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# The Right Words at the Wrong Time: Exploring the Role of Tone of Voice and Brand Personality in Crisis Communication

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## **Abstract**

Title:

The Right Words at the Wrong Time: Exploring the Role of Tone of Voice and Brand Personality in Crisis Communication

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Effective crisis communication is critical for brands to maintain their reputation. This thesis investigates the interplay between tone of voice and brand personality in shaping consumer perceptions during crises. Using a 2x3 factorial design, the study evaluates how three tones of voice (corporate, personal, and humor) interact with two brand personalities (competence and excitement) to influence account acceptance, brand trust, and positive word of mouth. The research employs two fictitious brands, Auris (Competent) and VibeWave (Exciting), communicating a manufacturing crisis via email, targeting participants in Germany. The findings reveal significant effects of tone of voice on account acceptance and brand trust, with corporate and personal tones emerging as the most effective. Humor, however, is perceived negatively in this context, highlighting its limited applicability in formal communication channels like email. Furthermore, the results showed that brand personality does not significantly moderate the impact of tone of voice on consumer perceptions. This suggests that brands should prioritize tone over strict alignment with brand personality in crisis communication. The study shows the importance of context and highlights the role of familiarity, as the fictitious brands used in the survey may limit the effectiveness of personal and humor tones of voice. Practical implications include adopting tones of voice according to the crisis situation and tailoring communication strategies to audience expectations and channels. Limitations, such as the use of fictitious brands and difficulties in stimulus manipulation, suggest opportunities for future research to validate these findings across real-world brands and other communication channels.

## Sumário

Título:

As Palavras Certas no Momento Errado: Explorando o Papel do Tom de Voz e da Personalidade da Marca na Comunicação de Crise

Autor:

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Palavras-chave:

Tom de Voz, Personalidade da Marca, Comunicação de Crise

A comunicação de crise eficaz é essencial para preservar a reputação de uma marca. Esta tese analisa a interação entre o tom de voz e a personalidade da marca na percepção dos consumidores durante crises. Utilizando um design fatorial 2x3, o estudo avalia como três tons de voz (corporativo, pessoal e humorístico) interagem com duas personalidades de marca (competência e entusiasmo) para influenciar a aceitação da mensagem, a confiança na marca e o boca a boca positivo. A pesquisa foi conduzida com duas marcas fictícias, Auris (Competente) e VibeWave (Entusiasmante), que comunicaram uma crise de produção por e-mail a participantes na Alemanha. Os resultados destacam que os tons corporativo e pessoal são os mais eficazes para promover aceitação e confiança, enquanto o humor teve um impacto negativo, especialmente em canais formais como e-mail. Além disso, a personalidade da marca não teve efeito moderador significativo, sugerindo que o tom de voz deve ser priorizado em relação à personalidade da marca na comunicação de crises. O estudo ressalta a importância de considerar o contexto e o canal de comunicação, assim como o papel da familiaridade do público com a marca, especialmente no uso de tons pessoais e humorísticos. Limitações, como o uso de marcas fictícias, apontam para a necessidade de validação futura em contextos reais. A pesquisa oferece insights práticos sobre a adaptação do tom de voz às situações de crise e às expectativas do público.

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## 1. Introduction

Language has been at the heart of human civilization since its beginning. Without language, it would have been impossible to build relationships, form cultures and enable social progress and advancement. Words have the power not only to inform, but also to influence how people think, feel and behave. In today's society, it is not just about conveying information through words, the way those words are said is just as important to the recipient's understanding. This not only applies to individual conversations, but also plays a critical role in how brands communicate with their audiences.

Marketing and communications professionals have long recognized the importance of carefully choosing words to build and maintain a brand's personality and image, especially in the digital age where brands are constantly in the spotlight. In the past, branding was largely product-focused, with businesses relying on features and benefits to attract consumers. However, with the rise of social media and brand visibility, communication has shifted to building relationships with consumers (Oh et al., 2020). In this connected world, brands are expected to speak not only as entities but as relatable personalities, capable of engaging consumers on a human level.

At the heart of effective brand storytelling is the idea of brand personality. Much like people, brands can be thought of as having distinct characteristics that describe how they interact with the world. A famous approach to defining brand personalities was created by Aaker (1997) in her framework of personality dimensions. In her work, she describes five key dimensions of brand personality: sincerity, competence, excitement, sophistication and ruggedness. As consistency in communication helps to reinforce a brand's identity and builds trust with consumers (Batra, Lehmann, & Singh, 1993) brands usually try to communicate in ways that reinforce the brand personality they want to convey to the consumer. Every interaction a brand has with its audience, whether through advertising, social media posts or customer support emails, is an opportunity to shape consumer perceptions and brand reputation. And in today's world, a brand's tone of voice is as much a part of its identity as its logo, colors or tagline.

Consistency in communication is also very important in times of crisis, when the stakes are higher, and the wrong tone can lead to mistrust or reputational damage. A well-crafted response, delivered in an appropriate tone, is likely to mitigate damage and rebuild trust, while a poorly chosen tone can escalate the situation and lead to a loss of consumer confidence. There are different tones of voice a brand can decide to use when communicating to its customers and the

consumer. In the past the professional and corporate tone was often favored but in a more connected world, where brands have focused heavily on building relationships with consumers to generate positive associations, other communication styles have risen in significance. Especially in social media, brands use a multitude of communication styles to attract attention and connect with the people. Some brands use a very personal and friendly tone when communicating, like for example Ben & Jerries, to appear relatable. Others focus heavily on humor to create connections with consumers, as for example Ryanair, that has built their communication strategy on social media around witty and clever comebacks, self-deprecating memes and even apply this strategy when responding to negative feedback (Armstrong, 2024).

Evidently, there are many ways how brands can communicate to the consumers and most brands decide to use a tone of voice that fits their brand personality. This master thesis will deep dive into the effects of tone of voice especially in relation to the brand personality and storytelling in crisis communication. It will examine the impact of tone of voice in customer support interactions, with a particular focus on a crisis where a brand error negatively affects a customer. Using a 2x3 factorial design, an experiment will be conducted through an online survey. The study will explore how consumers respond to the three different tones of voice (Corporate, Personal and Humor) after receiving the crisis communication of two fictitious brands. In addition, it will analyze whether the different personalities of the brands (Competent and Exciting) play a role in crisis communication and if and how the interaction between tone of voice and brand personality shapes consumer perceptions. The aim is to advance knowledge in a highly specialized area of crisis communication research while providing actionable insights that brands can apply in practice.

## **2. Literature Review**

Scientific research on brand personality proposes that brands can develop humanlike traits based on how they communicate and present themselves. Given that it has become more and more complicated for consumers to differentiate between competing brands in very saturated markets, brand personality and storytelling have become essential in marketing strategies. The differentiation of brands becomes easier when they are associated with human characteristics, allowing consumers to connect those brands to their specific needs (Park et al., 1986). Many previous consumer studies have also supported the idea that consumers consider it natural to

engage and build relationships with brands (Fournier, 1998). It is important to clarify that a brand's personality evolves over time through every point of contact the consumer has with it, whether directly or indirectly (Shank & Langmeyer, 1994; Plummer, 1984). It is all these interactions that shape how consumers perceive the brand and the traits they associate with it. As Aaker (1997) highlighted, this personality is shaped by the full range of marketing communications, including but not limited to advertising, packaging, pricing, logos, and tone of voice in communication. A well-defined and consistent brand personality emerges when these elements are carefully aligned and maintained over time (Batra, Lehmann, & Singh, 1993).

Aaker (1997) developed one of the main frameworks for brand personalities, which is composed of five dimensions: Sincerity (down-to-earth, honest, wholesome, cheerful), Excitement (daring, spirited, imaginative, up to date), Competence (reliable, intelligent, successful), Sophistication (upper class, charming), and Ruggedness (outdoorsy, tough). For both marketers and consumers, brand personality holds significant value as it plays a key role in a brand's overall image and perceived worth in terms of brand equity in the consumer's mind (Keller, 1993). A distinct and consistent personality can foster a strong connection with consumers, enhancing brand loyalty and differentiation from competitors, thus boosting marketing effectiveness (Lannon, 1993). Freling and Forbes (2005) further support this stating a strong, positive brand personality also leads to more brand associations that are favorable, unique and strong, therefore further enhancing brand equity. They also suggested that any brand personality, so long as it is perceived as being strong and favorable, is likely to be associated with positive consequences. Like human personalities, brand personalities consist of traits that are recognized over the long term. They evoke emotional responses in consumers (Aaker & Biel, 2013) and foster trust and loyalty (Fournier, 1998). A strong brand personality also enhances consumer preference and usage (Sirgy, 1982). Additionally, it encourages active engagement from consumers (Biel, 1992) and provides a foundation for product differentiation (Aaker, 1997). This makes brand personality a vital factor in helping brands stand out in the marketplace.

As said above, consumer perceptions of a brand and its personality are shaped by a variety of elements, many of which are subtle or complex. These elements can range from obvious factors, such as the brand's name, to more complex signals like the tone of voice. Even details like font choices on logos or packaging can convey distinct personality traits (Doyle & Bottomley, 2006). For example, serif fonts such as Times New Roman evoke qualities of elegance and

charm, while sans serif fonts like Helvetica are associated with strength, modernity, and intelligence (Tantillo et al., 1995). As this master thesis focuses specifically on how tone of voice shapes a brand's personality and influences consumer perceptions in a crisis, the literature on tone of voice will now be explored in depth.

Carnevale et al. (2017) state that brand personality is shaped by several linguistic factors, including the brand's unique linguistic identity and the structural properties of the language it uses. Moreover, how consumers perceive a brand is influenced by the linguistic characteristics of competing brands and the competitive landscape it operates in. Therefore, marketers need to pretest and monitor whether the tone of voice and vocabulary are not only consistent with their desired traits but also differentiated enough from competing brands. The tone of voice used by the brand, as defined by the choices of words as well as other linguistic devices (e.g., rhymes), should therefore reflect the desired brand personality. Moran (2024) identified four key dimensions of tone of voice that brands use to communicate and can manipulate in their communication style from a very practical standpoint: formal vs. casual, serious vs. funny, respectful vs. irreverent, and enthusiastic vs. matter of fact. Each dimension can be adjusted to shape how audiences perceive the brand, helping companies reflect their values, connect with users, and build trust. A casual communication style is defined by the use of informal and everyday language (McArthur et al., 2018). In contrast to formal styles, which are typical of written language, informal styles are more closely linked to spoken communication (Biber, 1986) and are characterized by linguistic elements commonly found in conversational speech (Fairclough, 1996).

In social media, a brand's tone of voice is especially important during initial interactions, when consumers begin to form impressions of unfamiliar brands. In these moments, non-verbal aspects such as communication style are crucial in decreasing uncertainty and shaping perceptions of brand trustworthiness (Keeling et al., 2009). The way brands communicate with consumers can be thus decisive in shaping consumer attitudes and determining whether the relationship will progress beyond the initial encounters (Keeling et al., 2009). Gretry et al. (2017) showed that informal style can have both, a positive or negative effect on brand trust, which dependent on if the consumers were familiar with the brand or not. More precisely these effects occur because consumers expect brands to behave according to social norms, such that the use of an informal style is perceived to be appropriate for familiar brands and inappropriate for unfamiliar ones (Gretry et al., 2017). This showed that there can also be negative aspects when a brand adopts a more casual and personal communication style.

In scientific literature the concept of brands adopting a more personal style is often referred to as conversational human voice (CHV) and has gained significant traction in research in recent years. It was first mentioned by Kelleher (2009) when he examined how consumers perceive brand communication via online blogs. Conversational human voice is defined as “an engaging and natural style of organizational communication as perceived by an organization's publics based on interactions between individuals in the organization and individuals in the public” (Kelleher, 2009). According to Kelleher, individuals who frequently visited a brand's blog were more inclined to interpret the brand as employing a conversational and human-like tone. This perception was linked to increased levels of trust, satisfaction, and commitment (Kelleher, 2009; Kelleher and Miller, 2006). Prior to the rise of social media, businesses often utilized a "corporate voice" to ensure their communication was formal and persuasive (Dijkmans et al., 2015). Changing these to CHV has allowed organizations to present themselves as more "human-like," enabling consumers to easier build connections with brands due to the approachable and friendly tone (Dijkmans et al., 2015). Liebrecht et al. (2021) identified three primary linguistic strategies for CHV in brand communication. The first is message personalization, which includes using personal greetings, first-person pronouns, and personalized signatures to create a more individualized interaction. The second is informal speech, characterized by casual language, including contractions, colloquialisms, emojis, and sound effects that establish a friendly and relaxed tone. Finally, invitational rhetoric that encourages dialogue by expressing gratitude, empathy, or humor, fostering engagement and building stronger relationships between the brand and consumers.

Barcelos et al. (2017) demonstrated additional impacts of CHV on consumers, showing that the use of CHV in online communication can greatly enhance purchase intentions for hedonic brands, particularly when the posts are positive. However, for purchases involving high risk, a corporate tone is more effective. Their research also indicates that CHV, compared to a corporate tone, has no significant impact when addressing multiple negative comments on social media. Yang et al. (2010), on the other hand, show that in some crisis communication, a more personal and dialogical style is perceived better than a formal, impersonal communication. As complaints are usually focused on individual cases, the human tone of voice could suggest that the service provider understands and empathizes with the complainer's individual position.

Given that this thesis examines the role of tone of voice in crisis communication, it is also essential to explore the specific implications of what defines a crisis. According to Seeger et al. (1998) a corporate crisis refers to “a specific, unexpected, and non-routine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and threaten or are perceived to threaten an organization's high priority goals”. In order to limit negative consequences, organizations must engage in effective crisis management. Crisis management encompasses a range of strategies aimed at managing crises and minimizing their damage (Coombs & Laufer, 2018). The appropriate response depends on the severity and nature of the crisis. A well-known framework for crisis management is the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), developed by Coombs (2007). SCCT categorizes crises into three clusters based on their severity: the victim cluster (lowest severity), the accident cluster (moderate severity) and the preventable cluster (highest severity). To maintain their brand reputation from potential threats, organizations commonly address crises by using media strategies as for example public relations or advertising campaigns (Avraham, 2013; Kim & Atkinson, 2014). In the past, companies often relied on apologetic press releases or having their CEO appear in news interviews to communicate with the public. But nowadays, a growing number of organizations utilize social media as a tool for crisis management (Freberg, 2012). Han et al. (2017) proved that brand personalities are a factor in responding to a crisis emphasizing that crisis communication strategies should align with brand personality. In their study sincere brands, according to Aaker’s Framework, generally experience more reputational damage from crises and thus are more likely to quickly adapt their communication strategies. Exciting brands, however, maintain a consistent tone, focusing on openness even during crises.

A distinct approach that will also be explored through this thesis is the use of humor, specifically self-deprecating humor, in crisis communication. Although this area has not been widely researched, Kim et al. (2016) examined its use during a crisis of the company Alibaba. When a subsidiary of Alibaba was accused of exaggerating sales data, initial company responses only worsened public perception. However, the company changed its approach by incorporating CEO Jack Ma’s well-known persona into the messaging, using self-mocking humor, such as joking about his own poor math skills, which led to a more favorable public reaction. Kim et al. (2016) further argue that traditional crisis communication strategies, such as denial or justification, are less effective in the context of social media. Instead, adopting informal tactics like humor and figurative language can more successfully mitigate reputational damage, especially when these strategies align with the brand’s identity or the CEO’s image.

### 3. Research Questions

While research on tone of voice in brand communication has made significant strides, particularly in areas like conversational human voice (CHV) and its impact on consumer-brand relationships, there remains a substantial gap in understanding how tone of voice affects consumer perceptions specifically during crisis communication. Furthermore, the use of humor in crisis communication is still underexplored. Despite early findings such as in Kim et al. (2016) suggesting that self-deprecating humor can positively shift public sentiment using the case of Alibaba, there has been little effort to generalize findings in the crisis context. This leaves room to further investigate how humor, alongside other tones, can be strategically employed in crisis communication.

This thesis aims to bridge these gaps by examining the relationship between tone of voice and consumer perceptions during crises, and how and if brand personalities are a moderating factor that brands need to keep in mind when defining the crisis response strategies further building on the research of Han et al. (2017). Prior research has focused a lot on social media as a primary communication tool in crisis communication. In contrast this study will apply a more direct and traditional communication channel by using customer emails to find out if similar findings can be replicated. Lastly, this survey will focus on Germany as the research location to minimize cultural biases and to be able to generalize findings to managerial implications for the German market. Three constructs have been used successfully in prior research and will be applied to analyze consumer perceptions in crisis communication: *Account Acceptance*, *Brand Trust* and *Positive Word of Mouth* (Yang et al., 2010). Account Acceptance describes the extent to which stakeholders perceive a company's explanation or response to a crisis as credible, satisfactory and effective in addressing concerns. Brand Trust refers to the extent to which stakeholders believe in the reliability, integrity, and competence of a brand. Positive Word of Mouth refers to the extent to which stakeholders share favorable opinions or recommendations of a brand.

The following research questions will be explored:

RQ1: How do different tones of voice affect consumer perceptions in crisis communication?

This question explores which tone of voice generates the most favorable consumer perceptions during a crisis, aiming to establish whether a corporate, casual, or humorous approach is more

effective in mitigating reputational damage by analyzing the dimensions of account acceptance, brand trust and positive word of mouth following the crisis communication.

*H1: Tone of Voice influences perceptions of account acceptance.*

*H2: Tone of Voice influences perceptions of brand trust.*

*H3: Tone of Voice influences perceptions of positive word of mouth.*

RQ2: Are consumers generally more forgiving in a crisis toward some brand personalities than others?

This question seeks to understand whether the brand personalities, in this case exciting and competent, will have an impact on how consumers respond to communication in times of crisis by analyzing the dimensions of account acceptance, brand trust and positive word of mouth.

*H4: A brand that focuses on quality and competence in their brand personality will be treated more harshly by the consumer if a crisis occurs than a brand that focuses on excitement.*

RQ3: Is a brands personality a moderating factor and does it affect how consumers perceive different tones of voice in crisis communication?

This question examines whether brands should adjust their tone of voice by for example using a more corporate tone of voice in crisis situations, even if the tone does not fit their usual brand personality by analyzing the dimensions of account acceptance, brand trust and positive word of mouth.

*H5: Brand personalities are a moderating factor in how consumers perceive tone of voice in regard to their opinions on account acceptance, brand trust and word of mouth in crisis communication.*

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1 Survey Design**

As the research tried to minimize cultural influences and biases, this research focused on Germany as the country of research. As a result, the survey included a filter question that guaranteed that only people that are currently living in Germany or are of German nationality are allowed to answer the survey. Afterwards a 2x3 factorial design was employed to investigate how different tones of voice interact with brand personality in crisis communication. This design included two key manipulations: the brand personalities of two fictitious brands and three different tones of voice, that the brands used in their crisis communication. The two brands, Auris, embodying a competence-based personality, and VibeWave, representing an excitement-based personality, both according to Aaker's five personality framework, were evaluated for their communication strategies during a manufacturing crisis involving delayed production and shipping. The crisis situation in the email would be categorized in the "accident cluster" in the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) of Coombs (2007) and has a moderate reputational threat. The brands communicated these issues to consumers through support emails using three distinct tones of voice: Corporate, Personal, and Humor. The corporate tone was formal and business-like, the personal tone conversational and friendly, and the humor tone included self-deprecating humor, featuring a meme to reinforce its distinctiveness. This approach allowed the study to explore how these different tones of voice affect consumer perceptions during a crisis.

To manipulate brand personality, Auris was portrayed as reliable and performance-driven, while VibeWave was described through fun and youthfulness. Both brands had distinct descriptions and visuals to reinforce these personalities. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of six conditions (2 brands x 3 tones of voice). After reading the stimulus material, a manipulation check was conducted to ensure that participants correctly perceived the brand personality and the tones of voice.

For the product category of the stimulus brands, portable speakers were selected as they strike a balance between being moderately priced and having a medium high level of customer involvement. This ensures that participants are invested in the product's availability without causing overly extreme reactions that might result from highly expensive or inexpensive items with very high or very low involvement.

After receiving the stimulus material, the survey assessed the perception of its participants through a series of scales that have proven successful in similar research. *Account acceptance* was measured using five 5-point Likert scale adapted from Blumstein et al. (1974), including dimensions such as favorable, acceptable, adequate, believable, and sincere. *Brand trust* was evaluated using three 5-point Likert scale developed by Morgan and Hunt (1994), assessing statements like "I feel that I can trust the brand", "I believe the brand can be relied upon to assist me and other consumers" and "The brand appears reliable". Lastly, *Positive Word of Mouth* was measured through three 5-point scales adopted from Brown (2005), including statements such as "I would encourage friends and family to buy from the brand", "I would recommend the brand's products to someone seeking advice" and "I would speak positively about the brand and its products to others". Additionally, demographic data (e.g., age, gender, education level, occupation status) will be collected. The full survey and stimulus material can be viewed in Appendix D.

#### **4.2 Data Collection Method**

The marketing research survey was conducted between the 13<sup>th</sup> and the 26<sup>th</sup> of November 2024 using the Qualtrics Tool. The survey was conducted in English language and shared on various personal social media channels, including Instagram and WhatsApp. Additionally, to generate a higher number of participants and guarantee a sufficient number in each of the six groups of the 2x3 factorial design, the survey was also shared through the scientific research platforms Prolific and SurveyCycle.

#### **4.3 Sampling**

The main target population for this study comprised individuals who live in Germany or are of German nationality. A total of 257 participants participated in the survey due to extensive sharing. Convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling technique, was employed due to its reliance on the availability and willingness of participants. This method includes individuals who are easily accessible and can be included in the study. However, it is important to note that this approach may introduce biased answers, and the sample may not be representative of the entire population. The sample consisted of 60% male respondents, 38% female respondents and 1% defined themselves as non-binary (Appendix A1). Regarding the age groups 25% of the sample were between 18-25 years old, 45% were between 24-34 years old, 14% were between 35-44 years old, 6% were between 45-54 years old and 10% were over 55 years old (Appendix A2).

The sample was generally highly educated with the highest degree achieved being the high school degree for 33%, the bachelor’s degree for 40%, the master’s degree for 24% and the doctor’s degree for 2% of participants (Appendix A3). These figures translate and are reflected in the occupational situation where the majority of respondents (51%) reported being employed full-time or part-time, while 34% indicated that they were currently studying and roughly 8% are retired or unemployed (Appendix A4).

According to the 2x3 factorial design, which was used in the survey, there were six groups that were exposed to different brand personalities and tone of voice stimulus material. The different groups were the following:

Group	Stimulus Material	Participants (N)
1	Auris/Corporate Tone	41
2	Auris/Personal Tone	49
3	Auris/Humor Tone	37
4	VibeWave/Corporate Tone	41
5	VibeWave/Personal Tone	35
6	VibeWave/Humor Tone	43

#### **4.4 Method of Analysis**

For the brand personality manipulation check, both items for each personality were computed to one variable analyzing the competent personality and one variable analyzing the exciting personality. The same was done for the five items analyzing account acceptance, the three items analyzing brand trust and the three items analyzing word of mouth, which were combined to one variable describing each dependent variable. A significance level of 5% was selected to answer the research questions, and a range of statistical methods was utilized, including Frequencies, Descriptives, Independent T-Tests, One Way ANOVA and Multifactor ANOVA to further analyze the new different variables. A more comprehensive description of the

methods employed will be provided in the following chapters, which cover the analysis, findings, and results of the online survey in more detail.

## **5. Results**

### **5.1 Manipulation Checks**

#### ***Brand Personality***

A manipulation check was conducted that ensured that participants perceived the intended brand personalities for Competence (Auris) and Excitement (VibeWave) as designed. The independent samples t-tests confirmed the effectiveness of the manipulation. Participants exposed to Auris rated the brand significantly higher ( $p < .001$ ) on competence ( $M = 4.12$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ) compared to those exposed to VibeWave ( $M = 3.27$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ). Similarly, participants exposed to VibeWave rated the brand significantly higher ( $p < .001$ ) on excitement ( $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ ) compared to those exposed to Auris ( $M = 2.89$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ). Collectively, these results confirm that the brand personality manipulations were successful (See Appendix B1).

#### ***Tone of Voice***

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to test whether participants accurately perceived the tone of voice in the manipulations (Corporate, Personal, Humor). The participants that received the email using a corporate tone in their stimulus rated the item “*The email uses a professional and corporate tone*” ( $M = 4.29$ ,  $SD = 0.64$ ) significantly higher ( $p < .001$ ) than the participants that received the personal ( $M = 2.18$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ ) and humor stimulus ( $M = 1.70$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ). For participants that received the email with a personal tone stimulus, they correctly perceived the item “*The email uses a personal and informal tone*” higher ( $M = 3.95$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ) than the participants who received the corporate stimulus ( $M = 2.32$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ). Unfortunately, there is no significant difference between the groups that received the personal and humor stimulus ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ) on how they rated the personal variable seen above, meaning in this case the manipulation was unsuccessful. Lastly, for the humor stimulus, participants rated the humor item “*The email uses a humorous and funny tone*” significantly higher ( $M = 4.26$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ) than both the participants who received the personal stimulus ( $M = 3.14$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ) and corporate stimulus ( $M = 1.50$ ,  $SD = 0.77$ ) meaning the manipulation was successful (See Appendix B2).

## **5.2 Hypothesis Testing**

### ***H1: Tone of Voice influences perceptions of account acceptance.***

The hypothesis that the tone of voice influences perceptions of account acceptance was tested using a two-way ANOVA, with tone of voice (Corporate, Personal, Humor) and brand personality (Auris, Vibewave) as the independent variables (See Appendix C1). Account Acceptance served as the dependent variable, measuring the extent to which participants perceive and accept the brand's response in a crisis.

The descriptive statistics for Account Acceptance show differences in the participant responses based on the tone of voice they were exposed to. The corporate tone stimulus resulted in the highest mean for Account Acceptance ( $M = 3.65$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ), followed by the personal tone ( $M = 3.42$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ) and the humor tone, which received the lowest mean for Account Acceptance ( $M = 2.79$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ).

A two-way ANOVA revealed a significant ( $p < .001$ ) main effect of the tone of voice on Account Acceptance indicating that the tone of voice used in the brand's communication strongly influences participants acceptance of the response therefore supporting H1.

Post-hoc analysis using Tukey's test revealed significant differences between tone of voice. The corporate tone of voice was significantly more effective in generating Account Acceptance compared to the humor tone ( $p < .001$ ), and the personal tone also outperformed humor ( $p < .001$ ). However, the difference between corporate and personal tone of voice was not statistically significant ( $p = .221$ ).

### ***H2: Tone of Voice influences perceptions of brand trust.***

The hypothesis that the tone of voice influences perceptions of brand trust was again tested using a two-way ANOVA, using the same methodology as in H1 (See Appendix C2). Brand Trust served as the dependent variable, capturing participants' confidence in the brand after exposure to the crisis communication.

Descriptive statistics showed slight variations in mean brand trust scores across tone of voice. Corporate tone resulted in the highest level of brand trust ( $M = 3.08$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ), followed by the personal tone ( $M = 3.02$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ). Humor tone of voice showed the lowest trust scores ( $M = 2.72$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ).

The two-way ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of tone of voice on brand trust ( $p = .044$ ). This indicates that tone of voice does have a significant impact on how participants perceived brand trust therefore proving H2.

Again, post-hoc comparisons (Tukey's test) were conducted further analyzing the differences in brand trust between the different tones of voice stimulus. While corporate tone of voice resulted in higher trust compared to humor, the difference approached but did not reach statistical significance ( $p = .059$ ). Similarly, personal tone of voice yielded higher trust compared to humor, but the difference was also not statistically significant ( $p = .132$ ). There was also no significant difference in trust levels between corporate and personal tone of voice ( $p > .926$ ).

***H3: Tone of Voice influences perceptions of positive word of mouth.***

The hypothesis that the tone of voice influences positive word of mouth was tested using a two-way ANOVA, using the same methodology as in H1 and H2 (See Appendix C3). Word of Mouth served as the dependent variable, measuring participants likelihood to recommend the brand or speak positively about it after the crisis.

The descriptive statistics indicate small differences in mean scores for positive word of mouth across tone of voice. Personal tone of voice had the highest mean score ( $M = 2.56$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ), followed by humor ( $M = 2.44$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ) and corporate tone ( $M = 2.39$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ).

The two-way ANOVA revealed no significant main effect of tone of voice on positive word of mouth ( $p = .424$ ). This indicates that the tone of voice used in the crisis communication did not significantly influence participants likelihood to speak positively about the brand therefore not proving H3, which has to be rejected.

***H4: A brand that focuses on quality and competence in their brand personality will be treated more harshly by the consumer if a crisis occurs than a brand that focuses on excitement.***

The hypothesis that a brand focusing on quality and competence (Auris) will be treated more harshly in consumer perceptions during a crisis compared to a brand focusing on excitement (VibeWave) was tested using two-way ANOVAs for account acceptance, brand trust, and word of mouth.

The results revealed that brand personality, as a main effect, did not significantly influence any of the dependent variables. For account acceptance, the main effect of brand personality was

not significant ( $p = .218$ ) indicating that participants did not differ in their acceptance of the brand's response based on whether the brand personality. Similarly, for brand trust, the main effect of brand personality was also non-significant ( $p = .937$ ) suggesting that trust levels were unaffected by the brand personality. Finally, for word of mouth, the main effect of brand personality was again not significant ( $p = .993$ ) showing no difference in willingness to recommend or speak positively about the brand. These findings do not support the hypothesis that a competent brand personality would be treated more harshly during a crisis compared to an exciting brand personality and as a result H4 has to be rejected (See Appendix C1, C2, C3).

***H5: Brand personalities are a moderating factor in how consumers perceive tone of voice in regard to their opinions on account acceptance, brand trust and word of mouth in crisis communication.***

The hypothesis that brand personalities like competent or exciting act as a moderating factor in how consumers perceive account acceptance, brand trust, and word of mouth in crisis communication was tested using a two-way ANOVA for each dependent variable. The interaction effects between brand personality and tone of voice (Corporate, Personal, Humor) were examined to determine whether brand personality influenced the relationship between tone of voice and consumer perceptions.

For account acceptance, the interaction between brand personality and tone of voice was not significant ( $p = .337$ ) indicating that brand personality did not moderate the effect of tone of voice on participants acceptance of the brand's account. The same is the case for brand trust, where the interaction effect was also not significant ( $p = .340$ ). While descriptive statistics show slight variations in trust ratings between the brand personalities for each tone of voice, these differences were not statistically significant. For positive word of mouth, the interaction effect was again not significant ( $p = .595$ ). As none of the interaction effects between brand personality and tone of voice are significant H5 cannot be supported (See Appendix C1, C2, C3).

## **6. Discussion**

This master thesis aimed to examine the impact of different tones of voice, more specifically corporate, personal, and humor tones, on consumer perceptions during a crisis. The perceptions of the participants were tested using the dependent variables account acceptance, brand trust and positive word of mouth. Additionally, it investigated whether brand personality dimensions, specifically competence and excitement, which were defined by Aaker's (1997) five brand personality framework, moderate these effects. The next chapter will focus on answering the three research questions as well as discuss and interpret the findings drawing conclusions.

### **6.1 Theoretical Implications**

#### ***RQ 1: How do different tones of voice affect consumer perceptions in crisis communication?***

The data revealed a strong connection between tone of voice and consumer perceptions, particularly in relation to account acceptance and brand trust, supporting H1 and H2. However, H3 could not be confirmed, as tone of voice did not significantly influence positive word of mouth, with mean scores across all items remaining relatively low. For account acceptance, the corporate tone of voice proved to be the most effective, achieving the highest mean score among participants. While no statistically significant difference was observed between corporate and personal tones of voice, the corporate tone maintained a slight advantage in the mean comparison (see Appendix C1). This suggests that professionalism and formality resonate highly with consumers when evaluating brand responses to crises. In the case of brand trust, corporate and personal tones again emerged as the most effective tones of voice. But as the difference was unfortunately not statistically significant between both tones of voice, it makes it difficult to recommend one tone over the other in a crisis.

A key objective of this study was also to determine whether humor could serve as a viable tone of voice in crisis communication. This builds upon the work of Kim et al. (2016), that found humor to be effective in social media contexts. The findings from this study, however, suggest that humor may not translate well to other media channels. In particular, the humor stimulus ranked significantly lower in terms of participants perceptions of account acceptance and brand trust. One explanation for this could be the differences between communication channels. While

social media tends to be a more informal and interactive platform, email is typically seen as a formal and direct medium. In crisis situations, consumers may expect a more serious approach in emails, making humor seem inappropriate or dismissive. Another potential factor is the subjective nature of humor itself. What is perceived as humor varies widely among individuals, and the specific humor stimulus used in this study may not have resonated with participants' expectations or preferences, thereby leaving a high negative impact.

Importantly, the research by Gretry et al. (2017) also highlights the role of brand familiarity in effecting consumer responses to different tone of voice. According to their findings, a personal tone of voice is more effective for familiar brands to consumers because it reflects social norms, where informal communication is reserved for people, in this case brands, that you know. In the study, the use of fictitious and unfamiliar brands to eliminate potential biases may have reduced the effectiveness of the personal and humor tones, as participants lacked a prior relationship with the brands.

In conclusion the findings reveal that tone of voice significantly impacts consumer perceptions of account acceptance and brand trust, with corporate and personal tones proving the most effective. However, humor was notably less effective. Additionally, the use of fictitious brands may have diminished the impact of personal and humor tones, as participants lacked familiarity with the brands, which is a key factor highlighted in prior research.

***RQ 2: Are consumers generally more forgiving in a crisis toward some brand personalities than others?***

According to Han et al. (2017), brand personalities play a significant role in crisis communication, emphasizing that a brand's crisis response strategies should align with its established personality. Their research demonstrated that sincere brands, as defined by Aaker's (1997) framework, tend to experience greater reputational damage during crises compared to exciting brands. As a result, sincere brands were found to adopt different crisis strategies on social media platforms such as Facebook. While Han et al. (2017) used content analysis to explore this dynamic within the context of social media communication, the study for this master thesis examined whether similar outcomes could be observed using an experimental design and a different communication channel.

When thinking about it, the findings of Han et al. (2017) do seem to make sense. It is reasonable to assume that a company emphasizing its quality and competence might face harsher consumer

judgement when it fails to uphold these standards, compared to a brand that does not communicate these attributes as heavily. However, the results of this study revealed no significant effect of brand personality on the three constructs that were explored: account acceptance, brand trust, and positive word of mouth. These findings challenge the conclusions of Han et al. (2017), suggesting that brand personality may not play as critical of a role in crisis communication as previously thought or at least don't do so outside of social media.

There are several potential explanations for this different outcome. One plausible explanation lies in the differences in methodologies. While Han et al. (2017) focused on social media as their primary communication channel, this study utilized email, a medium often perceived as more formal and direct, supporting again the hypothesis that the channel through which a crisis response is delivered, influences how consumers process and evaluate the communication. Additionally, this study employed fictitious, unfamiliar brands, whereas Han et al. (2017) analyzed real brands with established personalities. While the manipulation check confirmed the success of the brand personality manipulation in this study, it remains challenging to fully develop and convey a brand's personality within the constraints of an experimental setup using fictitious stimuli. Familiarity with a brand likely reinforces the awareness of its personality in consumer perceptions, which could explain why this study's findings disagreed from those of Han et al. (2017).

To summarize, the findings of the study suggest that brand personality may not significantly influence consumer perceptions in crisis communication when examined outside of social media contexts. Differences in methodology, such as the use of email as a communication channel and fictitious brands, likely contributed to the deviation from Han et al. (2017), emphasizing the need to interpret the results cautiously.

***RQ 3: Is a brands personality a moderating factor and does it affect how consumers perceive different tones of voice in crisis communication?***

The results of H5, which determined whether a brand's personality moderates how consumers perceive different tones of voice in crisis communication, indicate that brand personality does not significantly influence the tone of voice as a moderating factor. Specifically, the interaction effects between brand personality and tone of voice were not statistically significant for any of the dependent variables account acceptance, brand trust, and positive word of mouth. This means that the effect of tone of voice on consumer perceptions of the brand's crisis response is consistent regardless of whether the brand is perceived as competent or exciting. Still there are

some interesting things to point out while doing so with caution as the results are not significant. Looking at the plots for the account acceptance and brand trust ANOVA it does seem that humor does work slightly better on the exciting than on the competent personality therefore showing that there could be some, although not significant, influence of the brand personality on its effect on humor (See Appendix C1, C2). A similar not significant but interesting finding is that personal tone of voice has the highest mean on brand trust for the exciting personality while corporate has the highest mean for the competent personality, which could imply that consumers at least slightly lean towards tone of voices that fit the initial brand personality.

Still the lack of significant interaction effects between brand personality and tone of voice suggests that in general the tone of voice operates independently of brand personality. Corporate and personal tones performed consistently across both the competent and exciting personality, while humor was less effective in all cases.

In conclusion the results of H5 indicate that brand personality does not significantly moderate how consumers perceive different tones of voice in crisis communication, as interaction effects between brand personality and tone of voice were not statistically significant. However, slight trends suggest that humor may perform slightly better with exciting brands, while corporate tones resonate more with competent brands.

## **6.2 Practical Implications**

The findings emphasize the significant impact of tone of voice on consumer perceptions, particularly regarding account acceptance and brand trust. Corporate and personal tones were found to be the most effective, significantly outperforming humor, but having no significant difference between both. From a practical standpoint, a corporate tone could therefore be recommended for crisis scenarios requiring seriousness and credibility, demonstrating professionalism. In contrast, a personal tone might be used in relational crises, but only if the audience is already familiar with the brand. Humor, however, should be used with caution in crisis communication, as it risks undermining the perceived seriousness of the situation and diminishing consumer trust and acceptance.

However, it is important to understand that crisis communication and which use of tone of voice are not always straight forward and there is no guarantee of knowing how consumers will react. While the corporate tone may seem like a safe bet, it may not always be the best choice for brands in crisis communications. In April 2017, United Airlines faced a major public relations

crisis when a passenger was forcibly removed from a flight to accommodate airline staff. The incident, which was captured on video and showed the passenger being dragged down the aisle, led to widespread outrage and criticism of United's handling of the situation. United's initial response was widely criticized as “tone-deaf”, with CEO Oscar Munoz calling the passenger “disruptive and belligerent” and apologizing for “re-accommodating” customers. This corporate response failed to acknowledge the severity of the incident and lacked empathy, increasing the public backlash (Gunter, 2017). Consequently, Munoz issued a more sincere and personal apology, calling the event “truly horrific” and accepting full responsibility (Wattles, 2017). This highlights that in some cases a more empathetic communication during crises can be beneficial.

The choice of tone of voice likely also depends on how much risk a brand is willing to take in its messaging. A brand like Ryanair, for example, has little to lose by employing a high-risk crisis strategy centered on humor, which they commonly do when responding to negative customer feedback (Akavickaitė, 2023). Since Ryanair's main selling point is offering the cheapest flights rather than superior service or additional benefits, a humorous approach may still be worth it as people might not stop using their services, as the price is the deciding purchasing factor for them. Humor can also generate awareness, particularly on social media, where sharing funny posts and memes is a common practice among users. And there are other examples of brands successfully using humor in a crisis to mitigate reputational damages. One example using a very similar crisis situation than the stimulus material of the survey for this master thesis was the KFC Chicken Shortage Crisis. In 2018, KFC faced an unexpected crisis in the UK when a new supply chain collaboration with DHL led to widespread chicken shortages in shops. This operational issue forced more than 600 KFC restaurants to temporarily close, causing frustration among customers and extensive media coverage. Instead of reacting defensively, KFC turned the crisis into a positive example of using humor in crisis communication. The brand ran a full-page apology advert in major UK newspapers featuring an empty chicken bucket with the logo changed to “FCK”. The image was accompanied by a light-hearted but sincere message apologizing for the inconvenience, acknowledging the seriousness of the problem and promising quick solutions (BBC News, 2018). KFC's approach was widely praised as an example of effective crisis communication showing that if the context is right, humor can still be an effective tool. Thus, while humor may not have been well-received in the survey for this thesis, there are certain brands that may still benefit from its use, and it would be shortsighted to not even consider it, if the situational context is fitting.

A key practical takeaway is also the importance of tailoring the tone of voice to both the communication channel and the audience's familiarity with the brand. For channels where the audience is likely to have prior familiarity with the brand, such as social media platforms or loyalty programs, a personal tone may foster a sense of connection and relatability while building a relationship with the consumer. For channels targeting unfamiliar audiences, such as websites, product packaging, or press releases, a corporate tone is potentially more appropriate to establish professionalism and build initial trust.

The findings from RQ2 and RQ3 suggest that brands also should not feel limited by their established personality when selecting a tone of voice for crisis communication, as the study revealed no significant impact of brand personality on consumer perceptions in these situations. Instead, brands should focus on adopting the tone best fitting to the context of the crisis, even if this deviates from their usual communication style. For instance, a brand like Ben & Jerry's, known for its personal and relatable tone, could adopt a more corporate tone during a serious crisis, while a traditionally corporate brand like United as mentioned in the example above, can also use a more empathic personal tone in some situations.

That being said consistency is essential in building an authentic and lasting brand personality (Batra, Lehmann, & Singh, 1993). Therefore, any changes from the established tone of voice should be used carefully. This approach ensures flexibility while ensuring that the brands authenticity and trustworthiness stays remains unaffected.

According to the research done in this thesis the following guidelines could help brands develop an appropriate tone of voice in brand crisis communication:

*1. Assess the crisis situation and severity*

Begin by evaluating the severity and nature of the crisis. Use frameworks like Coombs Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) to classify the crisis type (e.g., victim, accidental, or preventable) and guide your communication approach.

## *2. Understand your audience and media channel*

Identify the audience you are reaching on each media channel. Consider whether they are already familiar with your brand, such as loyal customers or casual observers, as this influences their expectations and response to your messaging.

## *3. Match tone of voice to the media channel*

Tailor your tone of voice to the specific media platform. For example: Humor tones may work better on social media, where audiences expect informal and engaging interactions. Corporate tones are more suitable for press statements, ensuring professionalism and credibility. Personal tones are potentially best for direct communication with consumers, fostering connection and empathy.

## *4. Be flexible with your brand tone of voice*

Don't strictly use your established brand tone of voice if the situation calls for a different approach. If the crisis demands a serious and professional tone, prioritize effectiveness over consistency with your brand personality.

## *5. Exercise caution with humor*

Humor can be a high-risk strategy with the potential for backlash. Use it cautiously and only when the context is appropriate and aligns with audience expectations.

## *6. Monitor and adapt your approach if necessary*

Continuously assess the effectiveness of your communication. Be prepared to modify your tone or strategy if the initial approach fails to resonate, as seen in the United Airlines case, where a shift from a corporate to an empathetic tone was necessary to manage the fallout.

## **7. Limitations & Future Research**

As with most studies, certain limitations must be considered when interpreting the findings and results. One quite severe limitation is that participants were unable to completely distinguish between the personal and humor tones of voice during the manipulation check conducted after

the stimulus. This may be explained by the strong relationship and overlapping characteristics between humor and personal communication, as both fall within the framework of Conversational Human Voice (Liebrecht et al., 2021). The personal tone aims to create a friendly and approachable interaction, while the humorous tone incorporates wit to engage the audience. However, both tones are informal and personal in nature. Additionally, both attempt to humanize brand communication, which may have led to participant confusion in differentiating them. This overlap complicates the clear identification of each tone in experimental settings, and as a result, the findings must be interpreted with caution.

Another limitation is the lack of significant results for the dependent variable of positive word of mouth. This could be attributed to the nature of the stimulus material. For example, it is understandable that a consumer receiving an email informing them of significant delays may be unlikely to recommend the brand to family or friends. This contributed to very low mean scores across all tones of voice, making it more difficult to detect significant differences. In future research other concepts could be applied as for example negative word of mouth to test reputational damages from another point of view.

Further limitations, which are common in studies of this design, include the use of fictitious brands, a lack of diversity in the sample due to convenience sampling, and other biases such as inaccurate recall or neutral response bias. The use of fictitious brands, in particular, poses challenges for analyzing the effects of brand personality on consumers. While the manipulation checks confirmed success in creating brand personalities, it is naturally difficult to build clear and precise brand personalities for fictitious brands within the constraints of an experiment. It is possible that brand personalities might have had a stronger effect if existing brands with well-established reputations and personalities, already familiar to participants, were used. Future research could address these limitations by using well-known brands with clearly defined personalities to explore whether familiarity influences the interaction between brand personality and consumer responses in crises communication. This survey also only analyzed the competent and exciting brand personality with future research possibly leaving more room to explore how the three other brand personalities interact with each other.

Additionally, exploring the effects of different communication channels more deeply, such as social media versus email, may provide further insights into how the medium of communication interacts with tone of voice and brand personality to shape consumer perceptions during crises. As this thesis tried to recreate the results of previous surveys that were successful on social

media, and failed to do so, further possibilities for research are available to develop recommendations on which communication channel is the most fitting for which tone of voice.

Finally, the crisis context itself can be interpreted differently by individuals, leading to varying reactions. The stimulus material was designed to evoke sufficient concern to generate a reaction, while avoiding extreme negativity that could overshadow meaningful responses. However, this balance may still have influenced participants' perceptions and reactions, potentially limiting the ability to identify significant results. According to SCCT, "manufacturing malfunctions", that were used in the stimulus material for this study, fall under the "accidental crisis cluster", which is typically associated with moderate attributions of responsibility (Coombs, 2007). Future research could explore whether the findings of this study are also true for other types of crises or whether lower responsibility attributions make humor a more suitable response for the given situational context. Equally, it would also be interesting to investigate whether crises in the preventable cluster, due to their higher severity, impact the acceptance of a personal tone of voice, potentially needing a shift towards a more formal and professional corporate tone to address the higher need for professionalism and seriousness in a crisis response.

## **8. Conclusions**

This thesis explored the impact of tone of voice on consumer perceptions during crises communication, specifically focusing on three tones (corporate, personal, and humor) and their interaction with two brand personalities (competent and exciting). The findings highlight the significant influence of tone of voice on account acceptance and brand trust, with corporate and personal tones consistently outperforming humor. Contrary to expectations, brand personality did not significantly moderate these effects, suggesting that tone of voice can operate independently of a brand's perceived personality. These results highlight the need for brands to prioritize tone selection based on the situational context rather than strictly following their established personality.

The research suggests the importance of tailoring tone to the communication channel and audience brand familiarity as these potentially are moderating factors in how consumers perceive crisis communication and are avenues for further research. Therefore, practical implications emphasize flexibility in tone selection, with brands advised to adapt their

communication strategies based on the crisis type, audience, and channel. This approach ensures that communication remains effective while preserving brand authenticity.

While the study provides valuable insights, some important limitations remain. The use of fictitious brands and the choice of communication channel potentially limited the effect of brand personality. Also, the manipulation between the corporate and personal tone of voice in the stimulus material appeared to be more difficult and failed to reach the participants. Future research could focus on studying existing and established brands, exploring different crisis scenarios, and analyzing additional communication channels to provide further validation and extend the scope of these findings. Overall, this thesis contributes to the understanding of effective crisis communication and offers actionable recommendations for brands navigating challenging situations.

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## Appendix A

### Demographics

#### *A1. Gender*

*Please specify your gender.*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	144	56,0	60,3	60,3
	Female	91	35,4	38,1	98,3
	Non-binary / third gender	2	,8	,8	99,2
	Prefer not to respond	2	,8	,8	100,0
	Total	239	93,0	100,0	
Missing	System	18	7,0		
Total		257	100,0		

#### *A2. Age*

*How old are you?*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-24 years old	59	23,0	24,7	24,7
	25-34 years old	109	42,4	45,6	70,3
	35-44 years old	34	13,2	14,2	84,5
	45-54 years old	14	5,4	5,9	90,4
	Over 55 years old	23	8,9	9,6	100,0
	Total		239	93,0	100,0
Missing	System	18	7,0		
Total		257	100,0		

### A3. Education

*Please select your highest level of education completed.*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	High School	78	30,4	32,6	32,6
	Bachelor's Degree	96	37,4	40,2	72,8
	Master's Degree	57	22,2	23,8	96,7
	Doctorate or Professional Degree	5	1,9	2,1	98,7
	Prefer not to respond	3	1,2	1,3	100,0
	Total	239	93,0	100,0	
Missing	System	18	7,0		
Total		257	100,0		

### A4. Occupation

*What is your occupation?*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Student	80	31,1	33,5	33,5
	Employed full-time	97	37,7	40,6	74,1
	Employed part-time	24	9,3	10,0	84,1
	Self-Employed	16	6,2	6,7	90,8
	Unemployed	8	3,1	3,3	94,1
	Retired	10	3,9	4,2	98,3
	Prefer not to respond	4	1,6	1,7	100,0
	Total	239	93,0	100,0	
Missing	System	18	7,0		
Total		257	100,0		

## Appendix B

### Manipulation Checks

#### *B1. Brand Personality*

##### *Group Statistics*

	Brand Personality	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
MC_Compotence	Auris	128	4,1211	,76009	,06718
	Vibewave	120	3,2667	,84000	,07668
MC_Excitement	Auris	128	2,8945	,93836	,08294
	Vibewave	120	4,1667	,67155	,06130

##### *Independent Samples Test*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
		F	Sig.	t	df	Significance		Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						One-Sided p	Two-Sided p			Lower	Upper
MC_Compotence	Equal variances assumed	3,816	,052	8,408	246	<,001	<,001	,85443	,10162	,65427	1,05458
	Equal variances not assumed			8,381	239,551	<,001	<,001	,85443	,10195	,65360	1,05526
MC_Excitement	Equal variances assumed	18,467	<,001	-12,206	246	<,001	<,001	-1,27214	,10422	-1,47741	-1,06686
	Equal variances not assumed			-12,334	230,310	<,001	<,001	-1,27214	,10314	-1,47535	-1,06892

##### *Independent Samples Effect Sizes*

		Standardizer <sup>a</sup>	Point Estimate	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
MC_Compotence	Cohen's d	,79975	1,068	,801	1,334
	Hedges' correction	,80219	1,065	,799	1,330
	Glass's delta	,84000	1,017	,735	1,296
MC_Excitement	Cohen's d	,82020	-1,551	-1,834	-1,266
	Hedges' correction	,82272	-1,546	-1,828	-1,262
	Glass's delta	,67155	-1,894	-2,238	-1,546

a. The denominator used in estimating the effect sizes.

Cohen's d uses the pooled standard deviation.

Hedges' correction uses the pooled standard deviation, plus a correction factor.

Glass's delta uses the sample standard deviation of the control (i.e., the second) group.

## B2. Tone of Voice

### Descriptives

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
MC_CorporateTone	Corporate	82	4,2927	,63805	,07046	4,1525	4,4329	2,00	5,00
	Personal	84	2,1786	,95892	,10463	1,9705	2,3867	1,00	5,00
	Humor	80	1,7000	,93321	,10434	1,4923	1,9077	1,00	5,00
	Total	246	2,7276	1,41241	,09005	2,5503	2,9050	1,00	5,00
MC_PersonalTone	Corporate	82	2,3171	,94121	,10394	2,1103	2,5239	1,00	4,00
	Personal	84	3,9524	,96823	,10564	3,7423	4,1625	1,00	5,00
	Humor	80	4,0000	1,19068	,13312	3,7350	4,2650	1,00	5,00
	Total	246	3,4228	1,29683	,08268	3,2599	3,5856	1,00	5,00
MC_HumorTone	Corporate	82	1,5000	,77380	,08545	1,3300	1,6700	1,00	4,00
	Personal	84	3,1429	1,14221	,12463	2,8950	3,3907	1,00	5,00
	Humor	80	4,2625	1,00308	,11215	4,0393	4,4857	1,00	5,00
	Total	246	2,9593	1,49774	,09549	2,7713	3,1474	1,00	5,00

### Tests of Homogeneity of Variances

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
MC_CorporateTone	Based on Mean	3,029	2	243	,050
	Based on Median	2,140	2	243	,120
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	2,140	2	205,242	,120
	Based on trimmed mean	2,124	2	243	,122
MC_PersonalTone	Based on Mean	1,794	2	243	,168
	Based on Median	1,939	2	243	,146
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1,939	2	237,825	,146
	Based on trimmed mean	2,477	2	243	,086
MC_HumorTone	Based on Mean	5,653	2	243	,004
	Based on Median	7,339	2	243	<,001
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	7,339	2	239,787	<,001
	Based on trimmed mean	6,228	2	243	,002

### ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
MC_CorporateTone	Between Groups	310,655	2	155,327	211,933	<,001
	Within Groups	178,097	243	,733		
	Total	488,752	245			
MC_PersonalTone	Between Groups	150,467	2	75,233	69,893	<,001
	Within Groups	261,566	243	1,076		
	Total	412,033	245			
MC_HumorTone	Between Groups	313,320	2	156,660	161,120	<,001
	Within Groups	236,273	243	,972		
	Total	549,593	245			

Descriptives

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
MC_CorporateTone	Corporate	82	4,2927	,63805	,07046	4,1525	4,4329	2,00	5,00
	Personal	84	2,1786	,95892	,10463	1,9705	2,3867	1,00	5,00
	Humor	80	1,7000	,93321	,10434	1,4923	1,9077	1,00	5,00
	Total	246	2,7276	1,41241	,09005	2,5503	2,9050	1,00	5,00
MC_PersonalTone	Corporate	82	2,3171	,94121	,10394	2,1103	2,5239	1,00	4,00
	Personal	84	3,9524	,96823	,10564	3,7423	4,1625	1,00	5,00
	Humor	80	4,0000	1,19068	,13312	3,7350	4,2650	1,00	5,00
	Total	246	3,4228	1,29683	,08268	3,2599	3,5856	1,00	5,00
MC_HumorTone	Corporate	82	1,5000	,77380	,08545	1,3300	1,6700	1,00	4,00
	Personal	84	3,1429	1,14221	,12463	2,8950	3,3907	1,00	5,00
	Humor	80	4,2625	1,00308	,11215	4,0393	4,4857	1,00	5,00
	Total	246	2,9593	1,49774	,09549	2,7713	3,1474	1,00	5,00

ANOVA Effect Sizes<sup>a</sup>

		Point Estimate	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower	Upper
MC_CorporateTone	Eta-squared	,636	,565	,687
	Epsilon-squared	,633	,561	,684
	Omega-squared Fixed-effect	,632	,560	,684
	Omega-squared Random-effect	,462	,389	,519
MC_PersonalTone	Eta-squared	,365	,270	,443
	Epsilon-squared	,360	,264	,439
	Omega-squared Fixed-effect	,359	,263	,438
	Omega-squared Random-effect	,219	,152	,280
MC_HumorTone	Eta-squared	,570	,490	,629
	Epsilon-squared	,567	,486	,626
	Omega-squared Fixed-effect	,566	,485	,625
	Omega-squared Random-effect	,394	,320	,455

a. Eta-squared and Epsilon-squared are estimated based on the fixed-effect model.

Descriptives

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
MC_CorporateTone	Corporate	82	4,2927	,63805	,07046	4,1525	4,4329	2,00	5,00
	Personal	84	2,1786	,95892	,10463	1,9705	2,3867	1,00	5,00
	Humor	80	1,7000	,93321	,10434	1,4923	1,9077	1,00	5,00
	Total	246	2,7276	1,41241	,09005	2,5503	2,9050	1,00	5,00
MC_PersonalTone	Corporate	82	2,3171	,94121	,10394	2,1103	2,5239	1,00	4,00
	Personal	84	3,9524	,96823	,10564	3,7423	4,1625	1,00	5,00
	Humor	80	4,0000	1,19068	,13312	3,7350	4,2650	1,00	5,00
	Total	246	3,4228	1,29683	,08268	3,2599	3,5856	1,00	5,00
MC_HumorTone	Corporate	82	1,5000	,77380	,08545	1,3300	1,6700	1,00	4,00
	Personal	84	3,1429	1,14221	,12463	2,8950	3,3907	1,00	5,00
	Humor	80	4,2625	1,00308	,11215	4,0393	4,4857	1,00	5,00
	Total	246	2,9593	1,49774	,09549	2,7713	3,1474	1,00	5,00

Multiple Comparisons

Tukey HSD

Dependent Variable	(I) Communication Style	(J) Communication Style	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
MC_CorporateTone	Corporate	Personal	2,11411*	,13290	<,001	1,8007	2,4275
		Humor	2,59268*	,13453	<,001	2,2754	2,9099
	Personal	Corporate	-2,11411*	,13290	<,001	-2,4275	-1,8007
		Humor	,47857*	,13374	,001	,1632	,7940
	Humor	Corporate	-2,59268*	,13453	<,001	-2,9099	-2,2754
		Personal	-,47857*	,13374	,001	-,7940	-,1632
MC_PersonalTone	Corporate	Personal	-1,63531*	,16106	<,001	-2,0151	-1,2555
		Humor	-1,68293*	,16304	<,001	-2,0674	-1,2985
	Personal	Corporate	1,63531*	,16106	<,001	1,2555	2,0151
		Humor	-,04762	,16208	,954	-,4298	,3346
	Humor	Corporate	1,68293*	,16304	<,001	1,2985	2,0674
		Personal	,04762	,16208	,954	-,3346	,4298
MC_HumorTone	Corporate	Personal	-1,64286*	,15308	<,001	-2,0038	-1,2819
		Humor	-2,76250*	,15496	<,001	-3,1279	-2,3971
	Personal	Corporate	1,64286*	,15308	<,001	1,2819	2,0038
		Humor	-1,11964*	,15404	<,001	-1,4829	-,7564
	Humor	Corporate	2,76250*	,15496	<,001	2,3971	3,1279
		Personal	1,11964*	,15404	<,001	,7564	1,4829

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

## Appendix C

### Hypothesis Testing

#### *CI. Account Acceptance*

##### *Descriptive Statistics*

Dependent Variable: Account Acceptance

Tone of Voice	Brand Personality	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Corporate	Auris	3,5854	,65022	41
	Vibewave	3,7073	,82958	41
	Total	3,6463	,74323	82
Personal	Auris	3,4449	,73401	49
	Vibewave	3,3886	,99285	35
	Total	3,4214	,84626	84
Humor	Auris	2,6054	1,06300	37
	Vibewave	2,9535	,94197	43
	Total	2,7925	1,00854	80
Total	Auris	3,2457	,91415	127
	Vibewave	3,3412	,96703	119
	Total	3,2919	,93940	246

##### *Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances<sup>a,b</sup>*

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Account Acceptance	Based on Mean	3,582	5	240	,004
	Based on Median	3,414	5	240	,005
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	3,414	5	217,753	,005
	Based on trimmed mean	3,582	5	240	,004

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.

a. Dependent variable: Account Acceptance

b. Design: Intercept + ToneofVoice + BrandPersonality + ToneofVoice \* BrandPersonality

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Account Acceptance

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	34,442 <sup>a</sup>	5	6,888	9,096	<,001	,159
Intercept	2617,491	1	2617,491	3456,164	<,001	,935
ToneofVoice	32,455	2	16,228	21,427	<,001	,152
BrandPersonality	1,156	1	1,156	1,527	,218	,006
ToneofVoice * BrandPersonality	1,654	2	,827	1,092	,337	,009
Error	181,762	240	,757			
Total	2881,960	246				
Corrected Total	216,204	245				

a. R Squared = ,159 (Adjusted R Squared = ,142)

Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: Account Acceptance

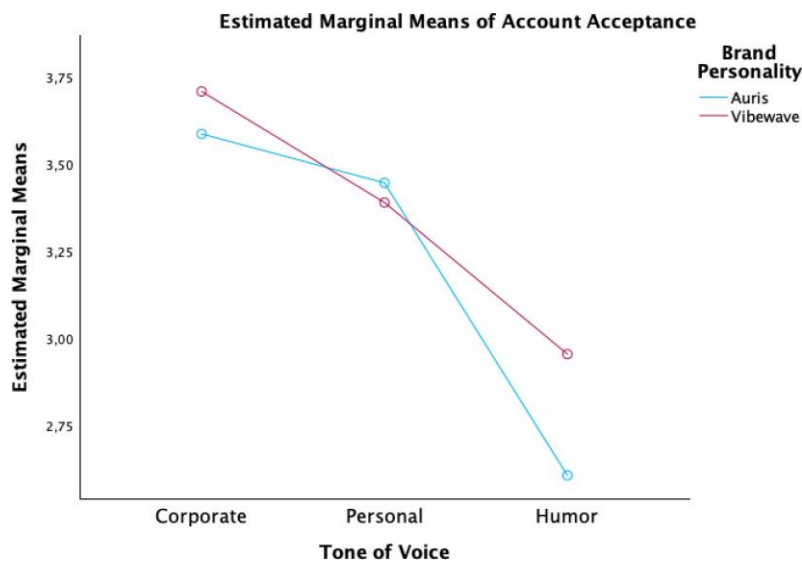
Tukey HSD

(I) Tone of Voice	(J) Tone of Voice	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Corporate	Personal	,2249	,13510	,221	-,0937	,5435
	Humor	,8538*	,13676	<,001	,5313	1,1764
Personal	Corporate	-,2249	,13510	,221	-,5435	,0937
	Humor	,6289*	,13595	<,001	,3083	,9495
Humor	Corporate	-,8538*	,13676	<,001	-1,1764	-,5313
	Personal	-,6289*	,13595	<,001	-,9495	-,3083

Based on observed means.

The error term is Mean Square(Error) = ,757.

\*. The mean difference is significant at the ,05 level.



## C2. Brand Trust

### Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: Brand Trust

Tone of Voice	Brand Personality	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Corporate	Auris	3,1951	,77451	41
	Vibewave	2,9593	1,01979	41
	Total	3,0772	,90767	82
Personal	Auris	3,0000	,95258	49
	Vibewave	3,0476	1,11772	35
	Total	3,0198	1,01837	84
Humor	Auris	2,6036	1,02089	37
	Vibewave	2,8217	1,04994	43
	Total	2,7208	1,03585	80
Total	Auris	2,9475	,94321	127
	Vibewave	2,9356	1,05523	119
	Total	2,9417	,99693	246

### Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances<sup>a,b</sup>

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Brand Trust	Based on Mean	1,527	5	240	,182
	Based on Median	1,512	5	240	,187
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1,512	5	227,302	,187
	Based on trimmed mean	1,515	5	240	,186

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.

a. Dependent variable: Brand Trust

b. Design: Intercept + ToneofVoice + BrandPersonality + ToneofVoice \* BrandPersonality

### Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Brand Trust

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	8,054 <sup>a</sup>	5	1,611	1,642	,150	,033
Intercept	2098,886	1	2098,886	2139,496	<,001	,899
ToneofVoice	6,230	2	3,115	3,175	,044	,026
BrandPersonality	,006	1	,006	,006	,937	,000
ToneofVoice * BrandPersonality	2,128	2	1,064	1,085	,340	,009
Error	235,445	240	,981			
Total	2372,333	246				
Corrected Total	243,498	245				

a. R Squared = ,033 (Adjusted R Squared = ,013)

Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: Brand Trust

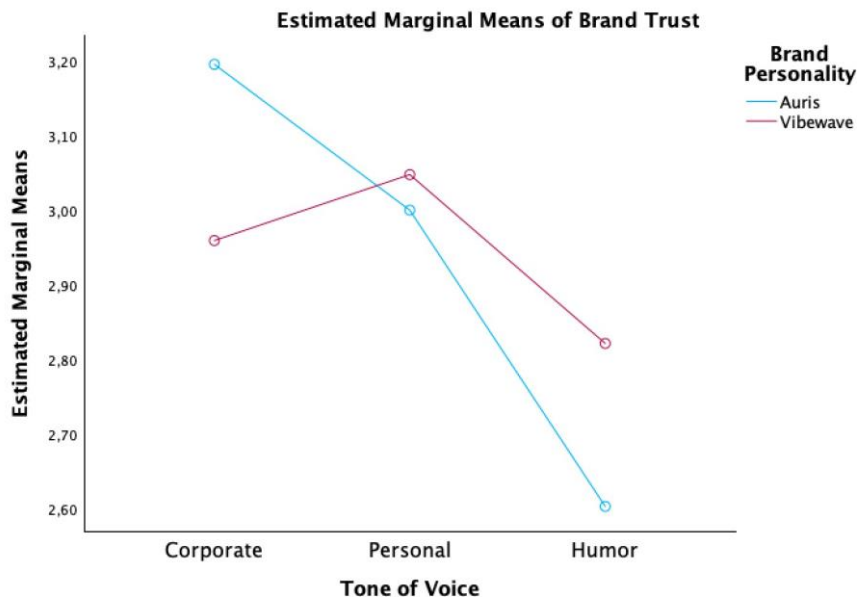
Tukey HSD

(I) Tone of Voice	(J) Tone of Voice	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Corporate	Personal	,0574	,15376	,926	-,3052	,4200
	Humor	,3564	,15565	,059	-,0107	,7235
Personal	Corporate	-,0574	,15376	,926	-,4200	,3052
	Humor	,2990	,15473	,132	-,0659	,6639
Humor	Corporate	-,3564	,15565	,059	-,7235	,0107
	Personal	-,2990	,15473	,132	-,6639	,0659

Based on observed means.

The error term is Mean Square(Error) = ,981.

Profile Plots



## C2. Word of Mouth

### Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: Word of Mouth

Tone of Voice	Brand Personality	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Corporate	Auris	2,4390	,89579	41
	Vibewave	2,3333	,80623	41
	Total	2,3862	,84858	82
Personal	Auris	2,5850	,85128	49
	Vibewave	2,5333	,96744	35
	Total	2,5635	,89619	84
Humor	Auris	2,3514	,91606	37
	Vibewave	2,5116	,81763	43
	Total	2,4375	,86272	80
Total	Auris	2,4698	,88327	127
	Vibewave	2,4566	,85796	119
	Total	2,4634	,86937	246

### Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances<sup>a,b</sup>

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Word of Mouth	Based on Mean	,372	5	240	,868
	Based on Median	,321	5	240	,900
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	,321	5	226,668	,900
	Based on trimmed mean	,355	5	240	,879

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.

a. Dependent variable: Word of Mouth

b. Design: Intercept + ToneofVoice + BrandPersonality + ToneofVoice \* BrandPersonality

### Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Word of Mouth

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	2,179 <sup>a</sup>	5	,436	,571	,722	,012
Intercept	1470,329	1	1470,329	1928,384	<,001	,889
ToneofVoice	1,315	2	,657	,862	,424	,007
BrandPersonality	5,621E-5	1	5,621E-5	,000	,993	,000
ToneofVoice * BrandPersonality	,794	2	,397	,521	,595	,004
Error	182,992	240	,762			
Total	1678,000	246				
Corrected Total	185,171	245				

a. R Squared = ,012 (Adjusted R Squared = -,009)

Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: Word of Mouth

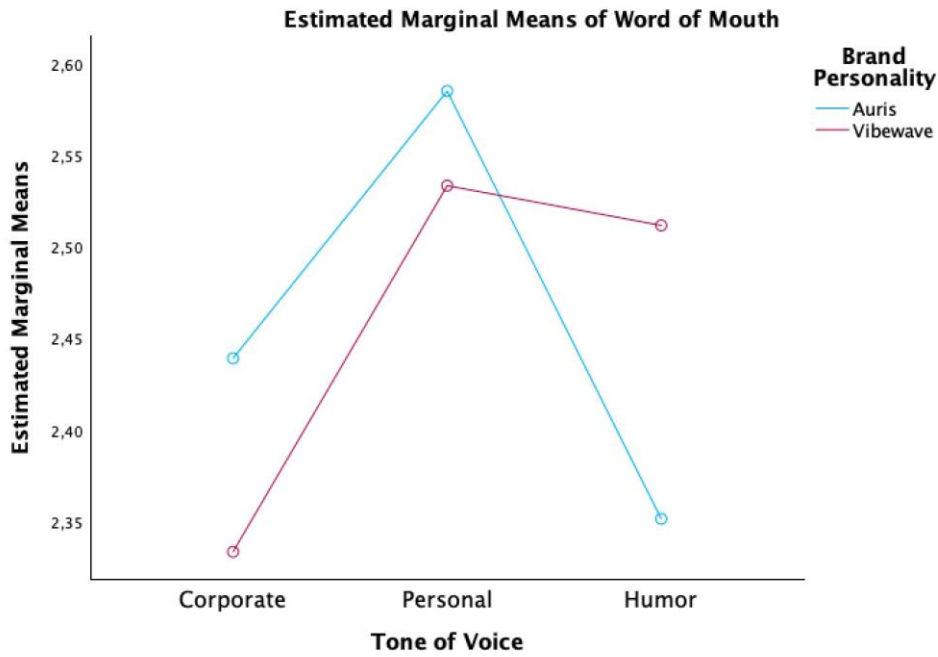
Tukey HSD

(I) Tone of Voice	(J) Tone of Voice	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Corporate	Personal	-,1773	,13556	,392	-,4970	,1424
	Humor	-,0513	,13722	,926	-,3749	,2723
Personal	Corporate	,1773	,13556	,392	-,1424	,4970
	Humor	,1260	,13641	,626	-,1957	,4477
Humor	Corporate	,0513	,13722	,926	-,2723	,3749
	Personal	-,1260	,13641	,626	-,4477	,1957

Based on observed means.

The error term is Mean Square(Error) = ,762.

Profile Plots



## **Appendix D**

### **Questionnaire**

#### ***Introduction***

Dear Participant,

Thank you for participating in this research project as part of my Master's Thesis at Católica Lisbon School of Business & Economics.

This study aims to explore consumer perceptions of brand communication in a crisis scenario. Your insights will play a crucial role in helping us better understand how brands can effectively communicate with their customers.

Please rest assured that your responses are completely confidential and anonymous, and will be used solely for academic research purposes.

The survey is designed to take approximately 3-5 minutes to complete. Your voluntary participation is greatly appreciated, as your personal experience and opinions are invaluable to the success of this research.

Should you have any questions, feel free to contact me via mail: [s-pstewart@ucp.pt](mailto:s-pstewart@ucp.pt)

Thank you for your time and contribution!

#### ***Filter Question***

Are you currently living in Germany or are you German?

Yes

No

## ***Brand Personality Manipulation (Auris)***

### Instructions:

Please imagine that you have recently ordered a new portable speaker online from the following brand, which you are really excited about. Please read the text carefully to get an idea of the brand and what it stands for.

---

### Brand Name:

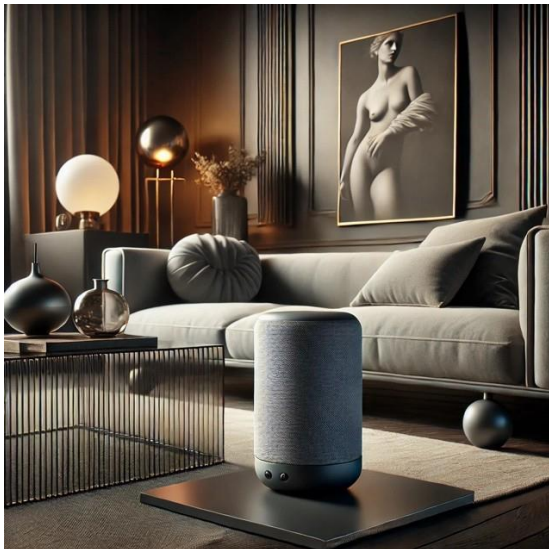
Auris

### Slogan:

Precision in Every Note

### Description:

Auris is the embodiment of acoustic perfection, engineered for those who demand nothing but the best in sound quality. Our portable speakers are meticulously crafted with cutting-edge technology, offering superior sound clarity, deep bass, and unmatched durability. Built for the discerning audiophile, Auris speakers deliver a flawless audio experience—whether you're at home or somewhere else. Every speaker is a testament to our commitment to excellence, blending minimalist design with advanced functionality. With Auris, you're not just listening to music; you're experiencing sound as it was meant to be heard.



How would you describe the brand shown above using personality traits?

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
This brand seems hard-working and competent.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This brand seems adventurous.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This brand seems intelligent and technical.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This brand seems energetic and fun.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## ***Brand Personality Manipulation (VibeWave)***

Instructions:

Please imagine that you have recently ordered a new portable speaker online from the following brand, which you are really excited about. Please read the text carefully to get an idea of the brand and what it stands for.

Brand:

VibeWave

Slogan:

Your Soundtrack, Your Vibe

Brand Description:

VibeWave is your partner in fun, turning up the volume on life's best moments. Whether you're jamming at a beach party, hosting a spontaneous house gathering, or just chilling with friends at the park, VibeWave speakers are designed to bring the energy. Compact and ready for adventure, our portable speakers are built for life on the go. With rich, immersive sound and a playful, approachable design, VibeWave is more than just a speaker—it's your best friend at every party, bringing people together through music. Wherever the fun is, VibeWave is right there with you.



How would you describe the brand shown above using personality traits?

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
This brand seems hard-working and competent.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This brand seems adventurous.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This brand seems intelligent and technical.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This brand seems energetic and fun.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Personality VibeWave

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Start of Block: ToV Corporate

## *Tone of Voice Manipulation (Corporate)*

### **Instructions:**

Now, imagine that a few days before the scheduled delivery, you receive an email from the brand regarding your order. This is the email that the brand sent to you. Please read it carefully while keeping what you learnt about the brand in mind.

Email:

**Subject:** Update on Your Order

Dear Customer,

We are writing to inform you that, due to unforeseen manufacturing challenges related to our latest product launch, there will be an extended delay in the delivery of your recent order. Unfortunately, we are unable to provide a precise estimate for the delay at this time.

Our team is working diligently to resolve these issues as quickly as possible to ensure that your order is processed and delivered with the highest level of care and precision.

Please rest assured that we are doing everything we can to minimize the delay and will keep you updated with any further developments. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause and appreciate your understanding in this matter.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact our customer support team.

Thank you for your continued trust in our brand.

Sincerely,

The Customer Service Team

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How would you describe the tone used in the email above?

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
The email uses a professional and corporate tone.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The email uses a personal and informal tone.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The email uses a humorous and funny tone.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: ToV Corporate

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Start of Block: ToV Personal

## *Tone of Voice Manipulation (Personal)*

### **Instructions:**

Now, imagine that a few days before the scheduled delivery, you receive an email from the brand regarding your order. This is the email that the brand sent to you. Please read it carefully while keeping what you learnt about the brand in mind.

Email:

**Subject:** We've Got an Update on your Order

Dear Customer,

We are reaching out to let you know that we've had some difficulties in the production of our latest product launch. This unfortunately means your speaker delivery is going to be delayed 😞

Right now, we're not sure how long it'll take, but we're working hard to get the product to you as soon as possible.

We know this really sucks, especially when you're excited about getting something new. We're really sorry and appreciate your patience and understanding while we're doing everything we can to get things back on track.

In the meantime, if you have any questions or just want an update, don't hesitate to reach out. We're always here for you.

Thanks so much for hanging in there with us, you're the best! 😊

Your Customer Support Team

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How would you describe the tone used in the email above?

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
The email uses a professional and corporate tone.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The email uses a personal and informal tone.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The email uses a humorous and funny tone.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: ToV Personal

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Start of Block: ToV Humor

## *Tone of Voice Manipulation (Humor)*

### **Instructions:**

Now, imagine that a few days before the scheduled delivery, you receive an email from the brand regarding your order. This is the email that the brand sent to you. Please read it carefully while keeping what you learnt about the brand in mind.

Email:

**Subject:** Delayed, But Not Defeated (We're On It!)

Dear Customer,

You know that feeling when everything's going smoothly... and then suddenly it's not? Yeah, that's us right now:



Unfortunately our dog ate our production plans and now we've hit a few unexpected bumps with the manufacturing of your new product. As a result your order is going to be delayed. As for how long? We're still trying to figure that out (and trust us, we wish we could give you a clear answer!).

While you're probably thinking - damn it I should of ordered somewhere else - we want to assure you that our team is working hard to put out the fires and get your order to you as soon as humanly possible. In the meantime, we seriously appreciate your patience while we sort this out.

If you've got any questions - or just want to vent at us 🤬 - feel free to reach out!

Thanks for hanging in there with us!

Your Customer Support Team

How would you describe the tone used in the email above?

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
The email uses a professional and corporate tone.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The email uses a personal and informal tone.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The email uses a humorous and funny tone.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Question Block 1 (Account Acceptance)**

After having seen the email sent to you about the crisis, how do you feel about the brand communication?

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Favorable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Acceptable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adequate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Believable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sincere	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Question Block 2 (Brand Trust)**

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I feel that I can trust the brand.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that the brand can be counted on to help me and other consumers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand appears reliable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Question Block 3 (Positive Word of Mouth)**

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

	Extremely unlikely	Somewhat unlikely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Somewhat likely	Extremely likely
I would encourage friends and family to buy products from the brand.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would recommend the brands products to someone who asked my advice.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would say positive things about the brand and its products to other people.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

***Question Block 4 (Demographics)***

Thank you for your participation in this survey so far. As we reach the end, we have a few personal demographic questions to conclude our survey. Please be aware that your responses will be handled with the utmost sensitivity and are strictly necessary to finalize our research.

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Please specify your gender.

- Male
  - Female
  - Non-binary / third gender
  - Prefer not to respond
- 

How old are you?

- Under 18 years old
  - 18-24 years old
  - 25-34 years old
  - 35-44 years old
  - 45-54 years old
  - Over 55 years old
  - Prefer not to respond
-

Please select your highest level of education completed.

- No school Diploma
  - High School
  - Bachelor's Degree
  - Master's Degree
  - Doctorate or Professional Degree
  - Prefer not to respond
- 

What is your occupation?

- Student
- Employed full-time
- Employed part-time
- Self-Employed
- Unemployed
- Retired
- Prefer not to respond