

Post-Crisis Communication in a Technology Driven Environment: Target Data Breach Analysis

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Abstract

Crises are detrimental to an organization's reputation. When a crisis occurs within an organization, they are expected to respond to those affected through the most effective and efficient mediums possible. With an increase in technology use, social media has become increasingly important as a post-crisis communication strategy for addressing external audiences. Social media is a sense-making tool for those affected by crises, because of its fast, relevant and interactive nature. In this research, Target's post-crisis communication concerning their 2013 data breach is analyzed through a Twitter and press release analysis and then compared to Neiman Marcus' and Michaels' post-crisis communication. Results show that Target not only properly aligned their crisis type to their crisis response strategy, but also tailored their crisis-response to the external environment in which they operate. By aligning their crisis, their crisis response strategy, and the external environmental factors, there is a less negative effect on Target's reputation.

Keywords: Crisis Response; Public Relations; Social Media; External Communication

1 Introduction

Crises have the potential to create negative or undesirable outcomes affecting the organization, company, or industry, as well as its publics, products, services, or reputation (Fearn-Banks, 2010). Because stakeholders expect organizations to uphold certain standards, crises usually disturb stakeholder expectations, which can result in angry people becoming upset and angry, possibly threatening the relationship between the organization and its stakeholders (Youngblood, 2010). Crises typically involve and affect multiple stakeholders and their interaction with an organization, thus damaging the reputation of the organization (McDonald et al., 2010; Coombs, 2007). Damage extends beyond the damage of an organization's reputation to include financial loss, injury of stakeholders, structural or property damage, and environmental harm (Loewendick, 1993).

“Crisis management is a process of strategic planning for a crisis... that removes some of the risk and uncertainty from the negative occurrence and thereby allows the organization to be in greater control of its own destiny” (Fearn-Banks, 2010 p. 2). Organizations use crisis management as a preventable measure. When a crisis does occur, post-crisis communication is used to repair the reputation and/or prevent reputational damage (Coombs and Holladay, 2005). Crisis communication not only alleviates the impact of the crisis, but it can also bring the organization a more positive reputation than it had before the crisis (Fearn-Banks, 2010).

1.1 Public Relations

Because crises are viewed as a threat to an organization’s reputation, organizations participate in public relations programs to help create or enhance an organization’s reputation prior to a crisis occurring.

Such public relations programs include media relations, community relations, internal relations, and consumer relations (Fearn-Banks, 2010). Employees working in public relations show higher levels of frustration, insecurity, and an enhanced need for information. They also produce more informal communication during a crisis (Johansen et al., 2012). Public relations specialists feel more stress during a crisis, because of the need to revive their reputation. “Under the stress of a crisis, the immediacy of digital communication might result in false information being communicated to stakeholders” (Veil et al., 2011 p. 118). Some believe that an organization that enters a crisis with a favorable reputation will remain strong after the crisis (Carroll, 2013). Public relations help to alleviate any attributions towards an organization prior to a crisis occurring.

1.2 Attribution Theory

“Attribution Theory helps public relations specialists understand how consumers make sense of events they encounter, especially those that are sudden and unexpected” (Heath, 2010 p. 482). Attribution Theory is appropriately used when the situation leads to a loss of face, which usually occurs when the accused is believed to have committed an offensive act by its target audience (Jin, 2010). In the eyes of the stakeholder, the organization is held responsible for the occurrence of the crisis. Organizations lose a favorable reputation when stakeholders attribute organizations fully responsible for a crisis; they lose valuable relationships, and generate negative word of mouth (Coombs, 2006). “Reputation is often regarded as a valuable, intangible asset relevant for financial success of the organization” (Schultz et al., 2012 p. 21).

1.3 Situational Crisis Communication Theory

“As the attributed responsibility becomes stronger, organizations must use more accommodative crisis response strategies” (Heath, 2010 p.483). To restore an organization’s reputation, Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) investigates “how crisis situations (i.e., crisis type, crisis history, and prior reputation) shape the publics’ crisis responsibility attributions, which in turn influence their reputation perceptions (i.e., favorable vs. unfavorable evaluations), affects and behavioral intentions regarding the organization” (Kim and Cameron, 2011, p. 828). The SCCT divides crisis types into three crisis clusters (Claeys, et al., 2010): (1) Victim cluster includes natural disasters, rumors, workplace violence, and product tampering, (2) Accidental cluster includes challenges, technical-error accidents, and technical-error product harm, and (3) Preventable cluster includes human-error accidents; human-error product harm; organizational misdeed with no injuries; organizational misdeed management misconduct and organizational misdeed with injuries (Coombs, 2007).

Just like each crisis has its own crisis cluster, each crisis has its own crisis response strategy to manage the crisis. The SCCT consists of four groups of crisis response strategies: (1) Denial strategies seek to prevent any connection between the organization and the crisis, (2) Diminish strategies attempt to reduce the amount of responsibility for the crisis, (3) Rebuild strategies attempt to improve the reputation, and (4) Bolstering strategies draw attention to the goodwill of the organization (Heath, 2010). When crisis types and crisis response strategies are properly aligned, they lead to a less negative effect on organizational reputation (Claeys et al., 2010). “An effective response is one that’s been calibrated to the characteristics of the brand, the nature of the event, and the parties being blamed” (Tybout and Roehm, 2009 p. 84). Effective response strategies can help “to repair the reputation, to reduce negative affect and to prevent negative behavioral intentions” (Coombs, 2007, p. 170).

Crisis response specialists should match crisis response strategies based on the amount of potential damage a crisis could generate. Post-crisis attitudes towards an organization are positively influenced when consumers have high crisis involvement and organizations have a ‘matched’ crisis response strategy (Claeys, et al., 2010). The framing of crisis responses can be emotional or rational.

Matching or mismatching crisis response strategies do not affect post-crisis attitude toward the organization if they are emotionally framed; however, rational framed crisis response strategies should match the crisis type through the SCCT (Claeys, et al., 2010).

1.4 Technology

Crisis response strategies should not only match the crisis type, but they should also match the external environment they operate in. The main external factor crisis response specialists find hard to understand is technology. “Technological advances are transforming how crisis management professionals and researchers view, interact with, and disseminate information to affected communities in a crisis situation” (Veil et al., 2011 p.110). Social media is defined as a digital tool that facilitates interactive communication exchanges between organizations and audiences (Wright & Hinson, 2009). While Facebook and Twitter are the most common platforms of social media, other social media platforms should not be overlooked.

During crises, social media can provide a new platform for consumer communication and can work as an informal communication channel through which organizational information can be conveyed, shared, and processed (Jin et al., 2012).

1.5 Social Media

Organizations use social media to provide stakeholders with an opportunity to make sense of the crisis. Stakeholders utilize social media outlets to seek out additional information. Often during crises, audiences’ social media usage may increase and, in some situations, audiences may perceive social media to be even more credible than traditional mass media (Jin et al., 2012). Audiences use social media as emotional support and recovery after a crisis has occurred, turning to the thoughts of others to rationalize their own attributions of the crisis. Prior to social media, audience members rationalized thoughts through verbal word-of-mouth. With technological advancements, negative word-of-mouth is generated online and spreads at a much faster speed than before. Now social media users are both consumers and contributors of information (Veil et al., 2011). Users consume information by participating in social networks, and they contribute through sharing and re-sharing information. This process helps consumers make sense of the crisis and helps speed up the recovery process.

Social media can also aid in the recovery process of a crisis. “Social media has a decentralized network structure that, through sharing, linking, and posting, permits wider flows of information” (Gombita, 2013). It has a large reach and spreads rapidly. “The channels of communication are becoming more diffused, and reaching the public through their preferred media is essential” (Veil et al., 2011 p. 120). “While many social media channels exist (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, etc.), Twitter could be considered the “second most important social media site for emergency management practitioners” (Roberts, 2012 p. 18). Because of the recent increase in smartphones, audience members have had more access to information at their fingertips. Twitter, which currently holds 241 million users, is ideal for crisis communication because of the speed with which information is readily available and for the ease of access from a mobile device (Goel, 2104; Roberts, 2012). Having access to these electronic devices allows for a faster and more accessible crisis response delivery.

1.6 Target’s Data Breach

To fully understand Target’s crisis response, one must examine the full extent of the Target name. Since prior reputation affects message perceptions (Carroll, 2013), organizational credibility is crucial in developing message content. Furthermore, a detailed explanation of the crisis must be outlined because the events through November 27th and December 15th were continually changing. Events after the data breach crisis are also crucial when analyzing Target’s crisis response. This cascading effect of the crisis impacted both the messages distributed and the speed with which additional information could be provided.

Exhibit 1



Between November 27th and December 15th, Target was unknowingly experiencing a data breach of consumers' personal information, including names, mailing addresses and phones numbers. According to Target's press release on December 19th, *Target Confirms Unauthorized Access to Payment Card Data in U.S. Stores*, over 40 million of Target's customers experienced this data breach within the 18 day period (2013). The numbers continued to accumulate as time elapsed.

On December 27th, over 70 million Target customers were impacted from the data breach, and sources even state up to 110 million customers were impacted (Germano, 2013; Harris & Perlroth, 2014). While any crisis may be detrimental to a company, it is important to first understand the company and their reputation before the crisis occurred.

According to Target's Corporate Fact Sheet, Target is an "upscale discount retailer that provides high-quality, on-trend merchandise at attractive prices in clean, spacious, and guest friendly stores" that has 1,797 stores in the United States, 127 stores in Canada and 361,000 team members worldwide (2014). They are considered the second largest retailer in the United States after Wal-Mart, who leads the industry with their cost-leadership strategy. Unlike Wal-Mart, Target focuses on a differentiation strategy by offering unique and tailored shopping experiences with TargetExpress, CityTarget, Super Targets, and convenient online shopping.

Understanding the value Target brings to their products and services can help understand their consumer base. Target's median consumer age is 46, which is the youngest of any retail competitor (Target's Unique Guests). The median household income is \$55,000, which is far more than other retailers as well (Target's Unique Guests). Consumers or "guests" who shop at Target are seen as being "smart about their purchases, savvy to trends and conscientious about their communities" (Target's Unique Guests). Target guests are 80-90% female, and 38% of them have children (Target's Unique Guests). Brand loyalty is a huge strength of Target; they were ranked the world's 29th most admired company, just behind Wal-Mart's 28th place ranking (World's Most Admired Companies, 2014). This may seem impressive; however, this ranking is down 7 spots from 2013. In 2013 they were ranked 22nd, and Wal-Mart was ranked 27th (World's Most Admired Companies, 2014).

2. Methodology

Analyzing Target's Twitter feed and press releases gave insight to their post-crisis communication and response strategy. @Target's Twitter feed was analyzed through the use of three different Twitter analysis systems including Twitonomy, TweetPsych, and AnalyzeWords. Although Target had a variety of verified Twitter handles related to the Target brand name, this study only analyzed results for Target's main twitter handle: @Target. Target's press releases were analyzed through Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count. Target's Twitter feed and press releases were compared to Neiman Marcus' and Michaels' Twitter feeds (@NeimanMarcus and @MichaelsStores) and press releases. Both companies experienced data breaches around the same time frame as Target. Comparing Target's twitter handle and press releases to other companies who have experienced a data breach exposed commonalities and differences within their crisis response strategies.

2.1 Twitonomy

Twitonomy was used to analyze and gain an understanding of Target's basic Twitter demographics.

These demographics included detailed analytics on a Twitter handle's tweets, retweets, replies, mentions, hashtags, keywords and favorite users. The date range for Twitonomy's tweet analysis was between June 20, 2013 and April 20, 2013. Ideally, the demographic analysis should have been analyzed before, during, and after the crisis, but due to restrictions in the website's features, the dates could not be altered. Twitonomy helped find inconsistencies within the timeframe given, and how these inconsistencies related to Target's data breach.

2.2 Tweet Psych

TweetPsych was used to understand the psychological construct of the Target Brand and their Twitter feed. TweetPsych compared Target's Twitter handle to thousands within its database, and it identified traits that are used more or less frequently in relation to other users. This information helped understand the voice within Target's messages and how they differentiated their voice from others. Michaels' TweetPsych profile did not exist, so in this analysis, Neiman Marcus' account was the only account compared with Target's.

2.3 AnalyzeWords

The last Twitter analysis tool that was used to analyze Target's Twitter handle was AnalyzeWords, which is a program that helped better understand the styles in which one writes. These styles were broken up into emotional (upbeat, worried, angry, and depressed), social (plugged in, personable, arrogant, and spacy), and thinking analytic, sensory and in-the-moment) styles. Understanding these writing styles helped reveal an organization's personality by looking at how one used words within their tweets.

2.4 Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count

LIWC (Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count) was also used to analyze Target's pre-disclosure and post-disclosure press releases. LIWC allowed one to determine the degree any text uses through positive or negative emotions, self-references, causal words, and 70 other language dimensions; however, due to budget and time constraints only self-references, social words, positive emotions, negative emotions, overall cognitive words, articles and big words were analyzed. By comparing the two categories, pre and post disclosure, a further understanding of how public relations specialists' writing styles and communication patterns change throughout a crisis was gained.

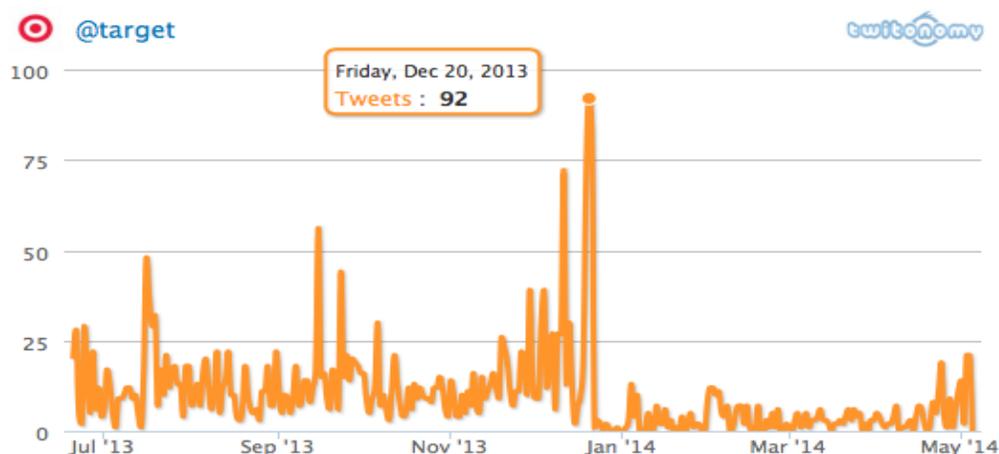
Target's press releases were grouped into pre-disclosure (11/18/2013-12/18/2013), and post disclosure (12/19/2013-1/19/2014). All press releases within these time frames were analyzed. Within the month leading up to the disclosure of the data breach, Target posted twelve press releases on their website. These press releases were categorized into the following: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (2), Advertisements (2), Black Friday (3), Financial Reports (2), and New Stores (3). During the post data breach disclosure period, Target produced 25 press releases. These press releases were categorized into the following: Advertisements (7), Financial Reports (1), New Stores (5), Data Breach (8), and Holiday (4).

3. Results

3.1 Twitonomy

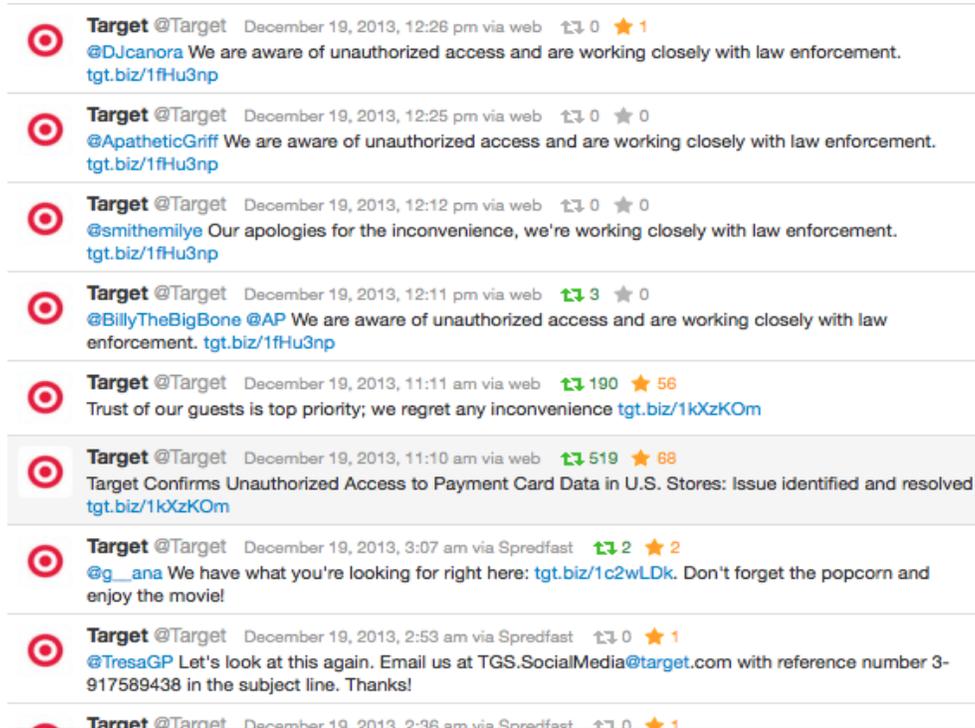
Between June 20, 2013 and April 20, 2013, Target produced a total of 3,197 tweets, 2,663 user mentions (83%), 2,267 replies (71%) and averaged 9.96 tweets a day. @Target produced the most tweets (92) on December 20, 2013, which was the day after their initial release of the data breach. They produced the second most tweets on December 19th, 2013, which was when they initially released the data breach crisis.

Exhibit 2



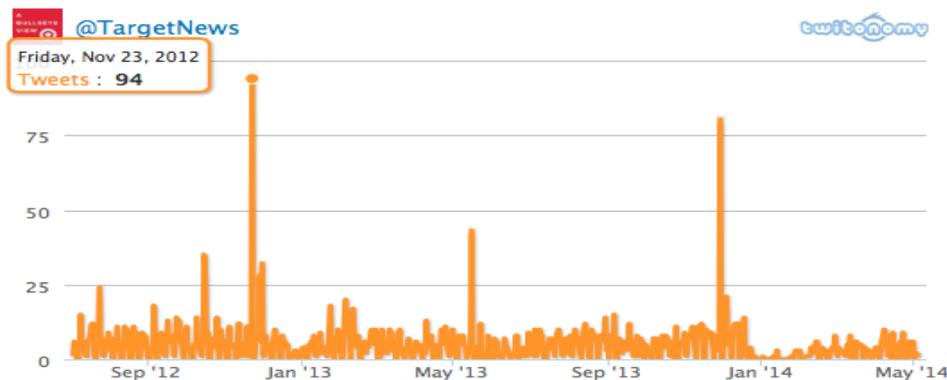
Their initial tweet stated on December 19, 2013, 11:10 am via web, “Target Confirms Unauthorized Access to Payment Card Data in U.S. Stores: Issue Identified and resolved tgt.biz/1kXzK0m.” The next approximately 200 tweets were all replies to concerned users experiencing the data breach directly.

Exhibit 3



Target’s most retweeted follower was @TargetNews. @TargetNews is a promoted twitter handle of Target’s and was stated as being “The official Twitter handle for @Target company news, partnerships, events, A Bullseye View stories and more.” When comparing the two twitter handles, there were some differences that set these two accounts apart from one another. Where @Target produced the most tweets on December 19th, 2013, @TargetNews produced a mere two tweets. This would have made more sense if they were never active on their twitter handle; however, the date that they produced the most tweets (94) was on November 23rd, 2013, which was Black Friday for retailers like Target.

Exhibit 4



Because @TargetNews specialized in news, events, and stories involved through @Target’s account, one would have thought that they would have produced more information about the data breach than @Target. There was a large inconsistency between the two accounts. The two days following the data breach @TargetNews produced no tweets at all, which was far below their average of 4.72 tweets per day.

Neiman Marcus produced an average of 4.72 tweets per day, and 98% (3,119) of their tweets were user mentions. From the high rate of user mentions, it was apparent that they highly valued customer satisfaction by addressing complaints and concerns. The day in which Neiman Marcus generated the most tweets was on February 10th, 2013, when they ran a promotional campaign entitled #TweetRevenge - a campaign where individuals shared their best break up stories via Twitter and used the hashtag #TweetRevenge.

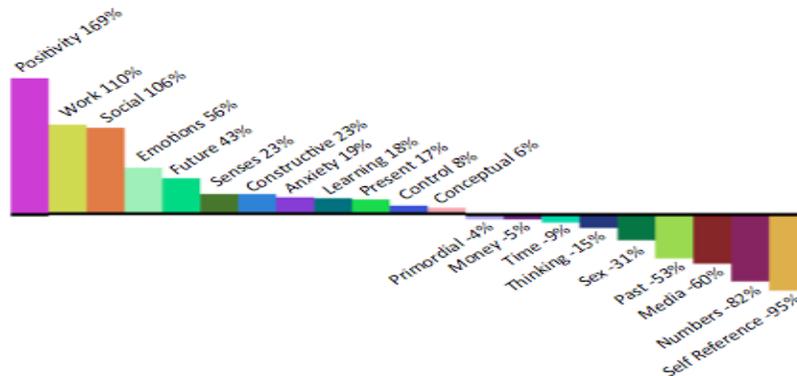
While already seeming to be an odd campaign, it was even stranger to find this as their most tweeted subject matter. When researching their data breach, their second most retweeted and favorited tweet read on February 27th 2013, “We hear your concerns tonight and we’re listening. We cannot comment on any matter that is under investigation.” When scrolling back to this date on their live Twitter feed, this tweet and other data breach tweets were no where to be found. Neiman Marcus may have deleted these posts, because they wanted to preserve their reputation in the future. Twitonomy did not clarify when the post was deleted.

Michaels produced 10.53 tweets per day, and 71% (2,271) of their tweets were user mentions. The user mention rate was much lower than that of Target’s and Neiman Marcus’ which was most likely due to the fact that they attempted to steer all DIY (Do It Yourself) projects and questions to their hashtag #AskMichaels. Twitonomy did not provide demographics on the hashtag #AskMichaels, so it was necessary to manually analyze tweets under this hashtag. There were only three tweets involving their data breach, none of which were from Michaels or from customers. Instead they were news sources reporting on the crisis. Target and Niemen Marcus’ tweets skyrocketed in response to their data breaches and Twitter campaigns, respectively. None of Michaels’ top retweeted or favorited tweets pertained to the data breach, indicating that they either did not view the data breach as a large crisis or else they did not view Twitter as the proper social medium to communicate and/or resolve the crisis. Michaels’ data breach only affected 7% of all debit and credit cards used within the store, so they may not have viewed the problem to be crucial to their reputation (D’Innocenzio, 2014).

3.2 Tweet Psych

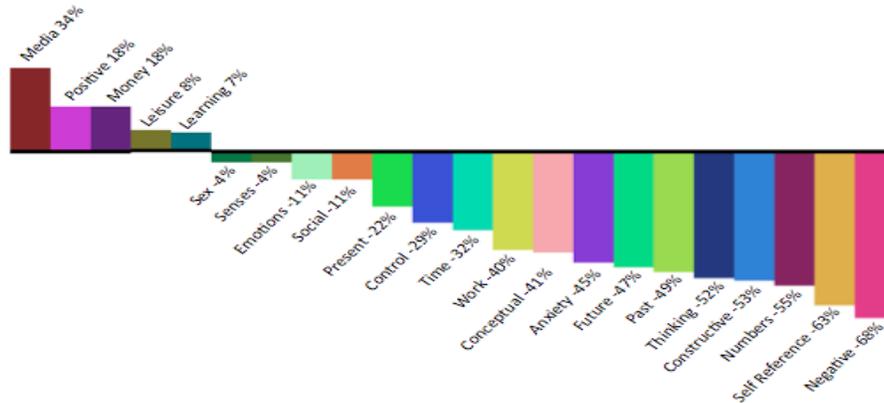
According to TweetPsych’s psychological profile of Target’s Twitter account, Target’s tweets were more than average in the following traits: positivity, work, social, emotions, future, senses, constructive, anxiety, learning, present, control, and conceptual. On the contrary, Target’s tweets were below the average in the following traits: primordial, money, time, thinking, sex, past, media, numbers and self-reference.

Exhibit 5



Having this knowledge of Target’s psychological profile was irrelevant unless compared to others. Neiman Marcus’ above average tweet traits were media, positivity, money, leisure and learning. There were seven less positive traits than that of Target’s.

Exhibit 6

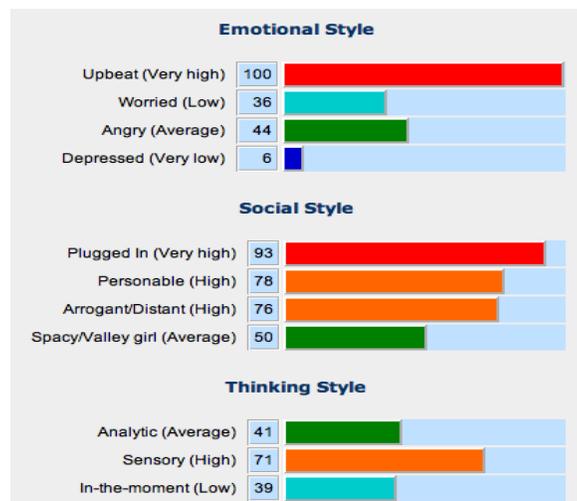


The main difference between Target’s psychological Twitter profile and Neiman Marcus’ was the difference in social and emotional context. Target’s account was above average in positivity, social, emotions, future, etc. Tweets skyrocketed during the data breach for Target, because Target attempted to address each guest personally using user mentions. By addressing each guest on an individual basis, they attempted to listen to customer’s feedback, calm heightened emotions, and shed a light for the future. Their top psychological traits matched their objective when addressing their crisis response. Where Target’s psychological profile directly aligned with their crisis response strategy, Michaels’ did not. Michaels’ above the average tweets were media, positivity, and money. As mentioned previously Michaels did not have many tweets pertaining to the data breach, which made it even more interesting that one of their top traits was money. Their account was more focused on DIY projects and leisurely learning, which was why leisure and learning should have been at the top of their psychological traits, rather than money. Considering none of their traits pertained to the data breach, money should not have been one of their most tweeted traits.

3.3 AnalyzeWords

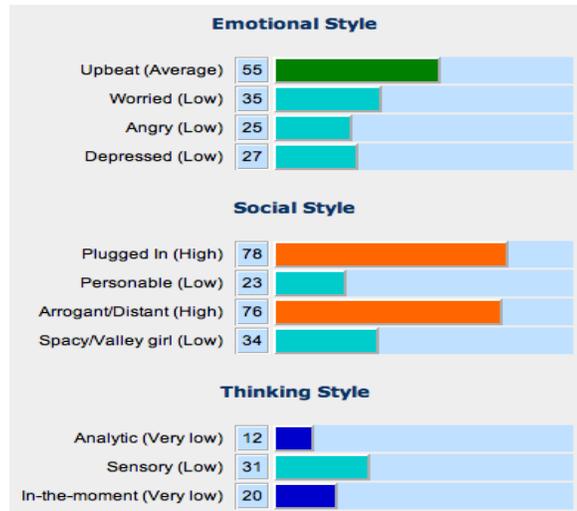
According to AnalyzeWords, Target ranked the highest in having an upbeat style with a 100%. Other stand out statistics included being plugged in, personable, and arrogant under the social styles and high sensory under thinking styles.

Exhibit 7



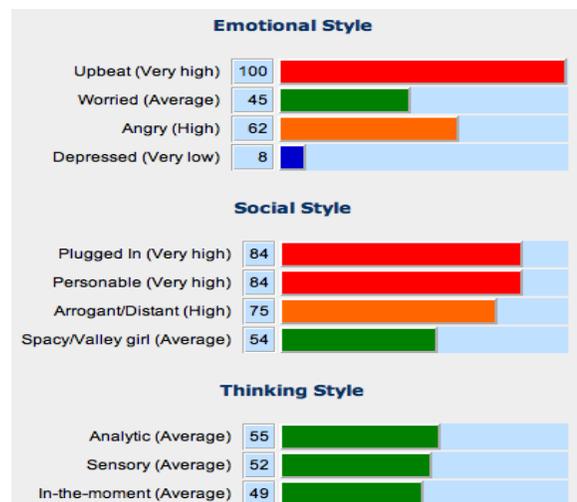
Being plugged in was defined as being socially engaged. Neiman Marcus scored relatively high in being plugged in and arrogant. They scored very low in analytics, which was measured through the use of complex words and thinking styles.

Exhibit 8



Michaels’ tweets were very comparable to that of Target’s. Michaels, like Target, scored 100% in being upbeat. Michaels also scored 84% in both being plugged in and personable.

Exhibit 9



Like Target, Michals also scored high in being arrogant. While most traits seemed applicable to crisis response communication, arrogance did not seem to fit this category. Because Michaels and Target both scored high in arrogance, reading into how arrogance was ranked was important. Arrogant was ranked based on being, “well-read and smart with an arms length approach to socializing. One scored high in this category if you discussed actions instead of emotions, used big words, and didn’t reference yourself much” (AnalyzeWords, 2014). This made the trait of arrogance more relatable in the context of crisis communication, because they provided stakeholders with a plan of action to fit their strategy.

3.4 Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count

LIWC (Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count) was used to analyze pre and post data breach disclosure within their categories.

Table 1

	Advertisements		CSR		Black Friday		Financial Reports		New Stores		Data Breach		Holiday	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Self-references (I, me, my)	1.75	2.74	1.87		0.62		0.33	0	1.37	1.07		4.85		1.01
Social words	4.58	5.69	7.8		3.71		4.36	1.614	6.18	6.25		12.76		4.49
Positive emotions	3.49	2.91	3.94		2.7		2.97	1.64	1.65	2.10		1.94		1.86
Negative emotions	0.25	0.75	1.01		0.14		3.56	0	0	0.00		0.56		0.26
Overall cognitive words	2.05	3.21	2.89		1.13		4.16	4.92	1.28	1.65		4.84		2.17
Articles (a, an, the)	5.73	6.31	7.32		3.81		6.54	11.48	7.73	8.00		6.18		4.44
Big words (> 6 letters)	21.46	23.31	28.93		23.62		30.11	29.51	25.72	23.55		24.56		20.87

As stated in the literature review, employees that work in public relations show higher levels of frustration, insecurity, and an enhanced need for information, while also producing more informal communication during a crisis (Johansen et al., 2012). Higher levels of frustration were exhibited as negative word choices started to escalate. The financial reports category was difficult to fully analyze, because there was only one financial report during the post data breach disclosure causing the data comparison to be skewed. Cognitive word choice significantly rose from pre to post disclosure, along with articles such as “a”, “an”, and “the”. The length in words also decreased ever so slightly from pre disclosure to post disclosure, and financial reports continuously had the longest words recorded. When looking at the post disclosure of the data breach category, one would notice that their self-reference and social word choices surpassed any other category. Linking back to Target’s Twitter account, their strategy was to sincerely apologize to their guests for the data breach. In doing so, they had to assume the responsibility themselves. An increase in use of self-reference words was hypothesized, because Target took responsibility for their actions by using words such as “we”, “our” and “us” to assume responsibility.

An increase in social words was also expected, in looking to make this subject matter more relatable to their guests. A comparison of word choices in press releases was also conducted between Target and Michaels.

Table 2

	Target	Michaels	
	Avg	1/25/14	4/17/14
Self-references (I, me, my)	4.85	5.11	1.13
Social words	12.76	8.03	4.18
Positive emotions	1.94	2.92	1.77
Negative emotions	0.56	1.09	0.16
Overall cognitive words	4.84	4.01	4.66
Articles (a, an, the)	6.18	7.3	8.52
Big words (> 6 letters)	24.56	33.21	35.69

Michaels did not have many press releases on their webpage. They only had three press releases from January 2014 until April 2014, and two of the three covered their data breach. The first was made public right after the data breach was recognized, where as the second press release was written in April after the data breach had a chance to settle down. The second press release gave Michaels a chance to collect their thoughts and create a sustainable strategy to project them through the crisis. The analysis of Michaels’ press releases looked at how their word choices compared to that of Target’s, and how time reduced stress on employees.

Michaels had a much stronger word presence in their press releases than Target (see Table 2). Their first press release regarding the data breach on January 25th had stronger self-references, more positive emotions, more article words and larger words (6+ characters). Michaels only produced one initial press release, so they had to express their utmost apology in only one press release, and one press release only. Unlike Michaels, Target had many press releases to extend their sympathy and make connections with their stakeholders. While it seemed as if positive emotions were abundant in Michaels’ first press release, Michaels also had more negative emotions in their first press release than Target. Because this press release was distributed at the same time as the data breach occurred, employees may have felt the stress of resolving the crisis through communicating. When comparing Michaels’ first press release to their second press release, many improvements were made. Self-references, social words, positive emotions and negative emotions decreased.

A decrease in these variables showed a decrease in vulnerability, because their social and emotional states were more level. As time elapses the pressure of resolving the crisis decreased. This decrease in pressure allowed employees to produce quality work without interference of emotions and stress in the workplace.

3.5 Analysis of Crisis Response Strategy

In addition to analyzing Target's twitter account and press release content, it was important to analyze Target's crisis type to proper crisis response methods as previously discussed. Target's data breach was considered an accidental incident, because it was due to a malfunctioning of the technological system's security. Guests affected by Target's data breach would continue to be highly involved in Target's crisis response, because they suffered on Target's behalf. Highly involved stakeholders were more apt to view Target as a reputable company if their crisis response matched their crisis type. Attribution Theory claimed that stakeholders would attribute more responsibility to the organization when events negatively and unexpectedly impacted themselves. To change these attributions, Target would have to participate in rebuilding strategies.

Rebuilding strategies attempt to improve the reputation of the organization when the crisis is viewed as detrimental. Organizations should attempt to provide as much information as possible and provide material items to stakeholders in rebuilding strategies. The organization should also participate in positive actions, which thereby offset the impact of the crisis. This may include a sincere apology or an offering of compensation for their misfortune. With estimates up to 110 million customers' information breached, the data breach posed more than an organizational threat to Target. Next, Target's crisis response strategies will be further analyzed to see how they align with the rebuilding strategies.

Target has properly aligned their crisis response strategies with their crisis, which will be foreseen as being reputable to highly involved stakeholders. Target initiated their crisis response communication through a press release issued on December 19th, 2013. The CEO, Gregg Steinhafel stated, "We regret an inconvenience this may cause." While this statement may not have sounded too apologetic, there is some sympathy behind the message. On December 20th, 2013 the CEO wrote a press release entitled, "A Message from CEO Gregg Steinhafel about Target's Payment Card Issues," which was more apologetic than that of the first press release. The data breach press releases previously analyzed also used more self-reference words than any other press releases, because they were assuming responsibility for the data breach. Target also offered material actions for their stakeholders. Target invested \$5 million in cybersecurity education for stakeholders. This multi-year campaign will help educate the public on the dangers of scams. They also offered Target guests 10% off their purchases, which was the same discount as Target employees. Target also extended a year of free credit monitoring to all Target shoppers to insure they will not be victims of identity theft. While Target's material compensation was well developed, they could have expressed more sympathy within their social media. The extent of their sympathy was addressing each person individually on Twitter through user mentions.

It was also essential that their crisis response matched the external environment in which their crisis took place. Since Target's data breach revolved around technology use, it was only appropriate to use technology to respond to the crisis. Target did not only use press releases and their Twitter account to respond to the data breach. They also used Facebook to communicate with their audience. Those affected by the data breach were able to post, comment, like, and re-share any information on Target's page about the data breach. If time allowed, further research would have been conducted on Target's Facebook account including the amount of likes, comments and shares of their information. With this research, one could have also analyzed the positive and negative feedback on their Facebook page. Other external environment factors Target should have taken into consideration when developing a crisis response strategy were competitor and social environments. This analysis provided further information on Target's competitors and the social environment they operated in, when relating it to data breaches.

4. Conclusion

After analyzing Target's crisis communication styles and comparing them to Michaels' and Neiman Marcus', it is clear that Target made many good corporate decisions when forming their crisis response strategy. Not only did they align the crisis to their crisis response strategy properly, but they also aligned it with the environmental factors surrounding them. Their data breach occurred in a technologically driven environment, and Target combated this crisis by responding with the use of technology.

Approximately 110 million customers were affected by Target's data breach, which is a substantial number of customers who may be jeopardized in this kind of crisis. However, Target has taken all the right steps to respond appropriately, protect their image, and prepare them to propel forward into the coming years.

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