be to the benefit or detriment to an organization (Rosenzweig, 2007b). In general business operations or assessment of operations, halo effect may mistake the fact of good performance as a byproduct of the illusion of good management or processes, which can misconstrue the true reasons for company success or even failure (Rosenzweig, 2007a). During a time of crisis, research has shown that a favorable reputation may generate a halo effect and affect how stakeholders attribute responsibility with regards to an organization experiencing the crisis (Klein & Dawar, 2004).

Halos are heuristics stakeholders develop over time. During a crisis, halos may manifest in one of two ways: first, stakeholders may simply give the organization the benefit of the doubt until such time the crisis is over and facts are assessed (Rosenzweig, 2007b), or second, the stakeholder will voice support of the organization, in essence, acting as a “shield” to protect the organization’s reputation for the duration of the crisis (Traut-Mattausch, Schuktz-Hardt, Greitmeyer, & Frey, 2004).
This phenomenon cuts both ways, adversely, if an organization has a poor reputation with its stakeholders it may always have a poor reputation, especially during a crisis where stakeholders will look for reasons to lay blame with the organization, or as Coombs and Holladay (2002) have coined the term, the organization develops a “velcro effect.” Neither Halo nor Velcro-effect is easy to measure, due first to the difficulty in researchers identifying when the effect occurs, and second due to research which has shown the overwhelming impact that perceived negativity expressed by others can have on a stakeholder’s opinion (Coombs & Holladay, 2006b), and to date, no research has empirically proven the halo effect in a controlled experiment.

3.2.1 Operationalizing Halo Effect

Reiterating Coombs and Holladay’s (2006a) assertion on the difficulty of studying halo effect due to the problems in creating a scenario where halo may emerge, the study of halo has been the focus largely of the business community in looking at brand awareness and loyalty (Bloom, Hoeffler, Keller, & Meza, 2006; Rosenzweig, 2007a, 2007b). In examining three decades of popular studies on business performance, the halo effect is implied as an explanation of the failure of data independency rather than actually being a rigorously tested phenomenon (Rosenzweig, 2007a).

In crisis communications, the majority of recent research on halo has largely been limited to controlled experiments where the effect based on prior reputation is one - based on a proactive relationship between organizations and stakeholders (Klein & Dawar, 2004), and two - was limited in results and showed respondents exhibiting shield dynamics rather than benefit of the doubt, and in instances where organization had a very favorable reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2006b).
However, with increasing use of social media in crisis communications, researchers may have better opportunity now to capture and quantify the phenomenon since crafting and delivering the appropriate response to stakeholders takes greater precedence online (González-Herrero & Smith, 2008b). Given the immediacy with which information travels through social media, it is not surprising that negative sentiment spreads faster through social media than corporate response to crisis (Park, Cha, Kim, & Jeong, 2012). However, high levels of social media activity on behalf of companies is shown to be correlated to high interactivity with online stakeholders and that while high interactivity is a predictor of negative input, companies with high interactivity with online stakeholders have more favorable outcomes (Fritzsche, 2012). Further, this same study also showed the best outcomes were specific to crisis type. This leaves questions regarding as to whom is most susceptible to negative comments, and what are the limits of the relationship an organization may have with their stakeholders. Also, this research is in conflict with another study showed while the halo and velcro effects occupy the opposite ends of the spectrum of perceived organizational responsibility, research concluded those stakeholders who occupy the middle portion of the spectrum, those with possibly no preconceived notion of responsibility, are likely more influenced by negative comments or perceptions in an online setting (Anderson, Brossard, Scheufele, Xenos, & Ladwig, 2013). As with the business studies of corporate reputation and brand loyalty, these studies in the context of social media, imply halo effect as a potential explanation of findings rather than testing the phenomenon directly.

### 3.3 Information Gaps and Research Questions

From the onset, there are many issues concerning SCCT. First, SCCT is too monological with a singular viewpoint from the crisis manager outward towards stakeholders. Schwarz (2012) contends that organizations often marginalize public response and perspective particularly in
social media. The framework also acts as a one-to-one communication strategy (crisis manager towards internal stakeholders) without recognizing that stakeholders are not a monolithic block of opinion and response. While research shows fans enacting crisis communication on behalf of organizations, the findings, when shown solely through the lens of SCCT, only show fans mimicking the managerial viewpoint, and not gauging conversations to or surrounding this response approach. According to Anthonissen (2008), “stakeholders are everywhere” and a “virtually infinite constellation of directly and indirectly involved parties” (Anthonissen, 2008).

In considering Hoffman’s and Novak’s Modified Mass Communication Model (1996), and the idea of the Internet creating democratized landscape of dialogical communication, a response strategy aimed solely at internal stakeholders may not work for other parties of interest. If the communication medium is the message, as Utz et al (2013) contends, then given the multiple audiences, how do you determine which medium and which message to use and when? Is the parsing of such information possible under these circumstances? SCCT has not been tested to see if it can address the various perspectives of multiple and now vocal stakeholders.

Coombs (2007b) states most people receive news of a crisis through the media and that media framing of the crisis event is important to consider. A report issued by the Pew Research Center, found US adults now get their news equally from social media as they do through traditional media outlets (newspaper, television, or radio), and are most likely to receive news through Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn (Holcomb, Gottfried, & Mitchell, 2013). Additionally, 80% of externally based business communication now takes through social media (Hendricks, 2014). Further, social media leaves a digital paper trail by which stakeholders may refer back to during times of crisis, which may have greater influence over framing than the news media. If stakeholders receive most of the information about an organization through social media, then it stands to follow that the organization needs to be more cognizant of how their day-to-day
communication practices may affect stakeholder perception for good or for ill (Jordan-Meier, 2011).

By Coombs own admission, SCCT assumes infinite human and financial resources and advises businesses with limited finances to choose the most economical strategy (Coombs, 2007c). Since social media did not exist on the same level today as it did when this theory was formulated, adding infinite technological resources to the list of necessary resources would be sensible advice. However, 97% of US employers are small business composes, and these businesses and organizations employ over half of all US workers (Frequently Asked Questions About Small Business, 2012), and since small businesses are often characterized as having limited resources across the spectrum, SCCT operates as a best case scenario most US-based companies can never hope to experience, particularly with the continuous global news cycle.

In considering the SCCT theoretical model, large gaps derived from new and complex ways communication occurs online becomes evident. The new variables that are currently unaccounted for are organizational resources, technology in the form of social media, multiple stakeholders, crisis framing, and prior communication. Where social media has removed the company public relations representative, newspaper editor, or television producer as the information gatekeeper, new gatekeepers have emerged in the form of Internet companies who while providing stakeholder with a venue to voice opinion, also technologically controls how the information is presented (Ristow, 2013). With this new form of information control, how does this impact communication from organization to stakeholder and what does this mean for crisis communication?

As stakeholders become increasingly more vocal, in the instances of fans communicating on behalf of their favorite brand, there emerges opportunity to for synchronicity in fan and organization communication, but also the opportunity for conflict. In examining the whole of conversation in these digital spaces, there also arises opportunity for capturing and quantifying
other phenomena. When studying the possible emergence of halo effect in controlled experiments, studies have only captured a post-hoc response, or, what people say they would do as opposed to capturing the effect in situ. In considering halo effect as a possible reputation preserver, there has been no research in looking at the real-life manifestation of the effect and social media now provides the digital trail to do so. Brown et al (2012; 2013) has shown that fans, or internal stakeholders, of an institution feel compelled to act during a time of crisis and will do so in the form of crisis communication. Considering this new paradigm, is it possible that aside from standard SCCT response strategies, these internal stakeholders express sentiments that might indicate halo effect? Lastly, if frames are cues stakeholder use to interpret crisis (W. Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Dowling, 2002), could then framing be equally as important as reputation? How might stakeholders express their understanding of the crisis frame and is that understanding an indication of halo effect?

In considering and critiquing these two theories, the following research questions emerge:

RQ1 – What crisis response strategies are present in the BLLC Facebook data?
RQ2 – What was the most dominant or frequently used response strategy?
RQ3 – How did the online environment affect crisis communication for BLLC?
RQ4 – How did the online environment of BLLC’s crisis communication affect reception by various stakeholders?
RQ5 – Given the increased technological complexity of online crisis communication and increased involvement of active stakeholder, does SCCT have utility as a crisis communication theory?

In answering these questions, this research seeks to test Situational Crisis Communication Theory from an organizational, technological, and dialogical perspective. The analysis of the
evidence will provide findings which will the utility of SCCT online, in a specific technological environment where small businesses and organizations are concerned.
Chapter 4

DATA AND METHODS

4.1 Case Study

A case study is a method of research that excels at placing a complex and social problem of interest within its contextual setting (Yin, 2003). By looking at these problems directly within their setting, a comprehensive view emerges that illuminate the multiple dynamics between and context and problem (Yin, 2003). The case study is a valued method for this research due to the need for theoretical expansion in this area.

There are several reasons why case study was selected as an appropriate methodology for this research project. The first is that a case study, as a tool for looking at complex social situation and interactions, has become an accepted methodology within the field of Information Science. The need for theoretical development in this area means that this study needs to address the contextual conditions that lead to the actions that occurred in these virtual worlds. The second is the fact that these individual protests are tied directly to the context which they are situated in and cannot be understood as a separate and disconnected entity. The third reason is that case studies excel in understanding problems in areas where there is little previous research to guide the work of the researcher.

While many case studies have been conducted in recent years concerning the use of SCCT in social media with reference to fan response. This research differs on multiple levels. Referring to Table 5, the first difference is organizational type. The University of Miami, Penn State, Toyota, and BP, are all large organizations employing thousands of employees while BLLC employed only three fulltime employees.
The next dynamic for consideration is crisis type. The crises of the University of Miami and Toyota were straightforward in that there was strong evidence for the claims laid against them and little ambiguity in responsibility (N. a. Brown & Billings, 2012; MacKenzie & Evans, 2010). Penn State’s crisis was complicated by crisis response of the university in the firing of key employees surrounding the event which split fan loyalty and created a secondary crisis (N. Brown et al., 2013). BP’s crisis was complex due to the number of other organizations involved where responsibility for the crisis was unclear (Walton et al., 2012).

Each of the case studies looked at either Twitter or Facebook and the organization’s level of response in the study and only the BP’s study looked at both. The BP case study is taken from the corporate response perspective on Facebook and Twitter, while the University of Miami and Penn State are looked at from primarily the fan response on Twitter. The Toyota study, however, looks an engagement model between Toyota and their stakeholders on Facebook.

Where this case study differs is that BLLC is an extremely small company with limited resources in the number of personnel, technical skill, and money. The organization suffered a complex crisis of a boat sinking with lives lost while the organization’s business offices was weathering a natural disaster. Their communication was conducted almost exclusively on Facebook where the organizational response was nearly overridden by fans communicating on

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization type</th>
<th>Crisis Type</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Organization Response</th>
<th>Fan Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bounty LLC</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Complex</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miami</td>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>Simple</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penn State</td>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>Complex</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toyota</td>
<td>Corporate</td>
<td>Simple</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BP</td>
<td>Corporate</td>
<td>Complex</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
their behalf. Lastly, this study looks at the response by stakeholders outside of the fan base with regards to the crisis communication surrounding the event.

4.1.1 Data Collection

Four types of data were collected for this study: the BLLC Facebook page status updates and corresponding comments from 25 October, 2013, when the HMS Bounty announced online that it was leaving the dock in New London, Connecticut, to 4 November, 2013, after the USCG called off the search for the missing captain. This timeline ensures that comments captured were within the acute phase of the crisis. Also collected are 1,123 postings over three different threads on Woodenboat.com forum, gCaptain.com forum, and the JackTar Private Merchant Mariner Group on Facebook concerning the boat sinking and during the same time frame. Additionally, observational notes and transcripts from the investigative hearings into the sinking of the Bounty were collected for use of clarifying timelines of events and other facts of the sinking, as well as official report findings from both the USCG and NTSB. Lastly, semi-structured interviews with 18 persons involved in contributing to social media on any of the previous pages mentioned were performed.

This mixed-method approach allows for: variation in data collection which will answer the research questions from a number of viewpoints, assist in eliminating information gaps with regards to data collected when one methodology (either qualitative or quantitative) does not provide all the necessary information, lead to overall greater validity, and helps limit biases on behalf of the researcher (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Mixed-methods is ultimately necessary due to the complexity of the data. Content analysis helped develop themes, themes then led to coding schemes where quantitative analysis was then employed to identify patterns, and lastly, interviews helped provide clarification to the findings. By triangulating the data derived from
different methods, a more nuanced understanding was gained than from a mono-method approach by offsetting the weakness of one approach with the strength of another (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010).

4.1.2 Method: Content Analysis

To answer the research questions, content analysis was deemed the appropriate primary method used to gather data. Budd, Thorp, and Donehew (1967) describe content analysis as a systematic technique for analyzing message content and message handling whereby the analyst is not necessarily concerned with the message, but with the larger questions of the processes of effects and communication. Since social media provides not only text but images, content analysis of data derived from this source, requires investigation into multiple interpretations, both qualitative and quantitative, whose physical manifestations are secondary to the meanings that a particular population of people brings to them (Boellstorff, Nardi, & Pearce, 2012). For this case study, content analysis allows for an examination of all public crisis communication messages via Facebook through the lens of the SCCT model.

Analysis was performed on comments taken from Facebook and two other forums devoted to the maritime trades. Over 7,000 comments were garnered from Facebook, and 1,800 from Woodenboat.com and gCaptain. For the Facebook sample, comments posting URLs to other websites, shared posts, posts expressing condolences or recollections of the boat, or other unrelated content were disregarded leaving a working sample of 2,092 comments. Similarly, for Woodenboat.com and gCaptain, comments were only taken from specific threads discussing the sinking of the boat, and comments that posted URLs were similarly disregarded leaving a combined working sample of 1,051 comments.
This study used a mix of coding approaches. This method combined features of both deductive and inductive approaches to coding data or analytic induction. There were preliminary codes developed from the typical reported manifestations of SCCT in social media and controlled experiments (Brown & Billings, 2013; N. Brown, Brown, & Billings, 2013; Walton, Cooley, & Nicholson, 2012) For halo effect, coding was developed from concepts explored in controlled experiments (W. Coombs & Holladay, 2006a; Klein & Dawar, 2004). Since the body of literature does not show halo effect having been captured and measured in social media, coding was built upon two concepts of “benefit of the doubt” and “shielding” and the likely wording capturing these sentiments (see Table 5). These coding schemes were used to analyze the data from BLLC’s Facebook page. Each comment was analyzed for the presence of Halo Effect in either form of shielding behavior (vigorous defense of the captain) or calling for the benefit of the doubt (by waiting for all facts to come in) and for any of the one of the SCCT strategies (attacking the accuser, denial of crisis, scapegoating, excusing, justification, compensation, apology, reminding or ingratiating). Descriptive statistics were used to determine which crisis communication strategy was employed most often in the comments. Regression analysis was then used to discover possible relationships between response strategies.

The chart below (see Table 6) represents the combined coding sheet of possible crisis response strategies to be found in the BLLC Facebook comments. These strategies have coded in previous studies regarding either lab experiments for Halo Effect or in social media case studies on SCCT. Corresponding to these strategies are the expected examples to be found in the language used in Facebook comments on the BLLC Facebook page.
Table 5: Halo effect and SCCT coding examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Crisis Response Strategies</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Halo</td>
<td>Benefit of the Doubt</td>
<td>&quot;Wait for facts/Now is not the time/Not for us to Judge&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shielding</td>
<td>&quot;The captain had 17 years experience&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attacking Accuser</td>
<td>&quot;Armchair quarterbacks / Landlubbers&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Simple Denial</td>
<td>&quot;This is cost of doing business at sea&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scapegoating Another</td>
<td>&quot;The owner forced them to sea&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excusing</td>
<td>&quot;They couldn't know the generators would fail&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Justification</td>
<td>&quot;A ship is safer at sea in a hurricane&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>&quot;I'm sure the owner will provide for those affected&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apology</td>
<td>&quot;We are sorry for this mistake&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reminding</td>
<td>&quot;The legacy of the boat outlives this tragedy&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ingratiation</td>
<td>&quot;Bounty Forever!&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.3 Method: Interviews

The purpose of the interview was to allow subjects to discuss or clarify emotional states, motivations for action or inaction, provide interpretation of statements or action, and elucidate on thought processes behind posts they made online. Interviews engage an interviewer and interviewee in a question and answer session where the interviewer engages in a conversation with the interviewee using questions (Mason, 2002). This research used a semi-structured format where respondents were also provided with copies of online posts they authored. A semi-structured interview poses a list of questions to the participant, but the interviewer maintains malleability in the format and ordering of questions in order to accommodate the flow of thought or conversation. While the questions may lack rigidity, the conversation is controlled or non-reciprocal where the interviewer may not be asked or respond to questions.

All responses to interview questions were recorded digitally in addition to the interviewer taking handwritten notes. These recordings then became the basic data for analysis further on in the study. Each recorded interview was anonymized where required, transcribed by the
researcher, and saved as a word document. Both the recorded and transcribed interviews were analyzed for repetition of themes. Interview subjects were selected from stakeholder groups identified during the event. The interview process sought not only to capture the individual personal insights but to also the insights of the larger stakeholder group.

Convenience or purposeful sampling, whereby persons who specifically posted online content concerning the Bounty sinking on either BLLC’s Facebook page, Woodenboat.com’s or gCaptain’s forums, or the JackTar Mariner Group page, and preferable across several platforms, were considered for follow up interviews for purposes of this research (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). The persons selected for interviews were primarily identified through content analysis of the previously mentioned online entities and were selected for their prolific online presence during the time frame of the event. These persons were mainly contacted through the Facebook messaging system or through the respective online forum where they were identified. Three persons were known to the researcher and contacted directly offline. Over 100 persons were identified and contacted through this process; however, given the small size of the tallship community, the recency of the event, and the polarization of opinions within the tallship community, most refused or were highly reluctant to be interviewed for this research. Further, attempts at snowball sampling, where even if the proposed interview subject granted or refused to take part in the research they nonetheless provided the name of another potential interview subject, largely failed. Only three interview subjects were identified through snowball sampling.

Many potential interviewees directly associated with BLLC refused or are prohibited from speaking about the event due to pending lawsuits. Of the many persons contacted through either online or offline attempts, 18 respondents served as the basis for the interview pool. It is important to note that each of these respondents are key informants for their stakeholder group, and as such, their views are representative of the stakeholder group. The makeup of this sample pool is twelve men and six women. All respondents were anonymized and given a pseudonym by
which they are identified on any digital copies of the interview, quotes, papers, or other writings. Interview subjects are grouped according to the respective audience their interview response corresponded: BLLC, internal or external stakeholders, general public, Media, Search and Rescue/Regulatory. An overview of the eighteen interview participants is as follows:

“Admin” (Interview 1): Male. Age: 60+ years. Interviewed in August 2013, with a follow-up interview in September 2013. Admin is a television repairman and business owner located outside of Chicago, Illinois. Admin’s son served as a deckhand aboard the Bounty for two year prior to the boat sinking. Admin served as BLLC’s Facebook page administrator and main content contributor since Spring 2011. He has no background in marketing or public relations, admittedly had no social media background personally or professionally prior to becoming the page administrator, and worked on behalf of BLLC in a volunteer capacity only.

“Zaza” (Interview 2): Female. Age: early 20s. Interviewed in August 2013. Zaza is a former crewmember of the Bounty, having left the boat only weeks before the sinking. Zaza is an avid social media consumer and contributed to the BLLC Facebook during the day of the sinking.

“Joanna” (Interview 3): Female. Age: 50+. Interviewed in February 2013. Joanna is an events coordinator for Tallships America, a non-governing advocacy organization for the tallship community. Joanna was a long time personal friend of Walbridge and BLLC.

“John” (Interview 4): Male. Age: 29. Interviewed in June 2013. John is a sailor and a former Bounty shipboard volunteer. John posted repeatedly on BLLC Facebook page prior, during and after the sinking of the boat. Further, John also contributed to threads on gCaptain and WoodenBoat.com forums.

“Jane” (Interview 5): Female. Age: mid-40s. Interviewed in June 2013. Jane is a former Bounty crewmember and has followed the BLLC Facebook page since its’ beginning. Jane repeatedly commented on status updates to the page before, during and after the sinking. Jane did not post to any other online forum threads related to the sinking.
“Otto” (Interview 6): Male. Age: 63. Interviewed in December 2012. Otto is a partner-captain of an east coast-based tallship. Otto was also a twenty-year colleague of Captain Walbridge from The HMS Bounty. Prior to the sinking, Otto was not a consumer or producer for social media. One month after the sinking, Otto composed an open letter to the captain of the Bounty analyzing the weather event the Bounty likely encountered and criticizing Walbridge’s decision-making process. This letter was posted to Otto’s Facebook page and was largely distributed throughout the tallship community. The USCG and NTSB entered this letter into evidence during the investigative hearings and Otto was subsequently called as an expert witness.

“Oliver” (Interview 7): Male. Age: 50+. Interviewed in July 2013. Oliver is the captain and owner of a tallship based out of Canada and was also a longtime colleague of Walbridge. Oliver was interviewed by several news organizations and his criticisms of BLLC and Walbridge were published online during the same time frame that BLLC was posting that all the crew of the Bounty were rescued and safe. Oliver does not personally use social media although he employs a staff that is well versed in the medium. Otto similarly served as an expert witness during the investigative hearings.

“Archer” (Interview 8): Male. Age: 38. Interviewed in December 2012. Archer is a partner-captain on the same tallship as Otto. He likewise knew Walbridge and many of the crewmembers aboard Bounty. Archer is an avid producer and consumer of social media and the main administrator his organization’s own Facebook page. He followed the events of the sinking through social media prior, during and after the sinking and was active on both Facebook and gCaptain.

“Samantha” (Interview 9). Female. Age: early 30s. Interviewed in July 2013. Samantha is an event coordinator and media strategist for a tallship advocacy organization. Samantha knew BLLC, the captain, and many of the Bounty crew well but did not have the same level of personal
relationship with the boat and organization as Joanna. Samantha followed and interpreted the social media event for her organization during and after the sinking of the boat.

“Ernie” (Interview 10). Male. Age: Mid-50s. Interviewed in February 2013. Ernie is a former captain and the executive director of the same tallship advocacy organization as Samantha and the contact person for the media surrounding the sinking. Ernie does not use social media, preferring to let his staff inform him of anything significant happening in that sphere, and admittedly did not hold social media in high regard prior to the sinking. Ernie was called to testify at the investigative hearings.

“Gareth” (Interview 11). Male. Age: 62. Interviewed in October 2013. Gareth is a delivery captain for private boats and is responsible for starting the Bounty thread on Woodenboat.com forum. Gareth is also responsible for reporting the majority of news content and posting snapshots from BLLC’s Facebook page to the forum. Gareth knows the majority of persons posting to the forum who are recreational sailors and while familiar with, are not members of the tallship community.

“Sara” (Interview 12) Female. Age: 33. Interviewed in July 2013. Sara is a civil servant in local government and lives in an area with a USCG district base and strong maritime trade presence. Sara was prolific in the comments in her criticism of the captain and BLLC in the handling of the event.

“Jim” (Interview 13). Male. Age: 65. Interviewed in June 2013. Jim is a retired USCG aircraft mechanic. He also is a tallship fan who donates to several tallship organizations and was very active in the comments on Facebook, Woodenboat.com, and gCaptain.

“Rosie” (Interview 14). Female. Age: 42. Interviewed February 2013. Rosie owns and edits a publication, which reports on various aspects of maritime culture. Carver followed both the BLLC Facebook page and gCaptain forum and reported on her online edition of the magazine,
but decided to create a private Facebook page for vetted mariners to discuss the Bounty sinking when she saw the BLLC Facebook had become too hectic.

“Moses” (Interview 15). Male. Age: 44. Interviewed October 2013. Moses is a longtime reporter for an east coast based a newspaper located in a city with a large USCG presence. Moses published prolifically about the sinking and the USCG hearings.

“Paolo” (Interview 16). Male. Age: 50. Interviewed February 2014. Paolo is a retired from the USCG SAR division and is an expert in cold-water rescue practices. While no longer employed by the USCG, Paolo is a contributing editor to gCaptain, was familiar with the social media coverage of the event, present at the investigative hearings, and wrote on behalf of the USCG perspective for the website gCaptain.

“CDR” (Interview 17). Male. 40+. Interviewed June 2014. CDR is a commander in the USCG and was the lead investigator into the sinking of the HMS Bounty for the USCG. CDR was responsible for not only leading the investigation but also for the writing of the final report on the marine casualty.

The second phase of coding where interviews were analyzed for the response to the crisis communication strategy, were derived from the research questions and general interview guide. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Major themes were identified and unusual events were noted. Cases were grouped into types or categories. This open axial coding allowed for themes to emerge that were driven by data and not theory. These were developed before data collection began and the codes were used deductively in the first round of analysis. The process follows where the record is obtained is the form of the online comment or from a personal interview, then transcribed, then coded. From the list of codes, frequencies of codes emerged and became the theme by which to analyze stakeholder response. Periodic checks on coding accuracy was performed by asking for confirmation from the person who made the comments in either
Facebook or other forums, and also by providing interview subjects with preliminary assessments of transcribed interviews and initial assessments for accuracy.

### 4.1.6 Reliability

Reliability in the first phase, a soundly quantitative method, would be achieved by establishing intra-coder, intra-observer (or within observer) reliability - the degree to which measurements taken by the same observer are consistent within a 95% confidence interval. However, after coding the same data set twice, no variance between the sets was discovered.

For the second phase of coding, reliability is achieved through triangulation. Initial assessment of the posts informed interview questions, which in turn, informed coding for final assessment of the posts. All interviews were recorded and transcribed with rigorous attention to detail in the form of interview notes, and the opportunity for all interview subjects to respond to follow-up written assessment of the personal interview to assure correct statements or add clarifying information.

### 4.1.7 Validity

For the first phase of coding, validity was obtained by following the same coding procedures for SCCT employed by previous researchers analyzing social media data (N. a. Brown & Billings, 2012; N. Brown et al., 2013; Walton et al., 2012). Similarly, for capturing the Halo Effect, coding procedures used by Coombs and Holladay (2006) were utilized.

For validity in the second phase of analysis, construct and internal validity is obtained through the strict adherence to sequential steps of the process established by McMillan and Schumacher in qualitative research (2001). The collection, documentation and cataloguing of
social media comments was performed followed by a written initial assessment, followed by interviews, and concluding with follow-up interviews where respondents could review statements and clarifying information. Literal statements of participants and quotations from documents were recorded.
Chapter 5

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The data collected for this study has been organized into six sections that specifically address individual research questions. Data was collected and analyzed for patterns. These patterns formed data themes. Supporting evidence for data themes are briefly described followed with specificity of where and how the evidence was collected.

5.1 RQ1 – What crisis response strategies are present in the BLLC Facebook data?

Theme: Halo Effect and SCCT are both present in Facebook data, although temporally occurring at different times with different actors. Fans would often mix both Halo and SCCT strategies, but did not employ either unless first specifically “provoked” by negative comments or criticism in the comment section.

There are three types of evidence for theme: qualitative analysis of status updates taken from BLLC’s Facebook page, and quantitative analysis of the corresponding comments to these updates by fans of the page.

BLLC employed SCCT strategies in all three phases of the crisis. The first instance was employed on October 27 when the status update enacted two SCCT strategies: denial and justification (see Figure 9). BLLC first denied the existence of danger through insistence of going to sea as a sensible course of action, and then also justified this decision by insisting a ship is safer at sea than at the dock during a hurricane. This status update was followed by two more updates made the same day and both followed the justification strategy. They first advised sailors to “TO LOCATE THE LOW AND GO AWAY FROM IT!” a reference to how to navigate around a
hurricane with corresponding link to the YouTube video where a physics professor explains the strategy ("HMS Bounty Facebook page," 2012). The next update insisted: “There’s No Leeshore Offshore” referencing how a boat at a dock during hurricane is damaged through repeated contact against the dock to which it is secured. This post also had an external link to an article providing evidence for the strategy (“HMS Bounty Facebook page,” 2012).

![Figure 7: BLLC first Facebook status update on October 27, 2012.](image)

The next instance of SCCT strategy used by BLLC occurs on October 31, two days after the sinking, when the Facebook administrator attempted to restrict the ability to comment on status updates. The status update employs the strategy of attacking the accuser: “Due to the nasty
nature in which some of these comments are being made, we are forced to take down the ability to post” (“HMS Bounty Facebook page,” 2012).

The last instance of SCCT strategy used by BLLC was posted November 2, four days after the sinking and hours before the USCG called off the search for the missing captain. Again, the justification strategy was used to explain the captain’s decision making by linking a YouTube video of an interview with the captain filmed August 2012, where the captain explained how to sail around a hurricane (“HMS Bounty Facebook page,” 2012).

During the acute phase of the crisis BLLC Facebook fans assume responsibility for crisis communication and employ response strategies on behalf of the captain, crew, and organization. Of the 2,092 comments in the working sample, 1,183 instances of crisis communication response on behalf of fans were coded. The halo effect behavior cluster was most prevalent in frequency (n = 749, 63%) over SCCT strategies (n = 434, 37%) (see Table 7).

Table 6: Halo and SCCT cluster strategy frequencies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N = 2,092 Comments</th>
<th>Message Strategies</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Halo Cluster</td>
<td>749</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCCT Cluster</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1183</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Textual analysis of the dated and time-stamped sequence of comments showed that neither Halo Effect nor SCCT was employed anywhere in the comment thread unless first proceeded by a comment of criticism of the captain or the organization. Hundreds of comments expressing concern or condolences were posted to most status updates before a single critical comment sparked either shielding or SCCT behaviors (“HMS Bounty Facebook page,” 2012).
5.2 RQ2 – What was the most dominant or frequently used response?

Theme: Benefit of the doubt in Halo Effect cluster is the more dominant response overall. Attacking the accuser is the more dominant response of SCCT strategies. Analysis shows correlation between Halo and SCCT strategies.

Evidence for this theme emerges from the quantitative analysis of the fan comments to the BLLC Facebook status updates.

In the Halo cluster, the shielding behavior of calling for benefit of the doubt (n = 437, 37%) outweighed direct defense of the captain and/or organization (n = 312, 26%) (see Table 7). In these instances the most common plea was to “wait for all the facts to come in before commenting” or to insist that “now is not the time to lay blame.” In defense of the captain, most comments insisted that a captain of Walbridge’s experience, or seasoned sailors “shouldn’t be second guessed”, or touted personal experience with either the captain or crew.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N = 2,092 Comments</th>
<th>Message Strategies</th>
<th>(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Halo Cluster</td>
<td>Benefit of the Doubt</td>
<td>437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Defense</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCCT Cluster</td>
<td>Attack</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excuse</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Justify</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scapegoat</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ingratiation</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Compensate</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>1183</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the SCCT cluster, attacking the accuser (n = 161, 14%) mostly in the form of comments referencing “armchair sailors” or “armchair quarterbacks”, “trolls”, and other more derogatory terms. The second most frequent strategy in this cluster was the excuse strategy (n = 121, 9%) where fans proclaimed that it wasn’t the captain’s fault for putting the boat in the path of a hurricane but a failed generator or malfunctioning bilge pump that caused the tragedy. Justifying behavior follows next (n = 96, 8%) where fans would reiterate the pre-sinking rationale that “a ship is safer at sea”, or would profess that the crew and/or captain where “doing what they loved.”

Looking solely at SCCT strategies, attacking behavior is closely coupled with excusing behavior. Of the 111 of the 161 attacking comments are coupled with excusing strategy 69% of the time: “You’re an idiot, don’t you know the boat would’ve have been smashed at the dock? They were trying to save the ship!”

The next strategy was scapegoating (n = 46, 4%) the owner of BLLC for “ordering” the captain to sea in order to be on time for the next event in Florida. The owner is also blamed for possible insurance fraud by sinking a ship, which was losing him money. Finally, there are few instances of ingratiation (n = 5) by insisting “Bounty forever!”, denying that an accident had occurred (n = 4), and lastly, a single mention of compensation for the victims.

In the data exists a layering of response types where one or both strategies from the Halo Effect corresponded with one or more strategies from the SCCT (n = 173, 15%). An example of this mixed strategy:

“James no need add WTF the sea is a ruff place think the captain (Rest in peace) tried too go around. It not your place too judge it the USCG’s job too find out what happed they lost power and a pump that a big deal on a ship maybe they ship would my
have gone down if the pumps worked don't jump till you know all the facts this is a sad day for all sailors” (“HMS Bounty Facebook page,” 2012).

In this example of a mixed strategy, we see the reiteration or doubling-down of the strategy as posited by BLLC on October 27 as the captain “tryed too go around”, there is also a call of benefit of the doubt as “it is not you place too judge”, excusing behavior as the failure of systems was the real cause of the disaster in this commenter’s opinion, and then circling back to calling for benefit of the doubt “till you know all the facts.”

A time series plot analysis of the recorded halo, denial, diminish, and mixed strategy clusters (see Figure 10) shows relative synchronization between the clusters and suggested a potential pattern prompting further statistical analysis.

![Figure 8: Time series analysis of Halo, Denial, Diminish, and Mixed clusters.](image)

A regression analysis was then conducted using the halo cluster as the dependent variable and then using either denial or diminish (the SCCT clusters with the highest frequencies) as the independent variable (see Figures 11 and 12). While both the denial (R² = 69.6%, F = 57.29, p
<.05) and the diminish clusters (R² = 53.4%, F = 28.61, p <.05) showed correlation with halo, only denial showed results significant enough to suggest predictive qualities.

Figure 9: Regression analysis of Halo and Diminish clusters.

Figure 10: Regression analysis of Halo and Denial clusters.
5.3 RQ3 – How did the online environment affect crisis communication for BLLC?

Theme: In absence of a crisis communication plan, internal stakeholders created one. Previous status updates by BLLC set the stage for future fan response by inadvertently creating the crisis frame. Technical limitations of Facebook page management limited the ability to control the message or narrative. Misunderstanding the type of the crisis BLLC was experiencing along with the corresponding level of responsibility and reputational threat led to Facebook posting errors with wide-reaching effects. BLLC and internal stakeholders believed social media and a public fan page was proprietary and a medium they could control.

To answer this research question evidence for this theme is taken from content analysis of the BLLC Facebook posts and corresponding comments from fans, and personal interviews with persons from the various stakeholder groups.

In a personal interview with BLLC’s Facebook administrator, “Admin”, he states: “Never in my wildest imagination did it ever occur to me that this would happen. I was totally unprepared for it, and for that matter, (BLLC’s office manager) was also. There was no crisis management or any anticipation of it. In hindsight there should have been some contingency plan by the (BLLC) to fall back on, but there wasn't.” When asked why a professional crisis manager or public relations professional wasn’t called in during the worst of the event, Admin has no knowledge of this as a possible resource and replied: “This is a thing? This is a job people do?” (“Admin Personal Interview,” 2014).

With regards to the Facebook page, use of SCCT justifying strategy in previous status updates posted on October 27 established BLLC’s stance on the type of crisis they perceived to be occurring. The SCCT model separates crises into three categories: 1) minimal responsibility (crisis due to natural disaster), 2) low responsibility (accidental crisis), and 3) strong responsibility (preventable crisis) (W. Coombs, 2007a). BLLC’s assertion of the necessity in
taking the boat to sea during the hurricane established their belief that they were the victims of a
natural disaster with minimal responsibility (“HMS Bounty Facebook page,” 2012) and set the

crisis frame for the internal stakeholders.

In an interview with Zaza, a former Bounty crewmember, she recalled, “Strangely, we
were only looking at the boat. We were fans of the boat and the crew was trying to save it
because we thought she (the boat) was in danger. We didn’t consider the people until the
sinking.” Admin admits to not agreeing with this rationale, or the crisis framing, but in light of
the response from internal stakeholders, or as he referred to the “true fans”, Admin felt obligated
to “the support Bounty Faithful” which meant continuing this course communication strategy

Admin could not respond directly to comments expressing concern prior to the boat
sinking (“Admin Personal Interview,” 2014). As early as October 26, three days prior to sinking,
fans of the page expressed concern (see Figure 15). Prior to March, 2013, Facebook did not allow
for fan or community, pages to respond directly to comments (Murphy Kelly, 2013). Responses
would be placed in sequential order of posting within the status update thread. Admin responded
by creating another status update addressing concern. This became a pattern of over the course of
updates October 27 thru October 28 (“HMS Bounty Facebook page,” 2012).

In deference to the comments received On October 26, where 75% of comments
expressed concern over the decision to sail, BLLC posted three sequential posts on October 27
addressing those concerns (“HMS Bounty Facebook page,” 2012). The first claimed the boat was
safer at sea, and then followed by two posts: locate the low, and there is no leeshore, explicitly
trying to explain the sail plan for the boat in navigating around the hurricane.
In the acute phase of the crisis, the number of page likes grew exponentially. Prior to the sinking, the number of page likes was in the vicinity of 3,000 and within 24 hours of the sinking the number of likes grew to over 29,000 (“HMS Bounty Facebook page,” 2012). The sinking of the boat became the number one trending topic in Facebook from October 29 through October 30 (“HMS Bounty Facebook page,” 2012).

Multiple status updates inaccurately stating the number of crew and the status of their safety drew hundreds of comments and complaints (“HMS Bounty Facebook page,” 2012). Admin expressed being overwhelmed by the number of comments online while offline trying to obtain information about the safety of his son who was aboard the boat (“Admin Personal Interview,” 2014).

The inaccuracies reported in the early hours of October 29 were not corrected until over 12 hours later on the same day (“HMS Bounty Facebook page,” 2012).

Offline, Admin was trying to emotionally support the office manager for BLLC, who was located on Long Island during the landfall of Hurricane Sandy with limited electrical power and
only a cellphone to communicate to with the boat owner, the USCG, and Admin (“Admin Personal Interview,” 2014). Most family members and friends of the boat’s crew commented on the BLLC Facebook page that is was their primary source for information. One family member remarked in the comments on October 29: “More information please! My son is on that boat!” (“HMS Bounty Facebook page,” 2012).

BLLC’s website during the crisis experienced denial of service issues to the public seeking information about the boat and organization due to the website exceeding its bandwidth (see Figure 16) making the Facebook page the sole channel for communication. Admin was alone in dealing with the communication of the organization online, and was concerned over the heated reaction by fans but felt “powerless to stop it” (“Admin Personal Interview,” 2014).

Admin attempted to turn off the comment function of the BLLC Facebook page not knowing that this is not an administrative option. Admin eventually removed the status update but not before 192 likes, 52 comment, and 2 shares were made on the post (see Figure 17). In reflecting on this action, Admin remarked: “The only issue I had with Facebook at that time was the inability to stop anybody from posting. I know in the past there was an option that the page could be an informational page only. The onslaught of negative posts was overwhelming and I
spent quite of bit of time in the following days trying to modify the pages settings with no luck” (“Admin Personal Interview,” 2014).

Admin was unaware of the global reach the Facebook page eventually achieved. As recently as summer 2014, Admin did not have a full understanding of how Facebook metrics work, and had no knowledge that the “ship is safer at sea” status update had been copy and pasted into over 51,000 news articles around the internet (“Admin Personal Interview,” 2014, “Google Search October 30, 2012,” 2012). In his interview, Admin stated that he believed the reach of the “safer at sea” post to have had only 18,000 views.

On October 30, Admin posted a status update announcing the establishment of a relief fund for the crew (“HMS Bounty Facebook page,” 2012). The traditional media was simultaneously reporting information on BLLC’s owner, Robert Hansen, and his status as a millionaire (Kruse, 2013). A statement made by the BLLC owner, Robert Hansen, to a Virginia newspaper claimed he was investigating hiring a private tug to locate and salvage the HMS Bounty (Cahn, 2012). The timing of these announcements, which occurred while the USCG was still looking for the boat captain, reignited heated discussions on many of BLLC’s Facebook status updates from October 25 to November 31, many blaming or scapegoating the owner for the sinking (“HMS Bounty Facebook page,” 2012).
On November 1, after the USCG called off the search for the missing captain, Admin posted a status update with an embedded video from YouTube. The video was an August 2012 interview from a public access cable channel in Maine featuring Captain Walbridge discussing his lack of belief in bad weather and how he liked to “chase hurricanes.” Prior to posting this status update, the YouTube video had 83 views, within 12 hours the video viewership grew to over 38,000 views (“HMS Bounty Facebook page,” 2012; Lightner, 2012). The phrase of “chasing hurricanes” was widely reported in the press (Applegate, 2012; Cahn, 2012; Kruse, 2013; Miles, 2013; Patterson, 2012; Pitts, 2012; Ware, 2012) and became a focal point of the USCG and NTSB hearings (“Sinking of the HMS Bounty Hearing Transcripts,” 2013).

Admin administered the page according a formula and status updates were normally planned in advance. Updates always placed a picture with the corresponding text that was consistent with the “Bounty Story” (“Admin Personal Interview,” 2014).

Internal stakeholders of the page attacked those that posted criticism with remarks advising naysayers to “go somewhere else with your negative thoughts. This page is for friends and family of the Bounty” (“HMS Bounty Facebook page,” 2012). Internal stakeholders regularly demanded the deletion of comments by those questioning or criticizing the captain’s actions (“HMS Bounty Facebook page,” 2012).

Admin, who admittedly believes that most people who participate in social media are “mostly hysterical and irrational” made sure to delete comments when he could to “preserve the integrity of the page” (“Admin Personal Interview,” 2014), as well as participating in attacking those who criticized the captain, organization or boat (“HMS Bounty Facebook page,” 2012).

Admin noted the frustration felt by BLLC when a surviving crew member of the sinking, posted complaints to his personal Facebook page (see Figure 11) about the lack of assistance BLLC provided in helping survivors get home from the North Carolina USCG base where they were taken after the rescue (“Crew Member Facebook page,” 2012). Admin state in his interview
that this act by the crewmember “became another fire to put out when our resources were already running thin.” (see Figure 18) (“Admin Personal Interview,” 2014).

During the investigative hearings held by the USCG and NTSB in February 2013, Admin was called to testify regarding posts made on Facebook. In a post to a private Bounty Facebook group, Admin expresses his confusion as to why Facebook is important to the crisis event (see Figure 19), which is confirmed by others on the page.
5.4 RQ4 – How did the online environment of BLLC’s crisis communication affect reception by various stakeholders?

Data theme: Stakeholders self-identified into distinct groups with different information seeking motivations and information needs.

Evidence for the theme is drawn from personal interviews with members from the various stakeholder groups, and content analysis of exchanges occurring on other web forums and community pages on Facebook. Stakeholders were categorized were as either BLLC, internal or external stakeholders, general public, media, or SAR/Regulatory (see Table 9).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder Group</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BLLC</td>
<td>The supporting organization managing the ship whose concerns are the crew and the vessel, and communicating to and alleviating concerns of the internal stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal/Fans</td>
<td>Families, friends and Bounty alumnus whose sole concern is for the not only the recovery of crew and vessel but the reputational protection of the organization managing the vessel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External</td>
<td>Member of the tallship community who may or may not have a relationship with BLLC or crew, and while concerned for crew and vessel, express additional concern for the effect of the sinking on the community as a whole.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Public</td>
<td>Any person who followed the event who may or may not be familiar with the tallship community and/or sailing, and while concerned for crew ad vessel, express concern of the risk of public assets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>Journalists reporting on the events for the general public, use Facebook as an information source. While concerned with facts of the sinking, may place emphasis on some facts over others to shape a narrative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search &amp; Rescue/Regulatory</td>
<td>This group consists of two government entities: the USCG and NTSB, who are responsible for maritime law and regulation enforcement, investigation of maritime accidents, and recommendations to lawmakers on potential future law amendments. The USCG holds the extra duty of response and rescue of persons and vessels in US waters.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.4.1 Internal Stakeholders/ "Fans"

Fans: the Facebook page was a pace of grieving and reminiscing and solely for the domain of the friends, family and crew of the HMS Bounty. The expectation was that those criticizing the captain and the organization would take their criticisms elsewhere. Zaza, a former crewmember who had left the boat a month before the sinking and was watching events unfold online felt “a powerful need to come to the defense” of BLLC although she too felt the decision to sail the boat was the wrong action. “It was difficult. It made me angry. To see these people who knew nothing about us write these things online” (“Zaza Personal Interview,” 2013).

Jane, a longtime supporter of the boat, saw defending BLLC as her “duty” when she realized “[Admin] was clearly on his own and receiving no help taking these people down” (“Jane Personal Interview,” 2013). Jane remarked in her interview how she made sure to personally “point fingers” at those in the comments “who clearly should not be on that page.”

John, a long-time volunteer on the boat, also felt compelled to defend BLLC on the Facebook page, but since he did not agree with the captain and the organization’s decision to set sail during the hurricane, “I felt it best to try and temper people down and give them [BLLC] a chance until we really knew what was going on” (“John Personal Interview,” 2013).

Both Jane and John felt that the Facebook page should be preserved for those grieving the loss of the boat and crewmembers (“Jane Personal Interview,” 2013, “John Personal Interview,” 2013).

Admin reiterates this sentiment in a post where he attempted to turn off the commenting function (see Figure 10). “We apologize to the people who are on this page for the right reasons, and that is to share stories of the crew you loved, the ship you loved, and to show support” (“HMS Bounty Facebook page,” 2012).
The BLLC community, shortly after the sinking, formed their own Facebook group, which was intended for those sympathetic to the fans and former crew of the boat. After the deletion of the BLLC Facebook page, and two discussion threads about the merits of defending the captain, the group administrator changed the page to that of a private group and removed members of the group expressing unpopular views ("Bounty Crew1," 2013).

5.4.2 External Stakeholders

While concerned for BLLC, the boat, and the crew, the younger members of the tall ship community worried about how the handling of the crisis, and particularly how it played out online, would impact other boat organizations ("Archer Personal Interview," 2012, "Samantha Personal Interview," 2013).

Older members of this community, who themselves had no social media experience or online presence, did not share the same concerns initially ("Ernie Personal Interview," 2013, "Oliver Personal Interview," 2013, "Otto Personal Interview," 2012).

Within 48 hours of the sinking, the older members of this group grew increasingly concerned over the significance social media would play in the overall reputation of the community. Ernie, the Executive Director of a tall ship advocacy group, realized "we couldn’t treat this (social media) anymore as fluff. We needed to pay attention to what is going on here and act accordingly" ("Ernie Personal Interview," 2013).

According to tall ship captain Archer, an avid social media consumer and content producer, "After the sinking, you could go to any east coast tall ship’s Facebook page and see they made it clear they (the boats) decided to stay at the dock and were safe" ("Archer Personal Interview," 2012).
Otto, Archer’s partner captain with no social media presence, had Archer create a Facebook page for him and wrote a scathing open letter to the captain of the Bounty (see Figure 20). This letter was distributed widely through community. Numerous conversations about its content and merits were discusses on the Jack Tar Private Mariner Group forum, HMS Bounty in Retrospect Facebook page, Woodenboat.com forum, gCaptain forum, Sailing Anarchy forum, and was entered as evidence in the subsequent hearings on the sinking (Otto, 2012; “Sinking of the HMS Bounty Hearing Transcripts,” 2013).

In a personal interview, Archer, an avid participant in social media, and active in popular sailing forums, participated in discussions concerning the sinking of the Bounty. He stayed off the BLLC Facebook page purposefully: “Imagine a small town of 30,000 having a town meeting with no moderator. That was no place for a professional to be, especially one who could be tainted by this tragedy” (“Archer Personal Interview,” 2012).
In response to prolific criticism of the Bounty and the tall ship industry in general on gCaptain, Archer was sure to explicitly distance his boat organization and the rest of the industry from BLLC:

“The only people who has real say in Bounty sailing or not were within the very small, privately owner Bounty organization. None of us (tall ship community) even knew Captain’s Walbridge’s intentions until after the ship was at sea. Many of us who knew him are baffled by his sailing and wished we could have persuaded him not to sail” (“gCaptain HMS Bounty Thread,” 2012).

Oliver, owner and captain of a Canadian tall ship, likewise provided interviews to online news outlets explaining how his organization was different from BLLC in its decision making processes (Ware, 2012).

In the private JackTar Facebook group for mariners, discussions took place over the need to distance the industry from the Bounty for weeks after the sinking (see Figure 21).

![Figure 17: JackTar Private Mariner group discusses distancing other boats from the Bounty.](image)

5.4.3. General Public

While internal stakeholders saw the general public as intruders on the BLLC Facebook page, those who identify as the general public felt they had cause to be on the public page and demand answers for an organization that risked public assets, namely the lives and equipment of
the USCG who was responsible for rescuing the crew. According to “Gareth”, a recreational sailor not associated with the Bounty, “It was impossible to ask questions or have a conversation. Everyone was so angry that the smallest comments were returned with personal attacks” (“Gareth Personal Interview,” 2013). “I asked a question of the page administrator to clarify if it was 17 people aboard (as BLLC proclaimed) or 16 as they were reporting in the news, and I not only had people attacking me in the comments but I received a personal Facebook message from someone threatening me physical harm.”

Sara, who joined the page October 28, hours before the sinking, thoroughly reviewed all posts dating back to October 25. “That they couldn’t get their facts straight was bad enough but the overall the rhetoric was unbelievable. Even from before the sinking it looked as though they were trying to defend the actions of the captain. I know friends and family of the rescue crew. That they were willfully put in this position is one thing, but for the entire (BLLC) Facebook page to defend it blows my mind. When you read the week through it was like they were trying to cover a bad act from Day One” (“Sara Personal Interview,” 2013).

Jim, another recreational sailor who was active in all the Woodenboat.com and gCaptain forums, holds a different view: “The update about a ship being ‘safer at sea’ disturbed me the most.” When asked to clarify his reasoning he added: “I’m not sure if it was the capital letters, the tone, or that horrible picture of the boat in a storm. Who does that? Were they bragging? It’s either bravado or insanity. Either way, it made them look bad. I can understand the captain making a bad decision but it seems that was the SOP (standard operating procedure) and the entire organization was behind him on that fact” (“Jim Personal Interview,” 2013).

Gareth agreed with this sentiment that the choice of tone in the writing, the use of pictures and maps where it showed the boat sailing towards the eye of the hurricane, and the subsequent defense by internal stakeholders made the entire organization and their followers “look like a Jones Town.” Gareth refrained from comment after October 29 and remained on
Woodenboat.com forums as his preferred place for discussion (“Gareth Personal Interview,” 2013). Gareth further explains “The (BLLC) Facebook page was a public, community page. These people act as though I had no right to be there. Those are my tax dollars at risk when they do something that requires USCG intervention. I had every right to be there” (“Gareth Personal Interview,” 2013).

The response from the constant attacks by internal stakeholders drove many off the BLLC Facebook page. The result was the creation of other Facebook pages, such as HMS Bounty in Retrospect, and the Jack Tar Private Group, and complaints posted on other forums such as Woodenboat.com and gCaptain. Rosie, administrator for the Jack Tar page, noted that: “civilized conversation became impossible [on BLLC’s Facebook page]. Even those trying to have meaningful interaction were getting battered” (“Rosie Personal Interview,” 2013). Rosie set up a forum, the JackTar Mariner Group on Facebook, as “safe environment” for those wishing to discuss the details surrounding the sinking (“Private Jack Tar Group for Merchant Mariners,” 2012). HMS Bounty in Retrospect was created for the same purpose (“HMS Bounty in Retrospect Facebook Page,” 2012).

Paolo, though working exclusively as a writer after retiring from the USCG, maintains close contact with the SAR community and did so during the sinking. Paolo noted in a personal interview that BLLC fan reaction was so negatively overwhelming that there was great speculation among the SAR community as to whether it was possible that all tallship sailors were “this utterly irrational.” Remembering his numerous visits to the BLLC Facebook page during the event, “I came to a point where I had to turn it off and not go back. The Bounty acolytes were so convinced they were right, I couldn’t sit there and read any more their ridiculous defense of (the captain’s) actions” (“Paolo Personal Interview,” 2013).

During the acute phase of the crisis, when one performed an internet search for the captain, Robin Walbridge, the number one search result was Walbridge’s biography page on the

A common perception as noted in Woodenboat.com, gCaptain, the Jack Tar Private Mariner Group, and HMS Bounty-in Retrospect, was that internal stakeholders were behaving as “bullies” (“HMS Bounty in Retrospect Facebook Page,” 2012), and were mired in groupthink or “cult” like behavior (“Private Jack Tar Group for Merchant Mariners,” 2012), or had “drunk the
“Kool Aid” over the repeated assertion that a ship was safer at sea and the defense of the captain (“gCaptain HMS Bounty Thread,” 2012, “Woodenboat.com forum,” 2012).

For months following the sinking and then the investigative hearings, forums continued discussing the merits of the event. The Private Jack Tar Group for Merchant Mariners did not allow access to former Bounty crew members for fear of arguments erupting (“Rosie Personal Interview,” 2013). BLLC and internal stakeholders were regularly referred to as “overreacting, “thin skinned”, “cultish”, and having “drunk the kool aid” on the page, particularly following testimony given by surviving crew that supported the captains decision during the USCG/NTSB hearings (see Figure 24).

Figure 20: JackTar Private mariner group criticize defenders of the Bounty.
The gCaptain forum regularly hosted posts that attacked the tall ship community as a whole as “nautical thespians” (“gCaptain HMS Bounty Thread,” 2012).

Long-form magazine articles prominently titled opinions such as Kathryn Miles piece for Outside Magazine: “Sunk: The Incredible Truth About the 'Bounty,' a Ship That Never Should Have Sailed” (Miles, 2013).

Numerous television specials were critical of the perceived mindset of the captain. 60 Minutes Australia previewed their coverage of the sinking on the one-year anniversary on their Facebook page as “What on earth was the captain thinking? Madness?” (Greenaway, 2012).

5.4.4 Media

Members of the media had higher expectation of information accuracy but did not see the lack thereof as a value judgment against the organization. Moses, reporter for the Virginia Pilot, regularly uses Facebook as a source in his work, “Like Wikipedia, I will go to someone or some group’s Facebook page for background information or to cultivate sources.” With regards to information accuracy or message, Moses doesn’t necessarily expect it as the Facebook primarily helps him “understand context and hopefully gives a flavor of the personalities involved” (“Moses Personal Interview,” 2013).

In a personal interview with Rosie, editor of Jack Tar Magazine, she remarked: “While personally I found the lack of accuracy frustrating, professionally, I just focused on finding other more sound sources.”

Paolo, a regular contributor for gCaptain.com disagrees. “Proper sailing practice demands an accurate manifest of all persons aboard a vessel. Facebook was supposed to be their professional communication portal to the rest of the world. They should have had their facts straight before posting them” (“Paolo Personal Interview,” 2013).
Eventually, the amount of activity and arguing on the BLLC Facebook page gained notice of the media who used the disagreements expressed on the Facebook page as a part of the crisis narrative regarding the sinking of the boat (Mather, 2012; Walker, 2012).

5.4.5 Search and Rescue, Regulatory

In dealing with life and death recovery missions, the USCG does not rely upon unvetted information. As Facebook is not allowed in offices or analysis centers for the USCG, there was not a threat of them taking action based on the inaccurate information posted on the BLLC Facebook at the time of the sinking (“Paolo Personal Interview,” 2013). Similar to the media stakeholder group, USCG SAR did use the BLLC’s website and Facebook page for contextual information about the boat and the captain prior to launch of the rescue mission of the boat’s crew (Kruse, 2013).

Post hoc, however, both the USCG and NTSB saw the errors on the Facebook page as reason to explore the entire history of the page for the decision making processes of the organization and captain, and to look for safety violations during the investigative process (“CDR Personal Interview,” 2014, “Sinking of the HMS Bounty Hearing Transcripts,” 2013) Within the course of the hearings, the pictures from Facebook depicting maintenance of the boat were examined, as well as the “ship is safer at sea” stance, and the length of the workday on October 25 that may have contributed to crew fatigue in the sinking (“Sinking of the HMS Bounty Hearing Transcripts,” 2013).

BLLC’s office manager and Admin provided testimony to determine who made or provided information for status updates from October 25 thru November 1, 2012. From this testimony, the USCG and NTSB expressed criticism of maintenance skills, the health of the crew
during the voyage, and the merits of going to sea during the hurricane (Jones, 2014; “Sinking of the HMS Bounty Hearing Transcripts,” 2013).

In looking through BLLC Facebook comments, investigators came across comments that posted links to news articles showing an event in 1998 where the captain took the boat out in rough seas, away from safety of the dock, and required USCG assistance (Kruse, 2013; “Sinking of the HMS Bounty Hearing Transcripts,” 2013).

Social media became an avenue for uncovering facts about the boat and its captain. Woodenboat.com, in their Bounty sinking thread, posted pictures of the boat’s engine room from several years before (see Figure 25, 26) which members noted numerous safety violations (“Bounty’s Engine Room,” 2012, “Sinking of the HMS Bounty Hearing Transcripts,” 2013, “Woodenboat.com forum,” 2012; Jones, 2014).

In the official USCG report of the marine casualty, three pieces of evidence were taken directly from the BLLC Facebook page: one, evidence that a naval architect was made aware via status update that dangerous alterations were made to boat, two, the BLLC posting of the YouTube link where the captain was interviewed and claimed to “chase hurricanes”, and three, all status updates as identified as coming from the captain (Carroll, 2014).

In a personal interview with the lead USCG investigator into the sinking, CDR, with regards to the use of social media in the investigation, he stated “This was an absolute first for us, but valuable insight was given into a fatal marine casualty via their (BLLC’s) Facebook page. Social media in this case was another source of information but incredibly data rich for our purposes” (“CDR Personal Interview,” 2014).
Figure 21: Picture of Bounty's engine room posted on Woodenboat.com.

Figure 22: Woodenboat.com forum members lost visible problems with Bounty's engine room.
The USCG and NTSB repeatedly questioned witnesses at the investigative hearings about their thoughts on the “a ship is safer at sea” logic posted on Facebook, a justification that was deemed as “reckless” in the official report filed by the NTSB (Jones, 2014).

5.5 Additional Findings

Through the course of textual analysis and personal interviews, a number of findings arose that did not fit within the research scope of this study.

5.5.1 Information Accuracy

*Data Theme: Information accuracy was shown to be a flexible and temporal concept.*

Evidence for this finding were taken from personal interviews.

Zaza stated that the inaccurate information “while unfortunate” was not an issue so long as it was eventually corrected (“Zaza Personal Interview,” 2013).

Archer felt BLLC should have done more to ensure accuracy in their communications, but dismissed accuracy as an issue as it was corrected in the same day (“Archer Personal Interview,” 2012).

Jim, from the general public group, saw it as unprofessional bordering on negligence as he was following the events October 25, only due to the fact that the page was the only way BLLC communicated to the public (“Jim Personal Interview,” 2013).

While Sara of this group did not see accuracy as a problem however had just started following on the evening of October 29, and was not aware of the inaccurate postings until later (“Sara Personal Interview,” 2013).
Moses remarked that social media is just context and not for facts, although the lack of facts made for an “interesting story” (“Moses Personal Interview,” 2013).

According to Ernie, “nothing on that page was important until the sinking” (“Ernie Personal Interview,” 2013).

5.5.2 Unclear Authorship

_data theme:_ Lack of clear authorship or singular voice led many to believe that the captain was creating the content of the Facebook page instead of content coming from another source.

Evidence for this finding is taken from two online forums, one private Facebook page, one news report, and transcripts from the investigative hearings.

“’A ship is safer at sea - this is not at all irresponsible’? Can you believe that jackass captain??” (“gCaptain HMS Bounty Thread,” 2012).

“The hubris of this captain is amazing. Ships are safer sure, but people are not! Is this vessel owner operated?” (“Woodenboat.com forum,” 2012).

“You gotta read what this captain is saying on the Bounty page, he’s gonna git those people killed” (“gCaptain HMS Bounty Thread,” 2012).

“A ship is safer at sea’? Sure, if it’s 300 feet long and steel hulled. (The captain) was always a bit too arby-dar.” (“Private Jack Tar Group for Merchant Mariners,” 2012).

“These ‘nautical thespians’ all need to have their licenses pulled. It’s bad enough they killed a girl but for this captain to justify this online is just fucked up” (“gCaptain HMS Bounty Thread,” 2012).

Taken from a live television report on WTKR in Portsmouth, VA: “The captain, the man who said he could out maneuver the storm, has never been found” (Mather, 2012).
In a conversation thread discussion the various news report on the sinking, a member of the private Bounty crew page remarked: “I wonder if the press will write about how they were mistaken to attribute facebook posts to captain robin” (“Bounty Crew1,” 2013).

The ambiguity of status update authorship led the USCG and the NTSB to spend one hour interviewing witnessed during the first day of testimony to clarify postings during the investigative hearings (“Sinking of the HMS Bounty Hearing Transcripts,” 2013)

5.5.3 Self-deletion of Comments

Data Theme: While internal stakeholders called for deletion of comments, and Admin admitted to deleting comments, many comments were actually deleted by the person who posted them.

Evidence for this finding is taken from 9 captured incidents on BLLC’s Facebook page, and three interviews from the general public stakeholder group.

On October 31, after the posting of a status update regarding the creation of a donation fund for the surviving crew, there are calls by fans of the page for comments made by “Mike” to be deleted. In reading the thread, the offending comment is not available as Mike himself took down the post and remarked in a later comment in the same thread: “Mike: Here, let me,.....delete my inappropriate comments. I am sorry but my anger over the matter got the best of me. or I should say the worst of me. Im just angry beyond words that a beautiful human being lost her life needlessly.” (“HMS Bounty Facebook page,” 2012). Nine other examples of this type of exchange occur over five status updates.

Jim admitted to stating some “harsh opinions” and after gauging the response from others in the comments and then reflecting on the original comment, he later went back to the page to remove them. This was not due to pressure by internal stakeholders but because he agreed with
their opinion that his comments were untimely, and generally “unkind and posted in the heat of the moment. I was willing to withhold until the facts came in. Maybe I wasn’t the best judge.”

Gareth and Sara admitted to the same action. “It wasn’t that I was agreeing with them (internal stakeholders) that this page was only for them,” Gareth explained, “but since I knew family of crew were reading comments, and since one person asked nicely, I felt it best to dial it back.” Sara had her comments deleted by administration but also self-deleted. “I was asking direct and hard questions. It made me furious I was deleted, but following up with more anger seemed pointless in the light of so many raw emotions, so I took my comment down. I was sure of the facts as they stood, but waiting to make a judgment in writing seemed to help calm things down.”

One status update was disregarded for this study for having no recordable instances of halo or SCCT behavior despite being posted at the peak of page activity. The content of this post: “Please bear with us as we wait for information. It is a very confusing time right now” (“HMS Bounty Facebook page,” 2012).

From this finding there are three respondents and nine instances in the comments where self-corrected of comments occurred in reaction to statements regarding time, benefit of the doubt, and reserving judgment.

5.5.4 Facebook as Separate from Sinking

Data Theme: Various stakeholders see the boat sinking and the event on the BLLC Facebook as distinct and separate events.

Evidence for this them is taken from 15 of the 18 respondents in the personal interviews.

“The single worst thing they did, aside from sinking the boat, was what they let occur on the Facebook page,” stated Archer (“Archer Personal Interview,” 2012).
Ernie, while initially not concerned with the social media activity in the early hours of the sinking, eventually saw BLLC as “fighting a war on two fronts” (“Ernie Personal Interview,” 2013).

Moses in his interview similarly remarked, “At first it was hard to tell where the tragedy of the boat ended and the Facebook activity began, but that became more clear as they lost control of the message.”

Zaza noted, “Being so close to the events, it was hard for me to see that there was a real danger to the organization occurring online. After a time, I later saw it as another disaster” (“Zaza Personal Interview,” 2013).

John remarked: “It seems like whenever we talk about Bounty now, we talk about the boat and then talk about the Facebook page.”

“We (Samantha and Joanna) spent a lot of time communicating with BLLC about the page. It was only after the fact, when everything died down, that it occurred to me – holy hell – that the boat had sunk” (“Samantha Personal Interview,” 2013).

Oliver remembers, “It’s still so shocking that all that occurred in one place on Facebook. Robin (the captain) was a close friend and even he would be grieving for this” (“Oliver Personal Interview,” 2013).

“It still amazes me that something of that nature could occur online. It makes me feel like Facebook is an awfully dangerous place” (“Ernie Personal Interview,” 2013).

“After witnessing the event on that page, it makes me wonder if we shouldn’t cease using ours” (“Otto Personal Interview,” 2012).

From the interviews with respondents directly involved in the online events see the boat sinking as a primary crisis and the online events on BLLC’s Facebook page as a distinct secondary crisis.
5.5.5 The HMS Bounty brand impact

Data Theme: All internal stakeholders interviewed for this study commented on the intensity the Bounty “brand” had their relationship with the boat.

Evidence for this theme is taken directly from personal interviews.

According to Admin, the boat was the first tallship he had ever seen and it was the first and only tallship he son had worked aboard. “I had no idea boats like even existed anymore. It was powerful to see” (“Admin Personal Interview,” 2014). Volunteering to be the Facebook page administrator was an important way for Admin to maintain contact with the boat.

For Joanna, the boat and the captain were the professional experience she had in the capacity of festival organizer. The professional relationship became a decade-long friendship and Joanna remarks how she always “prominently featured the boat at festivals because it had such a huge draw” (“Joanna Personal Interview,” 2013).

Zaza stated how the HMS Bounty was the first tallship she had sailed and felt a close connection to the Bounty crew and organization. Zaza intensely followed the boat on Facebook to stay in touch with the community (“Zaza Personal Interview,” 2013).

John was introduced to the HMS Bounty after watching “The Pirates of the Caribbean” movies with his grandchildren. When the boat visited his town, he made sure to take his grandchildren and was given a special tour by the captain. Since that time, John had volunteered on the boat many times and followed their adventures via Facebook (“John Personal Interview,” 2013).

Jane worked aboard the HMS Bounty every summer after she turned 18 and through her college years. She followed the adventures of the boat over the years through email, newsletters, and later, the BLLC website and Facebook page. The Facebook page was particularly important as it helped her maintain a sense of the “magic”. Per Jane: “I can think of no better ship than the
HMS Bounty. To me, she was the quintessential tallship, and Robin was the epitome of what a captain should be” (“Jane Personal Interview,” 2013).

Respondents express attachment to the boat, the captain, the organization, or an image their experience with any combination of the three inspired. Involvement with the BLLC Facebook page reinforced those feelings and allowed continued connectiveness.

5.6 RQ5 – Given the increased technological complexity of online crisis communication and increased involvement of active stakeholder, does SCCT have utility as a crisis communication theory?

In the evidence supporting data themes from the previously research questions, a pattern emerges that is unmistakable: BLLC possessed no practiced, crisis communication plan and were wholly unprepared both in human and technical resources to handle to the communications needs when disaster struck. Becoming overwhelmed by the information flow on their one communication channel and behind the scenes requirements for handling the emergency, fans of the organization banded together and took over crisis communication following the line of rhetoric established on the Facebook page prior to the event. The BLLC Facebook page became a battleground as conflicting attributions for responsibility of the sinking were voiced online.

While both BLLC and fans exhibited SCCT behavior, crisis response in the form of halo effect proved evident and outranked SCCT responses overall. From here it is scene that Halo effect is not only a capturable phenomenon in this case, but can potentially be a distinct crisis communication strategy itself as well as layered with SCCT behaviors. However, neither Halo Effect nor SCCT was a given occurrence, but an act that required provocation in the form of real or perceived criticism of either the captain or BLLC in the comments. As BLLC did not have a crisis communication plan, and struggled with the technical limitations of the Facebook page, the
internal stakeholders took up crisis communication on their behalf by reiterating statements made by BLLC on earlier status updates prior to the sinking.

While this allowed internal stakeholders to band together and BLLC to maintain their support, this strategy did not necessarily benefit BLLC as other stakeholder groups viewed this detriment to BLLC reputation, further compounding the damage done by the sinking of the boat.

In the end, the theoretical gaps in SCCT become evident in that the theory does not address the limitations of a small organization, prior organization history in the form of communication which can inform crisis framing, nor the variety of stakeholder needs, expectations, and viewpoints. SCCT in its current form does not prove to be a good fit for the case study in this research, and requires significant updating in order to meet the needs of the increasing reality of online crisis communication.
The findings from this research reveal numerous issues affecting SCCT as crisis communication moves increasingly onto online spaces. The realities and limitations of small businesses, the complexity of stakeholder involvement, and the technology of social media itself severely limit SCCT’s utility as exposed by the following key findings:

- Crisis events further extend the already stressed resources of small organizations, which are unlikely to recognize the lead-up to a crisis event and are unlikely to be prepared for the onset of a crisis.
- The digital volunteers administering the Facebook page complicated crisis management when not sufficiently trained or co-located.
- Ambivalence towards social media and the improper handling of the crisis online created a secondary crisis for the organization.
- SCCT does not prescribe strategy for working in tandem with fans in crisis communication.
- SCCT does not prescribe strategy for communicating across multiple stakeholder groups with different attributions of responsibility.
- The neutral-toned fan response strategy proved effective in tempering a heated debate and comments as opposed to SCCT strategies.
- The technology of Facebook exacerbated missteps by the organization through the speed of information flow, the temporal disordering of posts, maintaining easy access to older and inflammatory status updates, and lack of overall control administrators have to their own page.
6.1 Limitations of Small Organizations

By Coombs’ and Holladay’s own admission (2002), SCCT assumes vast resources be available to organizations, an impossible challenge to small businesses, which make up 97% of all US-based employers (Frequently Asked Questions About Small Business, 2012) and are largely characterized as being understaffed, undertrained, and with limited technical resources, particularly in the areas of technology and social media (Casserly, 2013). BLLC was no different in this respect, despite the potential financial resources of BLLC’s owner, the company itself was run as a small business with only two paid personnel, and in fact, operated very closely to same business model as most non-profit tallships in the industry (“Ernie Personal Interview,” 2013).

As Admin stated in his interview, BLLC was completely unprepared for the event at all levels. There was no plan in place that would have established roles, duties, and courses of action, like the establishment of an easily accessible backup of information, such as the ship manifest of who was aboard as required by the USCG, and contact information of the family of crew, and who would handle the crisis giving context of the situation. When the office administrator was cut-off from the organization’s offices due to the landfall of Hurricane Sandy, the time and resources spent on gathering and recreating this information took away both human capital and time that could have been spent on handling crisis communication, a task already difficult for only two persons who are not co-located.

On top of this general state of unpreparedness, and admitted bias on behalf of BLLC’s Facebook administrator, Admin, about social media being a low-brow communication medium, it was never anticipated that Facebook would be used in crisis communication should the situation arise. With no one on BLLC staff having training in crisis communication, little forethought went into the actual content posted to the page when the boat sank, such as tone, message, information accuracy, or even thought to the various stakeholders who may be involved. As it was, statements
made by Admin on the page with regards to a ship being safer at sea during a hurricane, established the framing for many fans by which to rally around. *What this means for SCCT is that pre-screening, or environmental monitoring of social media by organization representatives is a must.*

Coombs recently addressed the issue of stakeholders using social media to express concern prior to an actual crisis and termed this phenomenon “paracrisis”, meaning, something like a crisis but not being an actual threat worthy of crisis management. (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). This is somewhat in conflict with Coombs and Holladay’s assertion that if a stakeholder perceives there is a problem then there is in fact a problem for the organization, and that stakeholders define the type of crisis a company is in fact experiencing (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). *The problem with this assessment, particularly in the case of the sinking of the Bounty, is that when fans are involved, lack of careful response set the crisis frame whereby Admin felt he had a duty to support the fans in this rhetoric.* This perceived obligation limited strategic response options, especially with communications occurring over a single channel – the organization’s Facebook page. However, the misuse of social media in this case became grounds for creating a secondary crisis to the actual sinking.

There is no easy answer to the problems of small businesses and their limited resources except that it is imperative that they create crisis plans, build in numerous contingency plans, and be sure all employees are familiar with the plans. Fan-based and even nonprofit small businesses have an untapped resource in the form of volunteers. With a proper crisis plan in place, calling in volunteers for simple yet time consuming tasks such as manning telephones, performing online research, etc., frees the established crisis manager to perform more high level activity. Unfortunately, research has shown that most small businesses fail to create to a crisis plan even after suffering a crisis event (Herbane, 2010). This may be due to either the lack of resources required to create a proper crisis plan or the failure to recognize the issues emanating from the
crisis and how to best mitigate those in the future. As evidenced by Admin’s discussion on Facebook during the investigative hearings, he fails to understand that the BLLC Facebook page, and thus, the organization, experienced a secondary crisis event. When taken into consideration, lack of resources has a significant impact on how the crisis is handled and can intensify the effects of the crisis.

One may ask, given all the hurdles BLLC faced, why a professional crisis manager was not brought in, but this question is dependent on the employee or representative of the organization in question knowing that such a professional exists, which in the case of Admin and BLLC, was clearly not something Admin was aware of as an option. However, even with a professional crisis manager in place, other considerations confound crisis messaging during the event.

6.2 Addressing Multiple Stakeholders

A second important issue facing SCCT is the lack of forethought given towards multiple stakeholders. The theory is largely concerned with image repair post-hoc, and even then, only primarily concerned with internal stakeholders (Coombs & Holladay, 2001). This may be acceptable if internal stakeholders sustain the organization entirely, but this is rarely the case with a small business. If a crisis is capable of not only closing down a business, but having a ripple effect and potentially endangering an industry, then SCCT must given consideration to all stakeholders, internal and otherwise, in additional to the form of that communication.

BLLC had two forms of public communication: an out of date website with an unmonitored public forum, and their Facebook fan page. BLLC’s website had not been updated in a number of years and had an embedded public forum which was not particularly active until the sinking of the boat. The website worked well for some internal stakeholders, but the main traffic
had been driven to Facebook, which had been posting new content daily since its inception in 2011. Had the website not crashed due to increased traffic after the sinking, BLLC may have been able to maintain a separate place for internal stakeholders who felt the presence of others on the Facebook page unwarranted and unwelcomed. Even then, an organization has no choice in where stakeholders will go for information, so while parsing out communication channels is a recommended option, it required would have required additional resources the organization did not have available.

Internal stakeholders were clearly on the Facebook page for news and for emotional support. These fans wanted the page to be closed space where they could reminisce, share condolences, and generally support each other during the event. Anyone not on the page for this expressed purpose was treated with hostility, which is evident by the numerous response strategies employed. The expectation was for an open fan page to immediately switch to a closed community and no one outside of this circle was recognized as a stakeholder in the event. Changing the scope and nature of the public page incited more animosity as internal stakeholders attempted to gain control.

The Facebook page also confounded external stakeholders, in this case, members of the tallship community, who felt a direct threat of reputational damage to the industry not only through the captain’s decision to sail the HMS Bounty into Hurricane Sandy, but also the perceived lack of control BLLC maintained over the Facebook page, which many felt only complicated matter and made the tallship industry as a whole look unprofessional. While still concerned for ship and the crew, this event led many interviewed for this study to publicly distance themselves from BLLC and criticize the decision making strongly in the media and on other online forums such as gCaptain, Jack Tar, and Woodenboat.com where criticism was not limited to just the actions of BLLC and the captain of the boat, but towards all tallships in general.
The members of the general public, who were interviewed for this study and followed events on the page, saw themselves as stakeholders because of the nature of the crisis offline and the use of public assets in the crisis response. Because of the secondary risks that emerged from the ship’s sinking, search and rescue personnel were placed in danger responding to the crisis. With lives and expensive public assets at risk, this group felt they had a right – on a public fan page – to openly question the actions of the captain and the organization. This set the stage for the biggest online conflict surrounding the event. Fans on the page took offense to perceived outsiders criticizing the organization and retaliated in kind.

For the media stakeholder group, while looking at BLLC’s Facebook page only for purposes of context, they found another angle to what was already a sensational story. Since Admin was not clear in who exactly was speaking for BLLC, the media understood the comments to be coming directly from the captain of the boat instead of a proxy. The problem of wrongful attribution, despite the captain indeed making a fatal error in judgment, is that the words of another person made the captain appear more arrogant or hubris which deeply ingrains an already damaged legacy.

The USCG Search and Rescue (SAR) division has a policy of not using social media as an information source during active missions. However, members of SAR were reported to have visited BLLC’s website and Facebook page for contextual information about the boat and the captain. Given the amount of disinformation posted to BLLC’s Facebook page, and given that the USCG sees Facebook as an extension of professional communication, they hold an expectation of information accuracy albeit after the fact. Further, the inflammatory comments prompted them to explore the BLLC Facebook page for mindset of the captain, maintenance of the vessel in both pictorial and textual form, and any other form potentially unsafe or illegal activity. According to the lead investigator of the incident, the use of social media in a marine accident investigation is a first for the USCG and will likely set precedent for future investigations. So while the expectation
for information accuracy wasn’t immediate with this stakeholder group, it did hold the organization responsible for the accurate information in the entirety of the Facebook posting dating back to its inception in 2011.

In the end, BLLC was faced with multiple stakeholder groups with varying information needs, motivations, expectations, and attributions. While SCCT has been shown to work with multiple stakeholders with varying viewpoints, it was dependent on the attributions being the same among the groups (N. Brown et al., 2013). *In light of differing attributions, SCCT provides no guideline for a multiple stakeholder communication strategy, which as previously stated, is one of the bigger criticisms of the theory*. Using only one communication platform was not sufficient to address all the stakeholders’ needs, although the main issue of information accuracy could have been mitigated. It is unlikely that a blanket statement on one communication channel would address the different viewpoints and clash of emotions, particularly with internal stakeholders being such a vocal group. With traditional media still being regarded as a more respected source of information over social media (Jin, Liu, & Austin, 2011), spreading communication across multiple channels may have diffused some of the activity and emotion on the Facebook page by encouraging some stakeholders to use the other channels.

### 6.3 The Impacts of Technology

From the metrics of Facebook and interviews with Admin, it is clear that technology had a substantial impact on the course of events during the crisis. The tempo of events in the real-life sinking of the boat and the subsequent rescue of the crew was outpaced by the speed with which information was exchanged online. From the minute BLLC announced the boat was leaving the dock, it was noted on two very popular sailing web forums: Woodenboat.com and gCaptain. Immediately there was conversation and criticism as both communities followed the boat’s
journey from New London, CT until the time of its’ sinking. This significantly expanded the reach of information, which SCCT does not account for as the theory was devised during a time when social media did not exist on the global scale that exists today. Within BLLC’s own Facebook page, there was immediately expression of concern by fans, which should have triggered a more tempered response from BLLC instead of the constant defense of strategy, which many who were not internal stakeholders saw as defensiveness. Followers of the page increased from 3,000 to over 30,000 within 24 hours of the boat sinking. Status updates prior to the sinking were visited by newcomers and went from dozens of likes or comments, to hundreds and even thousands. These actions increased the exposure the page had to unknown personal networks of those visiting the page and interacting with content.

The content itself also became issue for the page. The strong visual element Facebook provides played a role in how certain messages were perceived. In the October 27 “A ship is safer at sea” post, it wasn’t just the wording, but the use of capital letters juxtaposed with a picture of the boat in perilous looking storm that angered many stakeholders. In the interview for this study, Admin, who is over 60 years old, recounted how he was taught that the use of all capital letters in spelling is reserved for emphasis. However, in the younger generations, the practice of using all capital letters signals someone yelling and using strong emotion. Unaware of this fact, Admin’s use of strong wording in a controversial rhetoric coupled with capital letters and dangerous looking picture became the focal point of the page. For fans, this was evidence of age-old sailing wisdom, for newcomers to the page this was someone screaming nonsensical information at them.

SCCT recommends consistency in crisis response and to not mix strategies, but when fans organically respond with mixed-strategies, as they did 15% of the time, consistency is hard to achieve. Further SCCT advises that crisis managers should be prepared to change tactics as information arises, in the case of BLLC, crisis framing as established on the Facebook page prior
to the sinking became so ingrained in the fan response, that changing tactics may well have put BLLC in direct conflict with its own fan base.

A key technical limitation of Facebook as of 2012, did not allow Admin to respond directly to comments within a status update thread. Given the large number of comments posting to each status updates, the easier strategy was to create a new status update. As each new update staunchly defended the captain’s decision-making process, this set conflicting crisis framing as interpreted by different stakeholders. For internal stakeholders, the “ship is safer at sea rhetoric” appealed to fans of the boat. Other stakeholders, not being fans of the boat, focused on the absence of concern for the crew, and the series of status updates created a narrative of hubris attributed to the captain. As of March, 2013, Facebook allowed business and fan pages to respond directly to comments in status update threads (Lunden, 2013), however, it is only automatic for pages with over 10,000 followers, which makes is incumbent upon page administrators to be cognizant of the opt-in feature.

Another feature of Facebook that added to the confusion was the fact that as of 2012, status updates on business and community pages were often subject to “recycling” or “story bumping”, that is, status updates were not listed on the page in temporal order but in order which update received recent engagement. As newcomers to the page went back to view updates posted prior to the sinking and commented or otherwise engaged with them, those older posts recycled to the top of the news feed on BLLC’s page. The October 27 post (“A ship is safer at sea”), largely regarded as the most inflammatory, remained at the top of the feed for three days, possibly reinforcing the idea of “hubris” as many interviewed for this study noted. This is a problem that Facebook has addressed in that business and fan pages now maintain posts in chronological order with new comments featured in a sidebar on the page, however, followers of a page may still experience “story bumping” on their own news feed (Lee, 2013).
When the information flow on the page was at its peak, Admin did attempt to turn off comments on Facebook, and created a status update saying so until such time he discovered it was impossible and the status update received 52 comments and 2 shares, forcing him to retract or delete the status update. While this may seem like an intuitive action, this is not allowable action on Facebook. Facebook does not allow for the disabling of comments on any page, personal or business alike. Facebook only allows for the blocking of specific persons, which when thousands people are flooding a page with comments. Left with only the option of suspending the entire page, Admin attempted to do so, but his instructions (from 2011) did not reflect interface changes Facebook had made, and reflects a long term criticism of Facebook where the interface changes constantly unpredictably (“A Design Critique of Facebook’s New Features,” 2013). Since Facebook does not have live support (“Contact Facebook,” 2014), requests for help were not returned until after the acute crisis phase had passed. While Admin was hesitant to take down the only open communication BLLC had with the public, he left the page as is and began deleting comments he personally deemed offensive, an action met with further derision by other stakeholder groups.

Being attuned to the metrics of any social media platform during a crisis event should ideally inform the manager of the scope of information flow on that channel. However, Facebook metrics do not always reflect the true reach of any given status update. This becomes a difference between active and passive engagement. Active engagement, the most measurable, is recorded when someone loads “likes” and follows a page, fully loads a status update, clicks “see more” in extended captions, “likes”, “share”, or comments on an update. Passive engagement, nearly impossible to measure, is someone visiting the page, reading visible posts and comments, and then leaving without measurable interaction. Admin, in not understanding the difference between these two actions, believed only 30,000 people (the number of those following the page) viewed the content. The controversial October 27 post is thought to have only 18,000 views according to
the Facebook metrics. However, Admin was unaware that the post was quite literally copied and pasted into online news accounts and that a simple Internet search for that post garnered over 51,000 news hits days after the sinking. *It is unclear if understanding the reach of information from the BLLC Facebook page would have changed the decision making during the crisis, but it certainly had a larger impact than BLLC was aware of, even a year after the event.*

Due to the preoccupation with trying to control the Facebook page, BLLC was unaware of a surviving crewmember making statements on his own Facebook page after being rescued. This crewmember criticized the organization for their lack of response and support and he was “stranded” across the country from his home. A company crisis policy asking staff and crew to not speak publicly may or may not have prevented this from happening, but in its aftermath, this was more negative online attention being drawn to BLLC, thus diverting their resources for yet another problem to tackle.

*Lastly, animosity from fans on BLLC’s Facebook eventually led others to form their own pages to discuss events, such as HMS Bounty Retrospect and Jack Tar Private Merchant Mariner Group, or onto other forums such as gCaptain and Woodenboat.com.* Part of SCCT is taking prior crisis history into account, and BLLC was not aware of older pictures circulating around the online forums showing the boat’s engine room with numerous safety violations clearly visible, or the circulation of a story when the boat and the same captain in 1998 (prior to current ownership) required USCG assistance due to the vessel taking on too much water. This incident occurred in the same area of the as the sinking in 2012, and again, the captain was faulted for taking an unsafe vessel out to sea. Because of member overlap between forums, the engine room pictures and resurgence of the older USCG rescue story, quickly circulated throughout all four forums within hours of each other, and again, gained notice from the USCG. The most damning story about the captain came from an interview with public access cable station in Maine, August 2012. While the captain discusses at length the strategy for sailing around hurricane, sound bites of the
interview, where he states how the boat “chases hurricanes” and professes his disbelief in “bad weather” are widely circulated in the media. The interview taken as a whole is less damning when heard in full, but these two statements were the part the media focused upon. It should be noted that BLLC posted the video on November 2 while the search for the missing captain was still ongoing, and the video had only received 83 views on YouTube prior to the posting and had garnered over 38,000 within 24 hours after the posting.

Despite studies insisting that SCCT is well suited for the environment of social media (Brown & Billings, 2012; Walton, Cooley, & Nicholson, 2012), clearly, the technology of social media played a major role in exacerbating certain conditions of the crisis event. The speed of the information flow and the limitations and quirks of Facebook operations and interface changes overwhelmed BLLC. With little hope of controlling the medium there was no hope of attempting to control the message. SCCT holds that certain elements act as intensifiers to crisis event: one, past crisis history; two, past relationship; and three, amount of damage done by the accident (Coombs, 2004). BLLC certainly had two of the three according to Coombs: the 1998 incident with striking similarities to the current event, and severity of the sinking which during the acute crisis phase had a missing captain and one dead crew member. It may be reasonably argued that technology in this situation, particularly the use of Facebook, accelerated the information flow and amplified every misstep by BLLC in their attempt to control the situation.

6.4 Halo Effect as an Impetus to Act

With much of Admin’s time being spent offline dealing with the crisis, fans of the boat took to the page and vigorously defended the captain and the organization. All of the internal stakeholders interviewed for this study reported that the HMS Bounty was the first tallship they worked on, volunteered for, worked with or supported. Additionally, the good impressions of the
captain, the crew, and the ship was something they sought to maintain and that Facebook became an important tool to accomplish this. This is inline with research which has shown that Facebook can be a particularly powerful tool in this area (Haigh, Brubaker, & Whiteside, 2013). Lastly, four of the five respondents reported engaging in online defense of the boat and captain during the crisis. *If part of brand image is the strength of a positive, initial memory that slowly fades over time and guides the perception of new information as Petty and Cacioppo (1986) suggest, then in this instances, it is a strong argument that these respondents were exhibiting halo effect.*

In coding for both SCCT strategies and halo effect, not only was halo effect found as a distinct and measurable action, but also the behavior outranked SCCT in frequency. Results also showed correlation between the halo cluster and denial and diminish – the two SCCT clusters with the highest frequencies. The presence of SCCT strategies was to be expected given recent research into fan-enacted crisis communication, and the frequency of the Diminish cluster is in line with SCCT’s matching scheme of crisis type (accident) and response (recommending Diminish), but the confirmation of halo effect type behavior and the extent that has been measured is an interesting result to explore.

Calling for the benefit of the doubt was the most frequent strategy followed by simple defense of the captain and his skills. Calling for benefit of the doubt could be interpreted in one of two ways: first, that in light of harsh criticism, fans recognized that BLLC’s posted justification for the sail may be in doubt but fans still wished to support the organization; or two, it perhaps became an easier way to temper emotions that were flaring on the page. Likewise, reiterating the captain’s skill and years of experience was likely a way to remind people that the decision to sail was made an experienced sailor. *On its own, calling for benefit of the doubt, in this case study became a distinct defense strategy.* When persons interviewed for the general public stakeholder group in this study were asked why they removed their own comments from the page, they directly referenced the sentiment that not all the facts were in, nor was it the time to be so critical.
Additionally, in the comments section people admitted to removing their own comments for the same reason. Further, the regression analysis showed a positive correlation between not just the general halo and SCCT clusters of denial, diminish, and mixed strategies, but benefit of the doubt on its own showed results suggesting predictive qualities. Along this line, a status update captured at the peak of page activity during the crisis and disregarded for quantitative analysis when no evidence of either halo or SCCT behavior was recorded, contained content asking time and patience while BLLC gathered the facts. This is only an inferred result, but an interesting phenomenon to note.

*The strength of halo effect may lie in the inherent neutrality of the halo effect behavior and does not lock any one person or organization into a set opinion, stance, or message with regards to crisis communication.* If a good offense is a good defense, then calling for a sense of neutrality proved useful in this case in that it made some of those interviewed for this study to reconsider their actions and self-delete comments, which was the desired effect of internal stakeholders. However, a misinterpretation of the events, or groupthink consideration with regards to the dynamics of the crisis event, produced both favorable and unfavorable outcomes for BLLC.

While the importance of recognizing that halo effect may no longer be an implied explanation but a quantifiable action, it is important to gauge the end result of fan engagement. Like the Penn State crisis, fans created additional unforeseen problems in their online defense. In this case, BLLC was able to retain a very loyal fan base, but may have done so at a cost. *The perception of the internal stakeholders by other stakeholder groups became so negative, that in driving dissent off the Facebook page, the internal stakeholders alienated those who may have been sympathetic to them.* This resulted in disconnecting BLLC from the conversation being had about the organization, and under better circumstances, preventing them from engaging with these stakeholders. There is an argument to be about the devil you know if better than the devil
you don’t and that by keeping the discussion, no matter how virulent, on the BLLC Facebook page, it was better to be aware of current public opinion. In short, fans or internal stakeholders gaining social control over the page may have won the battle but ultimately resulted in losing the public relations war.

6.5 Situational Crisis Communication Theory’s Lack of Fit

From this discussion the theoretical and practical application issues of SCCT become clear. From a practical application of SCCT, small businesses with limited resources in the form of trained human capital are faced with an enormous task when handling a complex crisis event such as the one that befell BLLC, where every misstep is recorded and amplified on a global stage. From the theoretical perspective of SCCT, crafting a unified message that would either pacify or unite multiple stakeholder groups across an unpredictable communication platform that is highly interconnect with others over the Internet is simply not addressed. Lastly, crisis managers of fan-based organizations may find themselves working in tandem with internal stakeholders who wish to come to defense of the organization in question but may not cede control over the message, thus abrogating crisis strategy. In this case study, SCCT was not a good fit either practically or theoretically. The result is a theory that is too mired in pre-Internet ubiquity and now exists in a time of technologically increased complexity of crisis events and communication, which has also exposed previously unheard stakeholder groups.

These new realities of more complex crisis dynamics require a more complex crisis communication response. SCCT, at this stage is an incomplete theory given the technological advances of the last decade and its impact on crisis communication. SCCT’s firm stance as a post-hoc approach is in direct opposition to the reality of the Internet and social media where a near immediate and proactive response is required. Additional considerations such as
organization resources, communication history, and type of response also require consideration in assessing SCCT’s usefulness as a crisis communication theory (see Figure 27).

**Figure 23: Variables complicating SCCT’s effectiveness.**

SCCT fails to recognize resource quality and management of the organization. From the theoretical perspective, the effect of organizational resources must be evaluated from both a human skill and technological level as a possible intensifier not to crisis responsibility or organizational reputation but to the crisis itself. Clearly, BLLC lacked every necessary resource component, which greatly impacted how the crisis was handled on Facebook. Given the dominance of small organizations on the employment landscape and their limitations, these attributes may increase the complexity of a crisis which otherwise may seem small to a larger organization. However, even with the proper amount of resources at hand, as DeKay (2012) contends, even larger corporation are failing to engage with stakeholders on Facebook. From both
ends of the spectrum, there is either a lack of ability or the lack of desire to engage stakeholders on Facebook.

An additional intensifier exists in prior communication, which in this case study established crisis framing, and may have a direct effect on crisis responsibility and reputational threat. Crisis framing in this case determined the crisis response strategy by the fans. SCCT only concerns itself with prior crisis history and reputation. Given the impact prior communication on Facebook had in the case of BLLC where the response by stakeholders was varied, another flaw of SCCT is exposed to show the monologic nature of the theory. While some crisis events may require only a limited and simple response by an organization, a complex crisis event may require more dialogue. This is not to dismiss a monologic response as it may be well suited in a less complex crisis event, but to consider the dialogic response, where communication is not just issued but conversations are conducted with stakeholders, better serves the multiplicity of perspectives multiple stakeholders may have in a more complex crisis event.

Lastly, the findings of this work bring to light issues in the guidelines of applying SCCT. The current prescribed practical approach, which is to first wait for a crisis to occur, and then provide adjusting and correcting information to protect people physically and emotionally. The approach then follows assessing crisis type, level of responsibility, and reputation threat. Lastly, after giving consideration to the previous factors, it enacts the appropriate strategic response. In social media, where nothing is ever deleted and companies are held ever more accountable for their content, organizations must treat social media as a serious communication tool. This would include being proactive and addressing expressed online concerns or comments by stakeholders no matter how irrelevant it may seem to the organization. Following recommendations by Byrd (2012), which encourages a “stewardship model”, or the active engagement of organization to stakeholder by recognizing the crisis as a public relations opportunity, always addressing the concerns of a stakeholder takes a more proactive approach and possible bolsters positive
reputation prior to any crisis that may occur. SCCT does not account for the reiterative process of response that may be necessary in the environment of social media where communication is extended by an organization with a near immediate response by stakeholder. Depending on the nature of response by the stakeholder, a reconsideration of strategy may be required. In the case of BLLC, a reconsideration of their stance on the responsibility and threat of the boat sinking, especially in light of the vast amount of criticism posted on their Facebook page, formulating a new response may have led to less in-fighting in the comments and a more tempered debate on the page.

Organizations must understand that social media is the province of stakeholders not the organization. The need for absolute control over the message or the medium is impossible when social media grants democratic access to all in voicing their opinion. In the case of the BLLC, the organization spent a full year trying to increase page likes and encourage followers on the public page only to then try and turn Facebook page into a closed community when disaster struck. Insulting dissenters, deleting comments, and blocking people from the page did further damage to BLLC’s reputation. Public relations experts in social media regularly note that deleting comments in what is generally viewed in a democratic forum is ill advised (Hepburn, 2012; Kabani, 2013), but many companies engage in this behavior (Dekay, 2012), though it has been shown that communicating directly with stakeholders who dissent or responding directly to their voiced concerns has been shown effective in other crisis case studies (Byrd, 2012). This shows that ambivalence regarding the importance of social media exists across the spectrum of business from small organizations to large corporations and institutions.

SCCT’s limited crisis response strategies overlook tempering or neutral language. When a crisis event occurs, organizations are advised to proceed with providing adjusting and correcting information. However, given the speed with which information and opinion flow over social media, it can be very difficult for crisis managers to know what to say when not all facts are in or
as the crisis is still evolving. In the case of BLLC, fans who asked for benefit of the doubt or for people to withhold criticism until all the facts were in, received positive response for their efforts. In the 12 cases where those who made them, and also by the three people interviewed stakeholder for this study deleted critical comments, the specific mention of this sentiment proved to have impact. SCCT’s list of strategic responses, there is no place for asking for time or patience of stakeholder, and no sentiment of neutrality, meaning, the crisis manager asks for time and patience for proper fact gathering to occur before making formal comments. This may work in conjunction with following actions of assessing crisis type, organizational responsibility, and reputational threat. By acknowledging and asking for time for fact gathering, this may encourage vocal stakeholders to do the same. As was noted in this case study, vocal stakeholders with opposing views did in fact take the needs for fact gathering and patience into consideration with positive results. If the key to good crisis communication is putting forward the right strategy at the right time (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2012), then an initial neutral statement may provide organization with a much needed buffer while assessment of the crisis begins. The caveat though is for the organization to base assessment on both internal and external perspectives. Social media allows for quick and efficient environmental monitoring for sentiment regarding the crisis at hand. Considering the sinking of the Bounty, while the organization saw themselves as victims of a disaster, they disregarded the opinion of other stakeholders who held them accountable. By acknowledging both perspectives, BLLC may have changed their communication approach, which may or may not have inspired fans to do the same. By considering multiple stakeholder viewpoints, a crisis manager can better select the appropriate strategy.

Each crisis is a unique event with different variables to consider, thus devising a comprehensive theory to accommodate all crises and all possible responses to crises is unlikely. SCCT was developed prior to ubiquitous business use of the Internet and certainly prior to social media. Addressing the unique dynamics technology plays in crisis communication is a necessary
extension of the theory. As technology advances and changes, any utility SCCT may have is likely to diminish. An example could conceivably be in the fact that users of social media increasingly access various services on their mobile phones as opposed to laptops or desktop computers (Duggan & Smith, 2013), how information is displayed may impact perceptions during crisis. Currently, crisis communication needs to become more constant as communication becomes more dynamic in an increasingly computer mediated world. Vigilant monitoring of online information about organizations where multiple perspectives about crisis events are considered and multiple stakeholders state their opinions, and employing new tactics as they become visible.

6.6 Summary

This study only addresses the effectiveness of one crisis communication theory in one form of social media during a particularly event and is not meant to be representative of all crisis communication theories or all social media platforms. In the messy technological environment of Facebook, where control of the technology and control of those who feel compelled to speak on behalf of an organization is not guaranteed, the existence of a catchall theory that is “strategic” that is prescriptive and predictive is not likely given the uniqueness of each crisis. Focusing on approaches that espouse conversing with, instead of speaking to, stakeholders is likely the best approach in the environment of social media. How to both converse with fans as they are conversing to the public on behalf of the organization is less clear. Barring control of the stakeholders, and more importantly, vocal fans, a possible technological response may be the best option for small businesses. The more small organizations use Facebook, the more likely an event such as the one that befell BLLC is likely to happen. This is an opportunity for Facebook to work
with the small business community and expand their digital offerings on business, fan, and community pages that better suit the small business needs.
Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

7.1 Contributions

This research sought to create many contributions through its analysis and completion. In this work three contributions have been made with nine implications. These contributions arise from the reconsideration of Situational Crisis Communication Theory, a new approach to studying Halo Effect, and the deepening of mixed-methods research in online communication.

7.1.1 Contribution: Communication Studies

The work is a contribution to communication studies in that this study, by situating SCCT firmly in an online context of a complicated and dynamic crisis event, shows how the model fails to address the growing and more conversant online crisis communication. SCCT having been formulated in a pre-Internet era does not espouse a more proactive response as opposed to a reactive response as the theory advised. The role of technology as a communication tool within the theory and its impacts on shaping message not only through word content but the visual dynamics further shows the extreme limitations of the theory, which is monologic and managerially oriented in opposition to the now highly dialogic nature of crises particularly in the medium of Facebook.

This work also furthers the understanding of online, fan-enacted crisis communication, a new and growing research area. By making endeavors to better understand the motivations, and
this case, the role halo effect plays in fan behavior, a more comprehensive approach may be taken towards future studies of fan communication during a crisis event.

7.1.2 Contribution: Methods

The second contribution from this research is the introduction of a mixed-methods approach for capturing halo effect manifestation in social media quantitatively, and then qualitatively understanding its implications. From this work, halo effect becomes a real-life, capturable, and measurable phenomenon, which creates new opportunities for research in halo effect not only in communications studies but other areas of academic interest where halo effect has previously been researched such as business, marketing, psychology and political science.

7.1.3 Business Studies

This work, through examining the human and technical limitations of a small organization during a highly complex crisis event contributes to a critically under researched area of Business Studies. Small business dominates the United States’ employment landscape and their fragility during times of crisis requires further understanding in the area of technology adoption and use, particularly in social media, and the management of limited employee resources, especially in the growing area of digital volunteers.

7.2 Implications

This research not only addresses questions raised in previous research of SCCT, but raises new questions in the many areas this study addressed, such as mixed-methods research,
online crisis communication, online fandom, small business and the study of small business, crisis research and the use of Facebook. The continuation of this research relies on the identification of similar crisis events for validation and further exploration to see how the lessons learned from this case study apply more broadly. Given the numerous areas of interest discussed in this research, there multiple possibilities in exploring topics related to this study. These implication include:

7.2.1 Implications for Mixed-Methods Research in Social Media

The mixed-method approach used in this study was a fluid and dynamic process. Qualitative methods were used for identification, which then informed quantitative analysis, which then opened new questions for further qualitative analysis. Understanding that mixed-methods can be a highly reiterative cycle further advances the study of psycho-socio phenomenon in the data-rich world of social media.

7.2.2 Implications for Online Crisis Communication

Conversations surrounding an online crisis event occur in multiple locations and it is incumbent upon crisis managers of fan-based organization to seek out those digital spaces in order to assess the larger conversation surrounding an event rather than focusing on the immediate digital spaces the organization utilizes.

Additionally, the development of methods and best practices for guiding fan-based crisis communication is imperative for complex events where responsibility and reputational threat are not immediately apparent or easily assessed.
7.2.3 Implications for Online Fandom

Social media consumers need to better understand the separation between fan, organization, and person. Internal stakeholders, or fans, that truly wish to support the organization they seek to protect, may better serve the organization if they engage in Halo Effect behavior, or shielding strategies, as opposed to SCCT strategies. Although the impetus to help an organization in crisis is strong, in some cases, limiting online contributions may be the best strategy.

7.2.4 Implications for Business Studies

Despite the size and scope of the number of small business in the United States, the study of small businesses during crisis is critically under researched. A more thorough understanding of the limitations small businesses face from not only human and financial resources but technology and its use in small business operations is sorely lacking.

While social media does not necessarily provide evidence that is admissible in a court of law, like news reporters, social media can provide valuable context and inform how a law enforcement or regulatory entity proceeds in an investigation by better understanding regular practices and decision making processes of the organization in question.

7.2.5 Implications for Small and Businesses

First, digital volunteers may be an invaluable resource for small businesses and non-profits, but training, distinct protocols, and oversight are required as they are not paid employees of the organization and may have a less vested interest in the well-being of the organization.

Second, it is critical that small businesses develop at the very least a rudimentary crisis communication plan for all to follow that involves the detailed use of social media during a crisis.
It is not enough to think what technology may do to benefit an organization but to also consider how it may be a detriment as well. This thinking would help develop a worst-case scenario according to the abilities and limitations of small business entities.

Lastly, small businesses and nonprofits also benefit from having a positive social media profile that provides proper and correct context for anyone seeking information about the organization, such as media or law enforcement. Treating social media as a professional communication tool and regularly reviewing posts and status updates critically may help reduce poor perceptions by those not readily familiar with the organization.

### 7.2.6 Implications for the Tallship Industry

While social media has been invaluable to the industry in upholding connections between fans of the boats as they travel around the country, and in this case study, shown to be a powerful reinforcement of company brand, a more professional approach needs to be taken towards the medium where managers of these organizations have an attitudinal shift from seeing social media as only a free and easy marketing tool to one of social media being a serious business communication tool.

While social media does not necessarily provide evidence that is admissible in a court of law, like news reporters, social media can provide valuable context and inform how a law enforcement or regulatory entity proceeds in an investigation by better understanding regular practices and decision making processes of the organization in question.
7.2.7 Implications for Crisis Response

If information accuracy is in fact a flexible and temporal concept in social media, then social media fails to advance beyond contextual information use for those in crisis response roles. While crisis responders are not yet to the point where they are incorporating unvetted information on social media into their decisions making, in this case, where an organization was clearly announcing a specific impending action well before disaster occurred, crisis response may consider revising its stance in allowing for pre-emptive action.

7.2.8 Implications for Facebook

Given the number of small business and nonprofits with Facebook pages, Facebook could take a proactive approach in assisting these organizations during a time of crisis. Small organizations with limited human capital can become especially sensitive to functionality changes in the application, particularly during a high-stress crisis event. Better communication with page holders in the form of notification that requires acknowledgement may help with this problem. Additionally, story bumping and recycling also proved problematic for page holders trying to maintain a sense of chronological order is another issue that requires addressing.

The development of a “crisis mode” for a business page would be enormously beneficial. Allowing businesses the ability to turn off the commenting function, to have pre-populated fields providing instructing information for the public, or simply freezing the page would allow an organization or business a small buffer of time by which to consider appropriate next steps with their Facebook page or other social media. This would be a small value-added service and more malleability in administration of the page may bring more small business and nonprofits into the crisis-planning fold.
7.3 Future Research

Testing Halo Effect as a crisis communication strategy requires further research and could be approached in two ways: the first is by revisiting previous research in online SCCT data sets that previously tested SCCT strategies and then add coding for Halo Effect. A second approach would be to test for Halo Effect in a controlled experiment, which may possibly give further validation to the findings in this study.

Further, coding the data set for a more comprehensive overview of all responses would better inform research with regards to the different types of dialogue occurring during this specific crisis event. Understanding the totality of the conversation better situates the perspective of crisis communication.

Several extraneous findings discovered in this study provide interesting future research topics. Particularly the idea that lack of information accuracy during a crisis was not an issue for many respondents is worth exploring. If it were possible to reopen the BLLC Facebook page and perform social network analysis, it would be interesting to see the strength of this attitude in relation to how closely one is connected to any one stakeholder group. Further, a separate controlled experiment that measures strength of belief against actual action would further benefit this field.

With regards to digital fandom and digital volunteers, research should be performed to determine how their behaviors and attitudes compare offline versus online. Since nearly all interview subjects in this research admitted to biases towards social media when they considered the quality of communication, yet expected truth and accuracy of information during times of crisis, exploring this ambivalence from either a technology adoption or demographic perspective might shed more light on this digital ambivalence. Additionally, there needs to be a clear understanding of what constitutes a fan and what is a true internal stakeholder. In the digital age
this may only be a semantic argument, and this study treated the two terms as synonymous, but proper investigation may help clarify proper terminology.

The capturing of halo effect in this study was only assessed during the crisis event with no follow-up post crisis analysis. Testing the strength of halo effect longitudinally from crisis to post-crisis could further illuminate the impetus for fan-enacted crisis communication.

Lastly, future research should examine other microblogging services such as Twitter for similar phenomenon to ascertain if the findings of this study are unique to Facebook only or span across other social media platforms.

7.4 Limitations

There are several limitations to the findings of this research project. The first limitation involves the sample population used for this study, and the second limitation stems from the method used to construct this academic work.

The researcher performing this study is well known to the tallship community and many, though not all, of the interview participants. As previous stated, the tallship sailing community is relatively small when compared to recreational, military, or industrial maritime sailing. The researcher knew several members of the HMS Bounty’s crew including the captain, chief mate, and the deckhand who perished. The researcher also has personal relationships with three interview subjects, and is an acquaintance with three other interview participants. These personal relationships could arguably have caused selection bias and may affect external validity of the findings.

Further, the research being known to the tall ship community also prevented many targeted persons from participating in the interview process. As this research was performed less than one year after the sinking, emotions and opinions remain highly divisive within the
community thus inhibiting many from taking part in this research less that person be seen as “taking sides” in the debate.

Although the timing of the research was performed less than a year after the sinking, many interview participants had trouble recalling emotional or cognitive responses behind online postings they had made during the acute emergency phase of events. Since the BLLC Facebook page was taken down shortly after the sinking, many people did not have access to their online comments until they were presented with them in written form during the interview process. Some participants had difficulty not only remembering some of the posts they had made but also the thinking or emotion behind them at the time.

Regarding methods used in this work, as this research is performed as a single case study, the generalizability of this research’s findings is not possible, thus potentially affecting external validity. Attempts were made to identify other small businesses or nonprofit entities experiencing crises on Facebook within the time frame of this study, but no such other case was identified.

Lastly, the coding of data was performed by a single coder. The coding of the comments was periodically checked by a second analyst for accuracy, and the data set was re-coded a second time with no variability, but intercoder reliability could not be calculated for this study and would require more rigor in future work. For the coding of interviews, a single coder was used as well, and interview respondents were given the opportunity to comment and respond to written assessments of the interviews for accuracy. Future research would require additional coding for calculating intercoder reliability.
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Appendix

Interview Guide

Background
- Demographic information
  - Age
  - Gender

Do you use social media?
- If yes, which services do you use?
  - Do you use this service for business or personal use?
- How long have you been using social media?
- If no, are there reasons for not using social media?

How familiar were you with the HMS Bounty prior to the sinking?

Did you visit BLLC’s Facebook page?
- If yes, did you like or follow BLLC’s Facebook page?
  - When did you like or begin following the page?
    - Prior, during or following the accident?
  - Did you comment on BLLC’s page?
  - Do you recall the nature of your comments?
  - What were your impressions of the Facebook page?
  - What were your impressions of the comments on the page?

Did you follow news on the sinking elsewhere online?
- If yes, where?

Did you view any online forums discussing the Bounty?
- If yes, which ones?
- Did you participate in discussions?
- What were your impressions of the forum conversation threads?

What do you see as the outcome of the sinking?
VITA

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