

Crisis Management in Communication: A Study on MH370, MH17 and QZ8501 Aviation Tragedies

MOHD NAZRI LATIFF AZMI, NUR AIN AFIZAN ABD RAHMAN,
ZULAZHAN ABD. HALIM & MOHD FAUZI ABDUL HAMID
Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia

In 2014, the MH370, MH17 and QZ8501 flight crash tragedies become a viral issue and attract the attentions of media and stakeholders, globally, and raise many crises to the airlines companies, respectively, including the risk of losing their stakeholders' trust. The study is to identify the crises management approaches used for the tragedies related, to analyse and compare the effectiveness of the crises management between two well-known airlines companies, Air Asia and Malaysia Airlines (MAS). Qualitative method was used to collect the data related to the ways that the airlines company had taken to handling the crises. So, the researchers conducted content analysis by studying the secondary data, due to the fact of the airlines reluctance to give out information about safety procedures or policies, as the airlines accidents are a very sensitive subject. The data are mostly of the documentary types in written format of press conferences, press releases and media coverage of the accidents by local and western daily press (printed and online news).

Keywords: Crisis management, communication, corporate image, discourse analysis, language

Since crises are undesirable for organizations, crisis management is an important task for management and nearly all organizations have crisis management and communication strategies (Wester, 2009). The year of 2014 has become a witness when Malaysia have encountered two devastating tragedies. Meanwhile, Indonesia with a tragedy involving aviation accidents successively throughout the year, which involved two Malaysian aviation companies, Air Asia and Malaysia Airlines (MAS). The MH370, MH17 and QZ8501 flight crash tragedies become a viral issue and attract the attentions of all media and other stakeholders, globally, and raise many crisis to the airlines companies, respectively, including the risk of losing their stakeholders' trust. Crisis management is considered to have three phases; the prevention phase, the response phase and the recovery phase (Hale, 2005).

The missing of Malaysia Airline flight MH370 was the first aircraft issue that happens in 2014. Carrying 227 passengers from 14 nations and 12 Malaysian crew members, Flight MH370 departed from Kuala Lumpur International Airport to Beijing, China on 8th of March 2014 at 12.41 midnight. According to BeritaHarian news dated 19th of March 2014, Flight MH370 was scheduled to arrive in Beijing at 6.40 am, but the signal of Flight MH370 has disappeared from the Malaysia's Department of Civil Aviation at 1.30 am. The aircraft however, did not enter Chinese airspace or contacted the Chinese controllers (Abu Bakar, 2014).

Correspondence to: Dr. Mohd Nazri Latiff Azmi, Faculty of Languages and Communication, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, 21300 Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia. E-mail: mohdnazri@unisza.edu.my

On 17th of July 2014, which is four months after the missing of Flight MH370, Malaysia Airlines faced another crash when Flight MH17 that scheduled to depart from Amsterdam at 6 pm and arrive to Kuala Lumpur at 6.10 am, was reported to be shot down by the Pro-Russia separatists near the Ukraine border using a long-range surface-to-air Buk missile as it mistaken it for another aircraft, killing 283 passengers and 15 crews on board. The tragedy was confirmed by MAS itself after they were told by Ukrainian Air Traffic Control (ATC) that it had lost contact with MH17 at 30 km from Tamak waypoint, approximately 50 km from the Russia-Ukraine border and they confirmed the location of a burning Malaysian plane in the Eastern Ukraine. Two days before the year 2014 ends, another aircraft crash occur, involves an aircraft that belongs to Air Asia, another airlines company based in Malaysia. The accident is the second-deadliest in Indonesian territory. It was also Air Asia group's first fatal accident in 18-year history of company. Air Asia flight QZ8501 was a scheduled international passenger flight, operated by Air Asia group affiliate Indonesia Air Asia, from Surabaya, Indonesia that departed at 5.20 am, and was scheduled to arrive to Singapore Changi Airport at 8.30 am. On 28 December 2014, the aircraft operating the route, an Airbus A320-216, crashed in bad weather, killing all 155 passengers and seven crew on board.

Problem Statement and Purpose of Study

In order to analyze the crisis management, the conceptual framework of Input, Treatment/ Services, Outcomes and Impact which proposed by Abu Bakar, Hamzah and Muhammad (2014) and the Situational Crisis Communication Theory will be used and described, which was developed by Coombs and Holladay (2002). However, the approaches used by both airlines were different, in resolving the crisis they faced in their almost the same tragedies. So, a content analysis and a quantitative analysis were conducted in this research to identify the crisis management approaches used by Air Asia and Malaysia Airlines to gain back the trust of their stakeholders and to maintain their corporate images. Hence, the purpose of this study is to identify the crisis management approaches used for the tragedies related. The following research questions will be addressed:

- RQ1: What are the strategies used by Air Asia and MAS to solve the crisis?
- RQ2: How the choices of crises management strategies are affect the effectiveness of solving the crisis itself?

The findings of this research would help Malaysian in general to understand the similarities and differences of crisis management strategy used by MAS and Air Asia. Thus, it is hoped that this study will help promoting openness, tolerance, cooperation among airlines when handling crisis, in general.

Literature Review

The crises that befell the organization will affect the reputation of the organization (Coombs, 2007). So, the way taken by the organization will then effect the perception of the stakeholder towards the organization and the perception given by the stakeholders after the crisis will portray the reputation of the organization. Upholding and develop a good reputation is very important as it create many benefits to the organization, such as, it may create a new customer, investors and it may giving an advance in term of financial.

According to Stephen et al. (2005), crisis is a situation that damaging the human lives, property, the environment or any combination of the above. Same goes to Hale et al. (2005), crisis is defined as a chain of events that have severe consequences. Common to nearly all definitions of crisis is the elements of surprise (Massey, 2001), or either the triggering event of the crisis itself was unexpected or considered to have a low probability of occurring (Hale, (2005); Alpaslan, 2009). Stephen (2005) also describes that crisis is a triggering event that expected to happen in the future, but not at the time when it occurred. As the triggering events were not expected, the organization will lose control over the situation for at least a brief time. Depending on how crisis is perceived, organizations face the possibility of severe consequences for its image, reputation of the company and the stakeholder's perception, evaluation and trust in the future (Coombs & Holladay, 1996).

Methodology

Conceptual Framework of Input, Treatment/Services, Outcomes and Impact

The conceptual framework of Input, Treatment/Services, Outcomes and Impact were proposed by Abu Bakar, Hamzah and Muhammad (2014). This conceptual framework is used to identify the crisis management strategies and approaches taken by the organization in handling the crisis. In this framework, the actions taken by the organization will be divided into four major levels which are input, Treatment/Services, Outcomes, and Impact. According to Abu Bakar, Hamzah, & Muhammad (2014), Input denotes the alterations or changes that are initiated during and after both tragedies to activate manage the crisis. The input consists of Society, Media, Aids and Infrastructure. Treatments and Services refer to the actions taken by the Malaysian government in managing the worst air disaster that hit the nation. Outcomes denote the consequences triggered based on the treatment and services provided by the government. Impact signifies the impact of the treatment and services provided by the Malaysian government on the families of the victims, society and the nation. Below shows how the conceptual framework is constructed:



Figure 1. Conceptual framework of input, treatment/services, outcomes and impact

Qualitative method was used to collect the data related to the ways that the airlines company has taken to handling the crises. So, the researchers will conduct content analysis by studying the secondary data, due to the fact of the airlines reluctance to give out information about safety procedures or policies, as the airlines accidents are a very sensitive subject. So, the secondary data collected from a wide variety of sources. The data are mostly of the documentary kind in written format of press conferences, press releases and media coverage of the accidents by local and western daily press (printed and online news).

Press Conferences and Press Releases

The researchers choose to analyse the press conferences instead of annual report because the MH370, MH17 and QZ8501 are the current issue in Malaysia and there is no full report written by the airlines company because these tragedies are still under investigation.

When looking for the material, the researchers analysed the first press conference held by the airlines companies after the incident. By doing this, the researchers are able to make a comparison in similarities and differences between the airline situations at the time. The press releases were found at each airlines respective homepage, because both MAS and Air Asia had all the press releases regarding the aircraft incidents in the archives.

Media Coverage

In the collection of the data through media coverage, the researchers went through all local and western press that have the trustworthy and legitimate values in their news reports. The media coverage used in this research was CNN News, BCC News, the Telegraph, the New Straits Times, the Malay Mail online news, and several others trusted media agencies.

Quantitative Method

A structured questionnaire was constructed to analysing two major aspects that related to the topic which are the level of effectiveness and comparison between Air Asia and MAS. The questionnaire was divided into three main sections: Section A and B containing Likert questions which comprises into two phases, before crisis that contain three questions and after crisis which contain three and four questions, respectively. The questions will evaluate the perception of the stakeholders toward the organisation before and after the crisis. Besides, Section C comprises of three objective questions and two open-ended questions. This section will evaluate the opinions of the public towards the effectiveness of the crisis management used by both airlines company. The questionnaires were distributed to 20 respondents. The respondents are from the Institute of Industrial Training Sandakan (ILP Sandakan) staffs. The respondents are selected based on their frequency of travelling or using aircraft. The respondents are among the staffs that have frequent outstation works and used Air Asia and MAS as their airlines transportation companies. The respondents also are among the workers who live in peninsular Malaysia and work at ILP Sandakan. So, they always used the airlines as their main transportation.

Discussion and Findings

The analysis of the study is divided into two main stages: During crisis and Post-crisis. During crisis stage will be taken during the first week of the incidents and post-crisis will be analysed after the first week of the tragedies. Each stage will be analysed by using the conceptual framework proposed by Abu Bakar, Hamzah, and Muhammad (2014) which divided into four main levels—Input, Treatments/Services, Outcome, and Impact. Input denotes the alterations or changes that are initiated during and after the tragedies to activate manage the crisis. This consists of Society, Media, Aids and Infrastructure. Treatments and Services refer to the actions taken by Malaysia Airlines, Air Asia and the Malaysian government in managing the worst air disaster that hit the nation. Outcomes denote the consequences triggered based on the treatment and services provided. Impact signifies the impact of the treatment and services provided on the families of the victims, society and the nation (Abu Bakar, 2014). However, the findings will include only one component in the framework, which is Input. Input will be divided into four sub-categories, media, aids, society, and lastly the company. Since Malaysia Airlines is a government-based company, the findings will be included on what the Malaysia government

takes to handle the crisis. However, Air Asia is not a government-based company, so the result will be comprised only on what the Air Asia's management takes to overcome the tragedy.

During Crisis

(i) MH370 Tragedy

Media

The first week of the tragedy is seems a hard time for Malaysia Airlines and the government of Malaysia to handle it. In the first week, the initiative taken by both MAS and the government of Malaysia were conducting the media coverage through mass media, press conferences and printed newspaper. Since the day the missing of Flight MH370 was announced, it received non-stop media coverage from various local and foreign media agencies, such as BeritaHarian, Malaysiakini, New Straits Times, Bernama, The Mail, CNN and others which reporting continuous updates about the missing Flight MH370. The media coverage focuses on the mystery of Flight MH370, since there is no clear explanation given by the government of Malaysia and MAS itself regarding to the disappearance. MAS and Malaysia government also used press conferences to report the updated information about Flight MH370. The first live Malaysia Airlines press conference was held on 9th of March 2014 at 7.24 am from Sama-Sama Hotel, KLIA (Kuala Lumpur International Airport) on the missing MH370 Kuala Lumpur-Beijing flight and the press conferences were conducted every half an hour. During the press conference, Malaysia Airlines released a statement confirming that flight MH370 had lost contact with Subang Air Traffic Control. The airlines pledged to provide regular updates on the plane's disappearance. The statement was also posted on Facebook, where it prompted thousands of shares and comments praying for the passengers' safety. Malaysia Airlines also used the social media such as Facebook and Twitter to give updated information regarding to the missing of MH370 throughout the first week of the tragedy. MAS have also reported the latest information through their official Facebook page and Twitter account.

Aids

Multinational supports were given by China, the United States and Australia in the searching mission, which is led by the Malaysia authorities. The Pentagon dispatches a naval destroyer and a surveillance plane to aid in the search for the missing jet. Australia sends RAAF jets which are equipped with sensors and electro-optics detectors that are ideal for the operation and 18 Australian crew members on board each RAAF jet to join the search efforts for the missing Malaysia Airlines plane and responsible in overseeing the search at the Indian Ocean. Meanwhile, China provided satellite to join the search for missing flight MH370. A fleet of Earth-monitoring satellites join the search, providing high-resolution data to authorities on the ground. Apart of the international support, the local also contributes in the search mission. There are one thousand fishermen from the PersatuanNelayanKawasan (Regional Fishermen Association), Kuantan, were voluntarily to help in the search mission.

Society

The family members of the victims in the tragedy are fall under society. On the first week of the incident, the Malaysia government provides the accommodation for the family members

of MH370 victims, especially the family members from China. The family members were stay at Cyberjaya Hotel with free foods, and other requirements were paid by the government of Malaysia.

(ii) MH17 Tragedy

Media

Same goes to the tragedy of MH370, Flight MH17 tragedy also use media as an initiative to handle the crisis. MH17 received relentless attention from both mass media and printed media throughout the world. However, there is an obvious difference in the focus of the news reports. In case of MH17, the media highlights on the terrible and criminals event which caused the horrible accident, instead of focuses on the mystery, conspiracy and theories like in the MH370 case. Thus, foreign newspapers such as the Guardians, the Sun (United Kingdom), the Telegraph (United Kingdom), de Volkskran (Netherlands), Bild (Germany) and the Advertiser (Australia) are more interested to report on the issue about who is responsible for the shot of Flight MH17. Apart of the coverage through the newspaper, MAS also updated the information regarding MH17 through official Facebook and Twitter; serve for the public to follow. MAS and the Malaysia government also conduct press conference to handle the crisis. The first press conference was held on 17th of July 2014 by the MAS authority, to announce the tragedy to the public, especially to the Malaysian.

Aids

As for the MH17 tragedy, the supports were given by several countries to expedite the deportation process of the remains of the passengers and crew of Flight MH17. For example, the Malaysia government were help by the president of United States, Barrack Obama, and the Dutch prime minister, Mark Rutte.

(iii) Air Asia Flight QZ8501 Tragedy

Media

In the case of Flight QZ8501 tragedy, Air Asia authorities report all the updated information regarding the QZ8501 tragedy through their official Twitter account and Facebook and their official website. The newspaper also will report based on the updated status done by Air Asia in their Twitter and Facebook account. A press conference also conducted by the Air Asia CEO, Tony Fernandez to announce the current situation of QZ8501. The focus of the media coverage such as BeritaHarian, New Straits Times, BBC, the Times and the Japan Times are demanding the reasons behind of the horrific tragedy of QZ8501.

Aids

Various supports were given to the Air Asia crews and the Indonesian government in the search mission to find the aircraft debris and the victims. The search mission was beginning on the next day after the tragedy. The searches were led by the Indonesian authorities by sending the National Search and Rescue (BASARNAS), Indonesia and National Air Force Indonesia (TNI-AU). Malaysia has given aid by sending the search and rescue team from Malaysia, which is the Malaysian Armed Forces that is divided into two, which are KD Lekir and KD Pahang.

Post Crisis

(i) Missing MH370 Tragedy

Media

Various local and foreign mainstream media agencies give more attentions to the Flight MH370 tragedy, such as CNN, New Straits Times, The Mail, and Bernama. However, the focuses of the stories in every media was changed into the speculation and theories that related to the mystery of MH370. There are many rumours reported about the missing of Flight MH370. However, Malaysia Airlines and the Malaysia government are making clarifications about the false information and rumours by doing press conferences and making media statements in the Facebook page and Twitter. After the crisis, the press conferences were dwindled to daily as the progress of the search for the missing was noticeably slow.

Aids

The multinational support given by the foreign countries were increased. New Zealand, South Korea, the United Kingdom, France and ASEAN have joined the search and rescue operation. France Office of Investigation and Analysis for the Safety of Civil Aviation was collaborated with the China's Civil Aviation to investigate the MH370 tragedy. Meanwhile, the British company Inmarsat and the UK Air Accident Investigation Branch are responsible in providing the detailed satellite data analysis to be the reference for the search and rescue operation of the missing aircraft.

Apart of the international help from several countries in the search and rescue operation, the Malaysian Bar Council also gives the legal aid to the family members of the MH370 passengers and crews to ease and assists the burden of the families of the passengers and crews of MH370. The legal advice given by the team of lawyers to the victim's families would include issues pertaining to insurance, liability, procedure, possible causes of action and limitation period. The services of the legal aid will be pro bono (no payment required) as it is a normal practice under the Malaysian Legal Aid Scheme. Besides, financial aids also provided the families of MH370 passengers and crews. The families of passengers on the missing Malaysian passenger plane have begun to receive initial compensation payments of \$50,000 (£30,000) by Malaysia Airlines. The full payment will be given to the families of all 239 people on board by the Malaysia Airlines insurer, Germany Allianz. However, the payment will be received after the amount of compensation indicated and they have to wait until MAS announce the issue on the tragedy MH370 is over.

Society

After the MH370 tragedy, there are several ways used by the Malaysia Airlines and the Malaysia government that fall under society, which are, giving the compensation, motivational tolls given by the Malaysia citizens and the counselling services. The compensation was given to the families of the passengers and crews of Flight MH370's victims. The payment of compensation was given by the Malaysia Airlines insurer, a consortium led by Germany's Allianz and it was divided into two phases. The first phase, the families of MH370 will be given initial compensation payments of \$50,000 (£30,000). And it was hoped that it will ease the burden of the family members of Flight MH370. According to the International Civil Aviation Organisation, the relatives of all 239 missing

passengers can claim up to \$175,000 since it was a plane crash. The Malaysian Deputy Foreign Minister, Hamzah Zainudin was assigned to be the head of the committee that support the next-of-kin of the MH370 passengers and the committee is complying all the claims made by the families and the full payment will be paid phase by phase after the tragedy of MH370 is declared as over.

As the families of the passengers and crews were mourning for their loss, the citizen especially Malaysian also overwhelming with sympathies. Many condolence messages were channelled via social network such as Facebook and Twitter and Instagram uploaded by the citizen of Malaysia to show their sadness and sympathies to the victim's families. Other than that, the Malaysian also had given the opportunity to sign on the wishing board as a symbolic of their supports towards the passengers and crews families, Malaysia Airlines and the nation for having the horrible tragedy. The wishing board then will be placed at the airport, supermarkets, hotel and other venues.

The last input of society for MH370 tragedy is the counselling services. The Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development will continue providing counselling for the families of passengers on board Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 until the mystery of its disappearance is resolved. The counselling services were led by its Minister Datuk Seri Rohani Abdul Karim. The main concern of these services was on the crisis counselling with focus on direct and action-oriented approach. The counselling services were divided into two stages, the first stage is taken a week during the crisis happen, which is during they were too distraught and shocked for it, so an intensive and private approach were taken by the counselling team. The second stage of counselling was given during the post crisis of the tragedy, which is a more open approach was taken since the families of the MH370 are able to accept the incident and they can think rationally. The team of counsellors were given their services by going to the families' residence, the hotel where they are staying, hospitals and airports, and the counselling team are available 24 hours.

Infrastructure

The infrastructure given after the crisis can be divided into two, the infrastructure given to the victim's families and infrastructure given by the international countries in helping the search and rescue operation (SAR). As for the family members of the MH370 victims, especially the victim's family from China, which is about 153 passengers on board, was transported to Kuala Lumpur with a MAS flight and they were given privileges to stay at the three hotels which are Cyberjaya Hotel, Lido Hotel and the Everly Hotel in Putrajaya throughout the search of Flight MH370, to ensure the communication between the MAS authorities, the Malaysia government and the families from China regarding the MH370 tragedy going smoothly. All the expenses of meals and accommodations are sponsored by the government of Malaysia. Besides the accommodation, there were several ambulances and about 100 police stand-by in every hotel where the families reside.

Other than that, the Australian Hotels Association also give their accommodations to the families of Flight MH370 passengers to witness the recovery area and to be at the closest where the plane is believed to have jumped into the ocean. The victim's families were transported to Perth, Australia by the Malaysia Airlines flight. There is an agreement of the memorandum of understanding between Malaysia and Australia, in providing high technology equipment needed, during the search of MH370. The Defence Minister, Datuk Hishamuddin has organised the Royal Malaysian Navy, KD Mutiara and Bunga Mas 6 to be involved in the SAR operation by using the Malaysia militarised assets. Following them,

are the other Royal Malaysian Navy vessel, the KD Mutiara, which equipped with multi-beam echo sounder, a Prosas Side Scan Sonar (Towed Synthetic Aperture Sonar) jointly supplied by Petronas, DefTech and Phoenix International, and a deep-towed side scan sonar with a remotely operated vehicle (ROV) provided by Boustead Heavy Industries together with iXBlue Australia. Australia and China provided their assets in the SAR operation, such as two naval vessels Ocean Shield and the UK's HMS Echo, which specialised in detecting the 'pings' from the black box recorder of the aircraft.

(ii) MH17 Tragedy

Media

Like the Flight MH370, the media coverage for MH17 tragedy was increased after the crisis. However, the focus of the topics for MH17 was altered to the political disagreement between Russia, Ukraine and the other western countries, such as the United States and New Zealand. The news report were highlights the 'blame game' between these dominant powers while Malaysia was given less attention in the story, after the crisis and it gives Malaysia some time to recover from MH370 and MH17 tragedies.

Aids

The aids provided for the Flight MH17 are different compared to the aids given to MH370 because the aid given for the MH17 tragedy are came in a form of multinational supports, such as from the United States and Australia, to quicken the process of repatriation of the remains of the MH17 passengers and crews and giving financial aids to the victim's families. These support can be seen on the 20th of September 2014, the United Nations Security Council, which was brought by Julie Bishop, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia, has adopted the resolution which demanded a safe access to allow the recovery of the MH17 victims, which orders the armed groups in the crash site to ceasefire, stop any actions that might interrupt the integrity of the site, and also claimed that all victims of the Flight MH17 be treated with dignity and brought home to their respective homeland to be laid to rest. Russia also requested to use its influence over the separatists to ensure safe return of the victims and to stop the conflict in Ukraine.

Other support was given by the Dutch Prime Minister, Mark Rutte. Mark Rutte had an intense conversation with the Russia's President and warned Vladimir Putin that he has "one last chance" to show that the Dutch is really means to give aid efforts to recover the victims of Flight MH17 and commanded Vladamir Putin to give a safe access to allow the recovery of the MH17 victims. Furthermore, a strong support from the European Union Foreign Ministers, threatened Russia with economic sanction if Russia did not cooperation in handing over the black box of MH17 and the bodies of the victims to the proper authorities. The EU threated Russia that they would impose a significant financial sanction against Russia if Russian-backed separatists continue to obstruct the investigation into the crash of the airliner. MAS also have offered a payment of GBP2980 to families of MH17 victims and the payment is considered as the financial aid, not compensation.

Society

After the Flight MH17 shot down, the world leaders become the criticiser and demand an international investigation over the tragedy at the eastern Ukraine and justice for 298

deaths that could mark a pivotal moment in deteriorating relations between Russia and the West. President Barrack Obama demanded an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine and intensive investigation regarding MH17 tragedy. The United States Vice President, Joe Biden said it appeared the downing of the jetliner was not an accident and that it apparently was “blown out of the sky”. The Australian Prime Minister, Tony Abbott appeared to go further than other Western leaders in apportioning blame, demanding the Moscow to answer questions about the “Russian-backed rebels”.

Additionally, the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel who reverberated the other leaders and demand for a full investigation on the tragedy. Same goes to the Prime Minister of United Kingdom, David Cameron who condemned the government of Ukraine and called for those who involved in the incident to take the responsibility. He also said that MH17 is the most horrible disaster. The Dutch Foreign Minister, Frans Timmermans, also condemned the downing of the civilian airplane Flight MH17 as an act of crime as the passengers of MH17 are mostly from Netherland. He mentioned that the demise of 200 Dutch citizens in the incident has left a hollow in the heart of the nation and it has caused grief, anger and despair for the slow process of securing the crash site and recovering the remains of the victims. The MIKTA (the congregation of foreign ministers of Mexico, Indonesia, Korea, Turkey and Australia) also has expressed their condemnation of the shot down of Flight MH17 and said that it was a serious international crime committed that should be investigated immediately. However, a rare decision made by the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Abdul Razak on 19th July 2014, doing a major breakthrough by reaching an agreement with Ukrainian rebels to hand over the two black boxes from MH17. The agreement also included transporting the remains of the victims by train from the rebel-controlled town of Torez in eastern Ukraine to the government- controlled city of Kharkiv.

Other than that, to show the grief and sympathies of the society, the Netherlands declared a day of national mourning for its 154 dead and Malaysia has also declared a day of national mourning for the first time on 22nd of August 2014. Public sympathies also expressed via social media such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, also the wishing boards that have been placed in public areas such as airports, Hotels and others. Same goes to the MH370, the victim's families also given the counselling service by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community. The counselling services also available for 24 hours like MH370 counselling services. Additionally, the families of the passengers and crews of Flight MH370 are voluntary to offers counselling to the relatives of the MH17 victims.

Infrastructure

The family members of MH17 tragedy were placed at the JW Marriott Hotel in Putrajaya so that they will get the updated information regarding MH17 tragedy, easily. The Minister in the Prime Minister Department, Tan Sri Joseph Kurup said the Malaysian government sent different religions representatives to the Netherlands to handle the funeral arrangements for victims according to the religious rites. Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism representatives were sent to Amsterdam to facilitate the repatriation of the remains of non-Muslims.

(iii) Air Asia Flight QZ8501 Tragedy

Media

An active update by the Air Asia CEO, Tony Fernandez in his Twitter account becomes the main attention of the local and western media coverage. The topic of the news media are

focuses on the reason behind the tragedy of QZ8501. There are lots of theories and speculation related to the Flight QZ8501 tragedy. For example, some says that the accident was caused by the bad weather, no official permission of flight departs, and the aircraft explodes before jump into the ocean and many more theories. However, all the incorrect information and rumours were settled through immediate press conference, media statement in Facebook and updated information given by the Air Asia CEO.

Aids

Many other countries have joined Indonesia and Malaysia in the search and rescue (SAR) operation in Java Sea, such as Singapore, and Australia. Singapore air accident experts, who are the specialists from the Air Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) and hydrography experts from the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA) make up the team, who will also be bringing special equipment, depart to Indonesia to assist in recovery operations for Indonesia Air Asia flight QZ8501. Besides, Singapore has also offered a disaster victim identification team comprising officers from the Singapore Police Force and the Health Sciences Authority to identify victims, to the Indonesian authorities and the Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF) also sent two Super Puma helicopters to the search area, in addition to the two C-130 aircraft already deployed. Meanwhile, Australia gives a hand by sending the Australia Royal Force to help in the search and rescue operation. Australia has offered to send a P3 Orion aircraft to help in the searching of the aircraft debris.

Financial aids also given by the Air Asia Company to the family members of the victims. The letter of compensation acceptance was given to the next-to-kin of the QZ8501 passengers and crews. The letter reportedly said that the compensation of US\$24,000 or RM84, 700 was given for each family member on board the Flight QZ8501 plane that had carried 157 passengers and seven crew members on a flight from the Indonesian city of Surabaya to Singapore on December 28th.

Society

There are various mediums used by Tony Fernandez and the staffs of Air Asia to serve the society, especially the family members of the passengers and crews of Flight QZ8501. One of it is giving the compensation to the victims' families. The Air Asia CEO, Tony Fernandez, was actively expressing his regret and apologise to the family members of the QZ8501 victims through press conferences and social media especially his official Twitter and ask support from the citizens especially the Indonesian and the Air Asia crews to persevere in facing the accident. The CEO of the Air Asia also gives his attention to the members of the Air Asia Big Shot, not only the public, generally. Tony Fernandez sends a personal letter to every member of the Air Asia Big Shot. The letter were portrayed the CEO's regret on what happen to the aircraft QZ8501 and the horrible unfortunate that happen to the passengers and crews of QZ8501, and also asked for support and sympathies from the members of the Air Asia Big Shot.

Infrastructure

After the crisis, the families of Flight QZ8501 passengers and crews were immediately transported to Indonesia by Air Asia and were placed at the accommodations nearby with search and rescue area.

Quantitative Data

The findings for the qualitative data will be based on the questionnaire constructed. There are three sections in the questionnaire. Section A and B containing Likert questions which comprises into two phases, before crisis that contain three questions and after crisis which contain four questions. The questions will evaluate the perception of the stakeholders toward the organisation before and after the crisis. Meanwhile, section C is comprises of three objective questions and two open-ended questions. This section will evaluate the opinions of the public towards the effectiveness of the crisis management used by both airlines company. The questionnaires were distributed to 20 respondents and will be analysed section by section.

Section A: Air Asia QZ8501 Tragedy (Before Crisis)

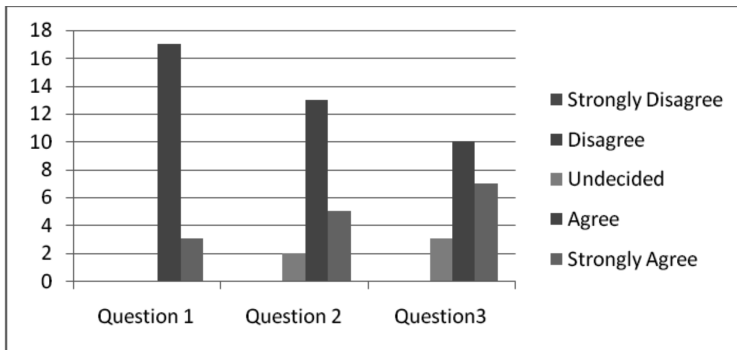


Figure 2. Result of Section A (Before crisis)

Based on the graph above, the first question is “I preferred Air Asia as my number one choices when I go somewhere by airplane”. Among the 20 respondents, 17 respondents are preferred Air Asia as the number one choice to be their airlines transportation and 3 respondents said that they are strongly agree that Air Asia is their preference airlines. In question 2 “I believe that Air Asia is a safe airline company”, two respondents are undecided, 13 respondents agree with the statement and the other 5 respondents said that they are strongly agreed with the statement. For question 3 “Air Asia is able to handle the crisis they faced, effectively”, 3 respondents state that the statement is undecided, 10 respondents agree and 7 respondents are totally agreed with the statement.

After Crisis

For the after crisis, question 1 “I preferred Air Asia as my number one choices when I go somewhere by airplane”, 15 respondents said that they are agree with the statement and the rest said they are totally agree. Question 2 “I believe that Air Asia is a safe airline company even after the incident”, 2 respondents disagree with it, 3 respondents said it was an undecided statement, 13 respondents agree and the other 2 are strongly agreed with the statement. Question 3 “Air Asia is able to handle the crisis they faced, effectively”, 15 respondents agree with the statement and 5 said they are totally agree. Lastly, question 4

"My trustworthy to Air Asia is still the same even after the incident", 3 said it is undecided, 15 respondents said they agree and there said they are totally agree.

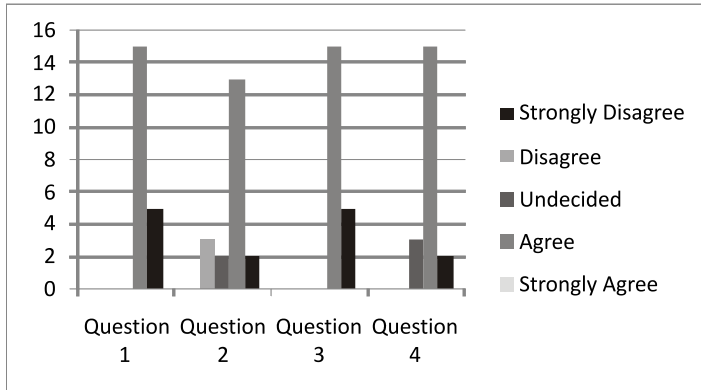


Figure 3. Result of Section A (After crisis)

Section B: Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 and MH17 Tragedies (Before Crisis)

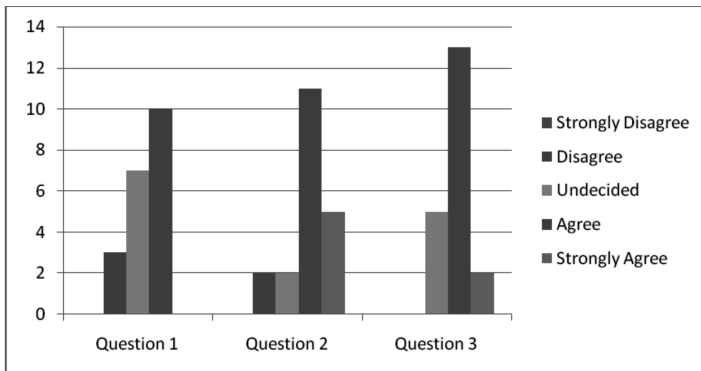


Figure 4. Result of section B (Before crisis)

Based on the graph, question 1 "I preferred MAS as my number one choices when I go somewhere by airplane", 3 respondents said they are disagree, 7 respondents are undecided, and 10 respondents are agree. Question 2 "I believe that MAS is a safe airline company", 2 respondents disagree, 2 respondents are undecided, 11 respondents are agreed and the rest are strongly agreed. Question 3 "MAS is able to handle the crisis they faced, effectively", 5 respondents are undecided, 13 respondents are agree and 2 respondents are strongly agree with the statement.

After Crisis

Based on the graph, question 1 "I preferred MAS as my number one choices when I go somewhere by airplane", 3 respondents said they are disagree, 8 respondents are undecided, 8 respondents agreed, and 1 respondent is strongly agree. Question 2 "I believe that MAS

is a safe airline company even after the incident”, 5 said strongly disagree, 2 said disagree, 5 respondents are undecided and the rest are agreed. Question 3, “MAS is able to handle the crisis they faced, effectively”, 10 respondents said they are disagree, 3 respondents are undecided and 7 respondents said they are agree. Lastly, question 4 “My trustworthy to MAS is still the same even after the incident”, * respondents disagree, 5 respondents are undecided, 5 respondents are agree and 2 respondents are strongly agree with the statement.

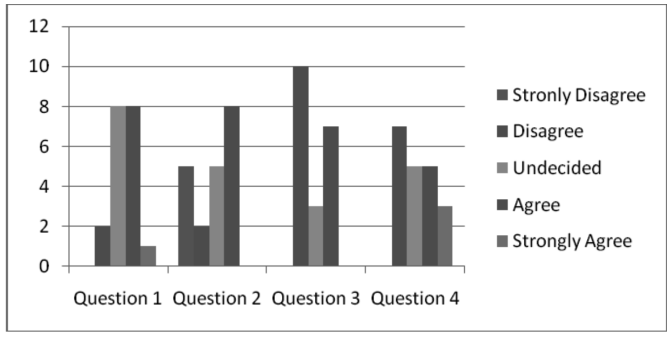


Figure 5. Result of section B (After crisis)

Based on the graph, question 1 “I preferred MAS as my number one choices when I go somewhere by airplane”, 3 respondents said they are disagree, 8 respondents are undecided, 8 respondents agreed, and 1 respondent is strongly agree. Question 2 “I believe that MAS is a safe airline company even after the incident”, 5 said strongly disagree, 2 said disagree, 5 respondents are undecided and the rest are agreed. Question 3, “MAS is able to handle the crisis they faced, effectively”, 10 respondents said they are disagree, 3 respondents are undecided and 7 respondents said they are agree. Lastly, question 4 “My trustworthy to MAS is still the same even after the incident”, * respondents disagree, 5 respondents are undecided, 5 respondents are agree and 2 respondents are strongly agree with the statement.

Section C: Air Asia

For section C, the first question “How do you feel Air Asia has handled QZ8501 situation”, 18 respondents choose the first answer which is Air Asia handle it as perfectly as could be expected and 2 respondents said Air Asia handle it in a good way but still need to be improved. The reasons given in the open ended question are,

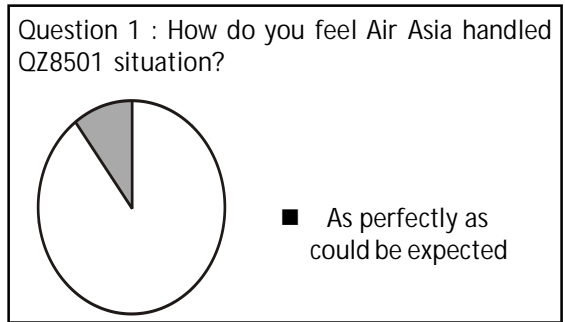


Figure 6. Result of Section C (Air Asia)

Tony Fernandez and the Air Asia crews are able to solve the problem in a short time and Air Asia used an effective approach compared to MAS.

MAS

Based on the graph, 15 respondents said the crisis management is not bad, but could still be improved, 3 respondents said it was quite bad, although MAS seems to take it well and 2 respondents said it was a horrible crisis management and decided to never flying with MAS again. The reasons given in the open ended-question are MAS give a slow action,

complicated and a lot of false information during the crisis and some respondents say MAS take a longer time to solve both crisis, MH370 and MH17.

Conclusion

The discussion in this study will compare the crisis strategies taken by Malaysia Airlines (MAS) and Air Asia during and after the aircraft incidents. Additionally, the discussion will focus on the effectiveness of the crisis management conducted by both airlines companies and the perceptions of the stakeholders towards the airlines management, after the crisis. The analysis will be compared with the past research that studied the same field.

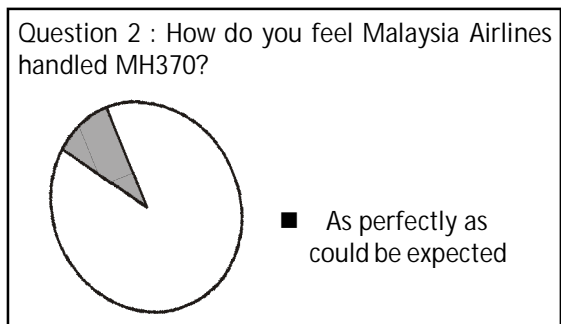


Figure 7. Result of Section C (Air Asia)

Based on the qualitative data collected, it can be found that there is an obvious difference between the crisis management used by Air Asia and Malaysia Airlines (MAS). As MAS is a government-based company, there is a political elements involved in handling the incident of MH370 and MH17. So, it is not only involved one organization, but two major organizations in handling the crises. Flight MH370 and MH17 tragedies are not only affected the reputation of the MAS organization, but also the reputation of the Malaysia government in handling the crises. This is parallel to the research conducted by Abu Bakar, Hamzah, & Muhammad (2014) which stated that the influences of political (the Malaysia government) will gives a big impact the reputation of the whole country because the incident of Flight MH370 and MH17 are the incidents that required many political power involved, to solve the crisis, such as pro-Russia, Ukraine and the United States, which makes the crisis complicated. Meanwhile, Air Asia is a non-government based company so the approach used in handling the crisis is a way different compared to Malaysia Airlines. Air Asia only deal with the Indonesia government itself without involving the Malaysia government political power in it.

Comparison between MAS and Air Asia Crisis Management Approaches

MAS and Air Asia also different in terms of the response while facing the crisis. During the crisis, MAS give a slow response regarding the crisis. The first media statement was at 8.13am, March 8, 2014, which is 6 hours after the incident. The slow response of MAS regarding to the crisis is affecting the perception of the public and the media on the MAS and the Malaysia government because it already show the first action taken by MAS is already portrayed the management quality of MAS and the Malaysia government. This is parallel to the research done by Ulmer (2001) which said that the quality of the actions taken in the early stages of response phase is a vital step because it affects the stakeholder, and sometimes being differences between life and death. Moreover, if the organization did not take an immediate action to respond to the crisis, the media will accuse and makes speculation that the organization is acting irresponsibility and ignoring the crisis (Romenti & Valentini, 2010). On the other hand, Air Asia gives a fast response to the Flight QZ8501 tragedy. Curt Lewis, president of Curt Lewis & Associates in Arlington, Texas, an airline safety and accident investigation consultant said, "The Indonesian government and Air Asia have responded more rapidly and with more accuracy to their customers, family members, and the media in general in comparison to the Malaysian accidents." This kind

of action will give a positive perception of the media and the stakeholders towards Air Asia as media coverage given by the media during the crisis has a large effect on the organization (Romenti & Valentini, 2010).

The difference also can be seen on the preference of the type of media as the main medium in giving the updated status of the crisis. As can be seen in the Air Asia crisis, the CEO, Tony Fernandez is using social media, which is Twitter and Facebook as the main medium in conveying and updating the latest information about the incident. As Tony Fernandez knows that social media is the fastest medium that can be used to report the information and everybody in the world using social media, so it is an easier approach that can be used to tell the people all over the world about the Flight Q8501 tragedy. Differ from Air Asia, Malaysia Airlines preferred press conferences and newspaper as the main medium to report about the updated status of the tragedy. This preference is influenced by the political power that involved in handling the crisis because politicians usually use press conferences in a formal setting when they want to declare something. So, late information update was taken place as the information only can be announced through official statement in the press conferences and not all the people will watch the conference. Apart of the differences, there are also some similarities in terms of the crises management taken by MAS and Air Asia. Both airlines companies were offered the financial aids or compensation to the family members of the tragedies' victims. As already mentioned, stakeholders is the most important members that should be taken care of during the crisis happen (Coombs & Holladay). So, the financial aids are given to the next-of-kins for every passengers and crews of Flight MH370, MH17 and QZ8501. By giving the compensations, the airlines companies show their responsibility towards the crises and it will affect the evaluation of the stakeholders towards both airlines companies. This is parallel to the theory proposed by Coombs and Holladay (2002) which stated that stakeholder perceive the crisis and the organization based on whom they are perceived to be responsible for the crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). So, by giving the compensation, the organization may be protecting their reputation by minimizing the perception stakeholders have of the responsibility of the organization for the events (Stephen et al., 2005; Coombs & Holladay, 2002).

The other similarities between MAS and Air Asia are using media coverage as a channel in giving the updated information regarding to the tragedy of MH370, MH17 and QZ8501. Both airlines used social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Facebook to give updated status about the tragedies. Other than that, both airlines also give an official statement through newspaper press releases and press conferences.

Effectiveness of Malaysia Airlines and Air Asia Crisis Management Strategies

The effectiveness of the crisis management strategies of MAS and Air Asia were analyzed based on both qualitative and quantitative data obtained. Based on the result obtained from the questionnaire, it can be seen that there are differences in term of perception of the public towards MAS and Air Asia before and after the crisis.

In Section A, the questions are focuses to the perception of the public towards Air Asia. As an excellent airlines company with various achievements, it makes the company to be the best choice of airlines among the others. The excellence background, it affects the preferences of the public or stakeholder to choose Air Asia as the main airlines transportation. This reputation also will make the stakeholders to trust the organization as the safe airline and their ability to handle any crisis. However, after the crisis, there is a slightly declined in terms of trustworthy among the stakeholders in choosing the airlines as their main airline company. So, it shows that there is a slightly change in the perception

of the stakeholder towards Air Asia. This analysis were supported by Rhee & Valdez, (2009) a bad relationship between the stakeholder and the organization also affect the perception of the stakeholder towards the company, as it is a sign of lacking capabilities in multiple area, especially in handling the crisis.

In Section 2, the questions are focuses on the perception of the stakeholders towards Malaysia Airlines before and after the tragedies of Flight MH370 and MH17. Based on the findings it shows a drastic decreased in every result. Before the crisis, the perceptions of the stakeholders are already in the unsatisfactory level and after the crisis the perception of the stakeholder becomes worst. This is supported by a research which stated that if the organization has a past crisis history, the organizations will suffer worse damage to their reputation as the crisis was repeated, and if the crisis is getting worse, it will cause more damage to the organization (Coombs, 2004). As Malaysia Airlines already has another aircraft crashes before the MH370 and MH17. Before the incidents of MH17 and MH370, there are also other incidents related to MAS, such as on 1977 that involved 100 passengers and crews died in Flight MH653. Besides, there is also an accident on 1995 which caused 34 people died on board. So, the past crises have already given a negative impact to the Malaysia Airline organization. In Section C, the stakeholders believe that Air Asia has handled the QZ8501 crisis better than MAS who involved in two tragedies, which are MH370 and MH17. The result shows the trustworthy of the stakeholders toward both companies in handling the crises and it is also influenced by the effectiveness of the crisis management strategies used by Air Asia and MAS.

Based on the content analysis conducted by the researchers, it can be seen that Tony Fernandez, used four crisis strategies to handle QZ8501 tragedy. Firstly, giving respond quickly with action. Barely an hour after the incident was announced via Air Asia's own twitter, Tony managed expectations before them by updating an official statement regarding to the tragedy. Three hours later, Tony was on a flight to Surabaya, with clear intentions of exactly why he was doing that. Several newspapers also started covering him in a very flattering light.

Secondly, do not put the blame on others. The CEO of Air Asia is more focus on how to solve the problem rather than searching the reason and who should be blame. So, to avoid the crisis becomes more complicated, Air Asia only used defensive strategies such as denial to have the sympathies by the public and it was supported by Coombs and Holladay (2002), which stated that for the accidents where there are no additional factors, organizations are more likely to use defensive strategies like denial, excuses of the crisis existence and portraying the organization as a victim and reminding the stakeholders about the organization past accomplishments.

Thirdly, is by telling people where to find information so they do not have to look for it themselves, because rumors spread faster than facts. So, to avoid it, Air Asia has using the social media to update the recent information about QZ8501, as it was a fastest way to give information rather than newspaper.

Lastly, be sincere and transparent. As Air Asia used social media as their main medium, Tony used the language that connected people, to make them feel that he cares. Compare to what the actions taken by MAS with MH370 tragedy. The crises management used is more confusing and complicated, where no one knew what was happening and the Prime Minister of Malaysia conduct the first statement a full 9 hours after the incident which basically did not tell the public anything about the incident. Moreover, MAS is more to the "blame-game" as it related to some political issues, so the international power such as the United States, Russia and Ukraine, MAS and Malaysia government are busy to find the person who should responsible for the tragedy rather than solve it.

Based on the content analysis and the findings obtained, it can be concluded that Air Asia and MAS have their own crisis management strategies. The strategies used by the organization are influenced by several factors such as the political power involved, the type of the crises and the background of the airlines companies itself. However, it can be concluded that, Air Asia has an effective crisis management strategies compared to MAS as Air Asia is able to handle the crisis in a short time compared to MAS that takes a long time, which is taking over than a year to solve the problem.

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Mohd Nazri Latiff Azmi is a senior lecturer in Faculty of Languages and Communication at Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia. His specializations are comparative literature and literacy.

Nur Ain Afizan Abd Rahman was an undergraduate student at Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia. Currently she is working as an English language teacher.

Zulazhan Abd Halim is a senior lecturer at Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia. His specializations are more to grammar and vocabulary teaching.

Mohd Fauzi Abdul Hamid is a senior lecturer at Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia. His specializations are more to computer assisted language learning and teaching strategies.