Corporate Reputation Management During a Crisis on Facebook: A Case Study of H.A.L.L Company

إدارة سمعة المؤسسة أثناء الأزمة على شبكة الفايسبوك: دراسة حالة شركة هال

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Abstract:

This study explores how HALL Company used Facebook to manage its corporate reputation during a crisis that generated widespread negative reactions across social media and traditional media platforms. The research aims to assess the effectiveness of the company's crisis communication strategies and their influence on public engagement and perception.

The study adopts a qualitative content analysis method, examining all posts published on the company's official Facebook page during the crisis period. The analysis focuses on three key aspects: the nature and frequency of posts, the communication strategies employed, and the level of audience interaction through likes, comments, and shares.

Findings indicate that Facebook served as a pivotal tool for managing the crisis, rebuilding trust, and restoring the company's image. The results further highlight that strategic messaging and transparent communication positively influenced audience engagement and contributed to mitigating reputational damage.

Keywords: Facebook; HALL Company; Crisis Management; Corporate Reputation; Communication Strategies.
JEL Classification Codes:L14; L66; M19; M31; Z13

Abstract in Arabic:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف كيفية استخدام شركة "هال" لشبكة الفايسبوك لإدارة سمعتها المؤسسية أثناء الأزمة التي واجهتها، والتي أثارت ردود فعل سلبية عل مختلف الشبكات الاجتماعية ووسائل الاعلام، ودور هذا الاستخدام في تغيير اتجاهات وتفاعل الجمهور،استندت الدراسة إلى تحليل وتقييم استراتيجيات الشركة وتفاعل الجمهور مع منشوراتها على شبكة الفايسبوك خلال فترة الأزمة.

أظهرت النتائج أن استخدام شبكة الفايسبوك بفعالية كان له تأثير إيجابي على إدارة الأزمة واستعادة سمعة الشركة، حيث اعتمدت الشركة استراتيجيات متنوعة خلال مختلف مراحل الأزمة وشهدت منشوراتها تفاعلا قويا.

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الكلمات المفتاحية: شبكة الفايسبوك؛ شركة هال؛ إدارة الأزمات؛ استراتيجيات الشركة؛ إدارة سمعة المؤسسة.
تصنيف JEL: L14 ؛L 66 ؛M19 ؛M31 ؛Z13

I -Introduction :

In today's complex and competitive business environment, corporate reputation represents one of the most valuable intangible assets for ensuring organizational sustainability. With the increasing use of social media, companies have gained direct channels to engage with their audiences, build trust, and foster positive brand images. However, these platforms can also turn into a source of reputational threats if crises are not handled effectively.

Facebook remains the most widely used social media platform, with over 3 billion users in 2025 (Statista, 2025), offering companies a powerful means to reach their target audiences. Yet, its open nature can accelerate the spread of negative content, making crisis management a critical challenge for organizations. For instance, the Algerian company H.A.L.L faced a reputational crisis in August 2023 after allegations circulated online regarding the safety of its "AtunMaratun" product.
The research addresses the following question:

How did H.A.L.L Company use Facebook to manage its corporate reputation during the crisis?

To answer this, two hypotheses are proposed:

1. The effective use of Facebook by H.A.L.L Company positively contributed to crisis management and corporate reputation recovery.
2. Positive audience engagement with the company's Facebook posts reinforced the success of its reputation management strategies.

This study is significant as it highlights the role of social media in shaping organizational responses to crises and maintaining stakeholder trust. It also provides practical insights for companies seeking to improve preparedness and response mechanisms for future challenges.
The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To describe the crisis faced by H.A.L.L Company on Facebook.
- To analyze the company's response strategies and assess their effectiveness.

- To evaluate audience engagement during different stages of the crisis.
- To provide recommendations for enhancing crisis and reputation management practices.

Previous Research on Social Media Crisis Communication

Social media crisis communication has been extensively studied, yielding diverse perspectives shaped by varying objectives, methodologies, and contexts.

(Erikssona, 2018)Conducted a systematic review of 104 empirical studies, aiming to identify universal crisis communication strategies across different industries. The review found five recurring strategic lessons but noted that most studies relied on Twitter and U.S.-based contexts, limiting cross-cultural applicability.

In a more localized context, (Bessouh, Grari, & Boukli-Hacene, 2024) investigated the impact of electronic word-of-mouth on the e-reputation of the Marriott hotel chain in Algeria. Using a quantitative survey method with hotel customers, the study revealed a strong positive correlation between online engagement and corporate reputation, underscoring the growing influence of social media in reputation management in North African markets.Similarly, (Başaran, 2024) examined social media crisis management strategies adopted by Starbucks Türkiye through a case study approach. The research highlighted how proactive and transparent messaging, coupled with empathetic communication, preserved consumer trust during high-pressure scenarios.

Finally, (Larisu & Zulham, 2024) explored crisis communication practices in Indonesian companies through a systematic review. Their findings emphasized the importance of real-time monitoring and culturally adaptive messaging, reinforcing the need for context-sensitive strategies in non-Western markets.

While these studies provide theoretical and practical insights, they differ in their focus, ranging from systematic reviews to localized case studies. They also vary in sample types from large-scale surveys to in-depth qualitative analyses. However, a notable research gap remains regarding platform-specific strategies, particularly the use of Facebook in crisis management in the Algerian context. The present study addresses this gap through a qualitative content analysis of H.A.L.L. Company's communication strategies during a major reputation crisis.

I.1. Social Media: From Reputation Management to Crisis Reputation Management

Social media represents a double-edged sword. It offers an ideal opportunity for organizations to strengthen their brand identity, foster positive relationships with their communities, and enhance their reputation.

However, building a corporate reputation through these platforms can be challenging for many organizations.

I.1.1. Social Media as a Tool for Corporate Reputation Management

Corporate reputation is defined as the perception stakeholders form about an organization, based on their interactions and the information exchanged between them. A strong reputation supports the achievement of strategic objectives and protects the organization from potential crises(de Marcellis-Warin & Teodoresco, 2012, p. 7) .

Organizations commonly use social media to build trust, loyalty, and stakeholder engagement with their brands. These activities are often referred to as online reputation management, defined as "the process of positioning, monitoring, measuring, talking, and listening as the company engages in transparent and ethical dialogue with various stakeholders online"(Dijkmans , Kerkhof, & Beukeboom, 2015, p. 4).

This process involves user interaction, the creation of shareable content, monitoring stakeholder discussions, tracking conversations, addressing negative online content, and following ideas shared across social networks.

Online reputation management can take two primary forms(Brick Marketing, 2012, p. 12):

- Proactive management, aimed at building a positive image for organizations in their growth phase or those seeking to maintain their established reputation.
- Reactive management, focused on repairing damage to the organization's reputation in the event of a crisis.

Additionally, social media facilitates the creation of virtual communities where users collaborate, share, and discuss topics related to the organization's sector or products(Bernal, 2010, p. 14) . This dynamic enhances trust among customers, employees, and the wider target audience, contributing to reputation building and brand awareness.

The (CCIAMP, 2022) report highlights that having official corporate accounts on social media platforms is essential to distinguish organizations from competitors, monitor public discussions, and address fake accounts. Prompt responses to user comments reinforce brand image and improve organizational communication. Furthermore, a study by (Younicom, 2021)revealed that active corporate presence on social media increases brand awareness by 74%, while 64% of organizations rely on these platforms for online reputation management.

I.1.2. Social Media: From Reputation Threat to Crisis Management

A crisis is defined as an unexpected event perceived as a threat to stakeholder interests, potentially harming the organization's performance (Coombs W. , 2007, p. 8). Crisis management is an integrated process that involves continuous risk assessment, proactive preparation, identification of crisis characteristics, and the development of effective plans with diverse mechanisms for handling the situation (Parnell, 2014). Crisis communication, on the other hand, represents a core responsibility of organizations before, during, and after the crisis. It requires delivering clear and reliable messages to the public while ensuring constant monitoring and management of these messages to control the situation and prevent its escalation.

(Coombs W. T., 2014, p. 3)places particular emphasis on **organizational crises**, which pose a serious threat to both operational activities and corporate reputation. These crises are classified into two categories: **operational crises**, which result in actual or potential disruptions to organizational processes, and **reputation crises**, which endanger the organization's image and may cause severe reputational harm.

The escalation of a crisis on social media is largely driven by the "viral spread" of content, which allows information to circulate rapidly across multiple networks. (Erikssona, 2018)highlights the necessity of proactive communication, carefully selecting messages, and closely monitoring information flows through social media tracking tools to prevent crisis escalation and avoid information gaps that may fuel rumors.

(McLachlan & Newberry, 2021)Further stress that transparency and prompt response on social media are key to mitigating crises and safeguarding corporate reputation. Similarly, (Larisu & Zulham, 2024) affirm that providing accurate information, ensuring rapid feedback, and continuously monitoring audience interactions foster trust and enhance the effectiveness of reputation management during crises.

I.2. Strategies for Reputation Recovery: Image Repair Theory

The theory identifies five key strategies to address crises: Denial, Evading Responsibility, Reducing Offensiveness, Corrective Action, and Mortification.

(Benoit, 1995)developed the Image Repair Theory (IRT), which outlines strategies for restoring an image when reputation has been damaged. IRT can be applied as a framework to understand crisis situations at both the personal and organizational levels. It is part of the crisis communication field, a specialized branch of public relations, aimed at protecting an individual or organization facing a public threat to its

reputation. The theory is based on two main assumptions (Coombs W. T., 2009):

* Organizational communication is viewed as a goal-oriented activity;

* Maintaining a positive reputation is one of the primary objectives of communication.

The theory identifies five key strategies to address crises: Denial, Evading Responsibility, Reducing Offensiveness, Corrective Action, and Mortification.

Table 1: Crisis Response Strategies According to Image Repair Theory

Strategy	Approach
Denial: Used when the organization is not responsible for the event causing the attack.	**Simple Denial**: The organization denies responsibility, either by rejecting the occurrence of the harmful act, denying its commission, or denying its damaging effect. **Shift the Blame:** The organization declares that another entity or individual is responsible for the act.
Evading Responsibility: When the accused cannot deny committing the act.	**Provocation:** Justifying the act by claiming it was a forced response to another event. **Defeasibility:** Arguing lack of information or resources to prevent the act. **Accident:** Asserting that the act was an unfortunate and uncontrollable incident while showing attempts to manage it. **Good Intentions:** Acknowledging the act but emphasizing it was done with positive intentions and no harm was intended.
Reducing Offensiveness: Aims to enhance the organization's image and mitigate reputational damage.	**Bolstering:** Highlighting the organization's positive attributes. **Minimization:** Downplaying the perceived severity of the crisis. **Differentiation:** Comparing the act to more serious incidents to lessen its impact. **Transcendence:** Placing the act within a broader, more favorable context. **Attacking the Accuser:** Questioning the credibility of individuals or groups criticizing the organization. **Compensation:** Offering gifts, money, or services to victims to reduce negative perceptions.
Corrective Action	Attempting to restore the pre-crisis status and promising change to prevent recurrence
Mortification	Admitting responsibility, seeking forgiveness, and expressing regret.

Source: Adapted by the researchers from (Crowley, 2024)

Crisis management strategies focus on how an organization communicates its response through clear and well-structured messages to limit the impact of the crisis and protect its reputation. Social media platforms serve as critical channels for implementing these strategies, enabling proactive preparation, rapid response, and improved decision-making transparency.

Organizations must adopt precise monitoring mechanisms to track online discussions, distinguish between ordinary negative comments and potential crisis indicators, and respond professionally and effectively.

II– Methods and Materials:

II.1. Case Selection and Research Context

This study focuses on **H.A.A.L** (Hispano Algérienne de l'Alimentation), **an Algerian limited liability company** established in 2001 and a prominent canned fish producer. This case was selected due to the severe reputation crisis it encountered in August 2023.

The crisis erupted when the consumer protection association "Hemaytek" accused the company's "AtunMaratun" canned tuna product of non-compliance with microbiological standards, linking it to two cases of food poisoning, one of which was fatal. These allegations triggered widespread coverage across traditional and social media platforms, profoundly threatening the company's reputation. The public, virulent nature of this crisis, coupled with its direct association with consumer health and safety—a critical vulnerability for any food brand—makes it a highly pertinent and compelling case for analyzing corporate crisis communication strategies on social media, particularly Facebook.

II.2. Data Collection

This study utilized a qualitative content analysis approach. The primary source of data was the official Facebook page of H.A.L.L. Company. The data collection period encompassed the entire crisis timeline, from August 1, 2023, when initial allegations surfaced, to September 1, 2023, by which point the crisis had been publicly resolved and contained. Facebook was selected as the focal platform for this study due to its widespread adoption in Algeria and its recognized significance as a channel for real-time public engagement and crisis communication. All data made publicly available by the company on its Facebook page during this period were systematically archived for subsequent analysis. This resulted in a comprehensive dataset comprising the following elements:

- Text-based posts (including official statements, press releases, and promotional content)
- Visual materials (such as images and infographics)
- Video content
- Official documents shared by the company (e.g., laboratory test reports)

- Quantitative metrics of user engagement (including the number of likes, comments, and shares for each post)

The comprehensive dataset comprised 17 posts with the following elements:

Table 2:Dataset Composition

Data Type	Description	Quantity
Text-based posts	Official statements, press releases, announcements	12 posts
Visual materials	Images, infographics, modified profile picture	4 items
Video content	Professional explanatory video (5:23 duration)	1 video
Official documents	Laboratory test reports, detailed statements	4 documents
Engagement metrics	Likes, comments, shares for each post	17 sets

Source: Compiled by the researchers based on H.A.L.L. Company's official Facebook page.

Total Posts by Crisis Phase:
- Crisis Onset (Aug 1-21): 6 posts
- Crisis Peak (Aug 22-26): 3 posts
- Crisis Resolution (Aug 27-Sep 1): 7 posts
- Extended Resolution (Sep 1): 1 post

II.3. Data Analysis:

The collected data was analyzed based on a framework designed to answer the research questions. To analyze the company's response strategies, this study adopted a qualitative content analysis approach guided by Benoit's (1995) Image Repair Theory (IRT). This theoretical framework provides a robust typology for categorizing communication strategies used to protect and repair a damaged reputation, making it particularly appropriate for analyzing reputation-centric crises like the one faced by H.A.L.L. Company.

The analysis specifically focused on identifying the following key strategies outlined by Benoit: **denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification**. The use of this theory allowed for a systematic classification of the company's communicative actions throughout the different stages of the crisis.

II.4. Codebook Development

To ensure systematic and reliable coding, a detailed **codebook** was developed to operationalize each IRT strategy. The codebook provided clear definitions, inclusion/exclusion criteria, and example indicators for each strategy, as shown in Table 4.

Table 3: Coding Framework for Crisis Communication Strategies

IRT Strategy	OperationalDefinition	Inclusion Criteria	ExampleIndicators	Exclusion Criteria
Simple Denial	Organization explicitly denies responsibility or occurrence of the harmful act	Post contains explicit negation of accusations; uses words like "deny," "not responsible," "false"	"We categorically deny..."; "The product did not cause..."; "These allegations are false"	General positive statements about the company without explicit denial
Shift Blame	Organization attributes responsibility to another party	Post explicitly names another entity as responsible; redirects culpability	"The association published false information"; "They are responsible for spreading rumors"	Criticism of accusers without attributing blame
Bolstering	Highlighting positive organizational attributes, past achievements, or good reputation	Post emphasizes company's history, quality standards, certifications, or track record	"22years of food safety"; "Certified by.."; "No previous incidents"; "Strict quality controls"	Generic promotional content unrelated to crisis
Minimization	Downplaying the severity or impact of the crisis	Post suggests crisis is exaggerated, less serious than portrayed, or isolated	"The sample was inadequate"; "This is an isolated incident"; "Not as serious as claimed"	Factual statements about the situation without minimizing
Attacking Accuser	Questioning credibility, motives, or legitimacy of those making accusations	Post challenges accusers' reliability, suggests ulterior motives, or questions their expertise	"The association has ulterior motives"; "They lack credibility"; "Fabricated allegations"	Simple disagreement without attacking credibility
Corrective Action	Concrete steps taken to fix problem and prevent recurrence	Post describesspecific actions, tests, improvements, or changes implemented	"We conducted additional laboratory tests"; "Publishing certified results"; "Implementing new protocols"	Promises withoutspecific actions
Mortification	Admission of fault, apology, or expression of regret	Post contains explicit apology, admission of responsibility, or request for forgiveness	"We apologize"; "We take full responsibility"; "We regret this incident"	Expressions of concern without admission of fault

Source: Developed by the researchers based on Benoit's (1995) Image Repair Theory and content analysis indicators.

Illustrative Examples

To illustrate how the coding framework was applied to the dataset, a few short examples from the company's posts were examined. For instance, the statement published on August 21 ("We categorically deny any link between our product and the reported cases") was coded as simple denial, while the claim that "the tested sample is inadequate and cannot be relied upon" reflected minimization. Similarly, the announcement of legal action against those "spreading false information" was classified under attacking the accuser. These examples clarify how the indicators in Table X were operationalized in the actual coding process.

The analysis focused on three main categories:

1. Volume and Timing of Communication: Quantifying the total number of posts and tracking their distribution across different phases of the crisis (beginning, peak, end).
2. Crisis Communication Strategies: Qualitatively analyzing the content of the posts to identify the specific image repair strategies employed by the company.
3. Audience Engagement: Measuring and analyzing the level and nature of public interaction (likes, comments, shares) with the company's posts throughout the crisis to gauge public perception and the effectiveness of communication.

II.5. Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to established ethical standards for social media research by analyzing only publicly available content from H.A.L.L Company's official Facebook page, without accessing private information or identifying individual users. Given the sensitive nature of the crisis, the analysis was conducted with objectivity and respect, avoiding any identification of victims or affected families. Audience comments were examined only at the aggregate level, and any screenshots used were anonymized. As the study relies solely on existing public data and involves no direct interaction with human subjects, it was deemed exempt from full institutional ethics review. The research is entirely independent, and no contact with the company was required or undertaken.

III -Results and discussion:

III. 1. Analysis of Total Posts Published During the Crisis

The total number of posts published by H.A.A.L. Company on its official Facebook page during the crisis period reached seventeen (17) posts, spanning from August 1, 2023, to September 1, 2023.

Overall, the volume of posts was relatively low, suggesting several potential factors: a lack of preparedness for crisis management, absence of a structured crisis communication plan, or difficulties in addressing the unfolding situation. In crisis contexts, rapid and effective responses are essential to safeguard an organization's reputation and protect stakeholder interests.

Based on the qualitative content analysis of the company's Facebook page, the crisis can be divided into three distinct phases: the onset, the peak, and the resolution stage.

Table 4: Distribution of Content across Crisis Phases

Phase	Dates	N° of posts	Content Type	Strategic Purpose
Crisis Onset	Aug. 1–20, 2023	6	Promotional posts (5); Religious post (1)	Avoid confrontation; Ignore crisis
	Aug. 21, 2023	1	Clarifying statement	Denial of accusations; Protection of reputation
Crisis Peak	Aug. 22–26, 2023	3	Urgent clarifying statements	Respond to allegations; Reassure stakeholders
Crisis **Resolution**	Aug. 27–Sep. 1, 2023	7	Image post; Clarifying statements (2); Lab results (2); Detailed document; Explanatory video	Prove innocence; Rebuild trust; Strengthen reputation; Prevent recurrence

Source: Compiled by the researchers based on content analysis of H.A.A.L.'s official Facebook page

1. Crisis Onset (August 1–21, 2023)

The crisis began on August 1, 2023, when the Algerian Consumer Protection Association (Hemaytek) hinted at possible microbiological non-compliance of –AtunMaratun- canned tuna. On August 8, the association issued a warning following two reported cases of severe food poisoning, one resulting in death, supported by a friend's testimony and a laboratory test image, though without directly naming the brand.

Company Response:

H.A.A.L. initially ignored the emerging crisis, as the brand was not explicitly mentioned, and instead published only promotional content (five

marketing posts and one religious message) between August1–20, 2023. However, as accusations became more explicit, the company released its first official statement on August 21, denying responsibility, reaffirming product quality, and announcing additional laboratory tests. The statement also warned against exploiting the situation to harm the company's reputation and employees' livelihoods.

Despite these efforts, the initial response was delayed and defensive, lacking transparency and failing to address public concerns promptly, which may have weakened its credibility.

2. Crisis Peak (August 22–26, 2023)

The crisis escalated sharply following two critical events:

- Health escalation: the death of one consumer and hospitalization of another in intensive care, adding a moral and public safety dimension to the crisis.
- Regulatory intervention: the Ministry of Commerce ordered the precautionary withdrawal of batch No. 23 005235 and issued a public warning against consuming AtunMaratun, which reinforced the allegations.

Company Response: During this high-pressure phase, H.A.A.L. published only three posts (two on August 22 and one on August 24), focusing on:

* Denying the accusations and labelling them as false information.

* Threatening legal action against Hemaytek for defamation.

* Clarifying that the tested sample was non-compliant, while certified laboratories were testing valid samples.

* Reassuring consumers and promising to publish official results soon.

While these actions signaled a more proactive stance, the tone remained largely defensive, and the limited posting frequency may have hindered the company's ability to control the narrative effectively.

3. Crisis Resolution (August 27 – September 1, 2023)

The crisis resolution phase began with the release of official microbiological test results from the Pasteur Institute, confirming that the product was safe and met regulatory standards.

Company Response: H.A.A.L. significantly increased its communication activity, publishing seven posts during this stage:

- On August 27, the company shared four materials, including a lab report, an urgent statement, and a detailed four-page document in French to reach the Algerian diaspora. It also changed its profile

picture to display the Atun Maratun can topped with a crown, symbolizing victory and restored reputation.(Annex 1&2)

- On August 29, additional laboratory results were published to further confirm product safety.(Annex 3)
- On August 31, a statement challenged Hamaytek's motives, urging full disclosure of their evidence.
- On September 1, a professional video produced by Dz News showcased the company's production standards, hygiene protocols, and positive customer testimonials, reinforcing its reputation.

This stage demonstrated a shift toward proactive image repair, emphasizing evidence-based communication, transparency, and positive brand reinforcement, which helped rebuild consumer trust and restore corporate credibility.

III. 2. Crisis Communication Strategies Analysis

H.A.A.L. Company relied on a set of communication strategies to manage the crisis, guided by Benoit's (1995) Image Repair Theory (IRT), which assumes that organizations seek to minimize reputational damage and restore stakeholder trust through strategic messaging. The nature of these strategies varied across the three stages of the crisis (onset – peak – resolution).

1. Crisis Onset Stage

At the beginning of the crisis, the company primarily adopted denial and attacking the accuser strategies:

- **Denial Strategy** Applied through:
  - ✓ **Simple Denial:** The company categorically denied that its product was responsible for the alleged food poisoning cases.
  - ✓ **Shifting the Blame:** Responsibility was shifted to the consumer protection association (Hemaytek), accusing it of disseminating false information.
- **Attacking the Accuser:** The company explicitly announced its intent to pursue legal action against the association for defamation.
- **Bolstering:** The company highlighted its long-standing record of food safety, emphasizing that no cases of food poisoning had been linked to its products since its establishment.

2. Crisis Peak Stage

During the peak of the crisis, the company expanded its strategy mix to include denial, reducing offensiveness, and attacking the accuser:

- **Shifting the Blame:** The company accused –Hemaytek- of fabricating allegations and spreading misleading information.
- **Reducing Offensiveness:** This strategy aimed to minimize reputational damage by stressing the company's strengths and credibility, including:
  - ✓ **Bolstering:** Reaffirming its reputation for high-quality and safe products, produced under strict hygiene standards.
  - ✓ **Minimization:** Downplaying the severity of the crisis by emphasizing that the sample tested was unfit for microbiological analysis.
- **Attacking the Accuser:** The Company questioned the credibility of Hemaytek, reiterating its intention to initiate legal proceedings.

3. Crisis Resolution Stage

In the final stage, the company shifted towards more corrective and reinforcing strategies while maintaining elements of denial:

- **Denial Strategy** Reasserted through:
  - ✓ **Simple Denial:** Restating that the product did not cause the alleged food poisoning cases.
  - ✓ **Shifting the Blame:** Continuing to accuse Hemaytek of spreading false information.
- **Reducing Offensiveness** Reasserted through:
  - ✓ **Bolstering:** Underlining the product's safety with certified laboratory test results and highlighting the company's commitment to quality standards.
  - ✓ **Minimization:** Suggesting that the crisis was exaggerated and that the product was, in fact, safe.
- **Attacking the Accuser:** Renewing accusations of defamation against.

The company demonstrated a diverse response strategy that combined denial of accusations, credibility reinforcement through laboratory test results, and reminders of its positive track record, along with attacking the accuser. However, some of the early-stage messages appeared defensive and exaggerated, which likely reduced their effectiveness.

Nevertheless, the subsequent corrective strategies, particularly the publication of certified test results and factual clarifications, played a key role in restoring public trust and mitigating the crisis impact. These findings are consistent with Benoit's (1995) Image Repair Theory, which highlights the importance of shifting from defensive to corrective and trust-building strategies as a crisis evolves.

III. 3. Audience Engagement Analysis:

The interaction of H.A.L.L. Company's followers on Facebook during the crisis was highly dynamic, reflecting shifts in public sentiment across the three phases.

Table 5: Audience Engagement and Sentiment Distribution Across Crisis Stages

Metric / Phase	Crisis Onset (Aug 1-21)	Crisis Peak (Aug 22-26)	Crisis Resolution (Aug 27 - Sep 1)
Number of Posts	6	3	7
Avg. Comments	2,017	383	1,035
Avg. Likes	5,944	1,329	3,940
Shares	1,004	269	459
Dominant Sentiment	Supportive (~85%)	Cautiously Supportive (~70%)	Celebratory Support (~90%)
Engagement Volume	Very low initially, then a massive spike after the first clarifying statement (Aug 21).	Significant decline.	Strong and sustained rebound.
Key Themes	Brand trust & loyalty ("We are with you"), belief in the company's narrative.	Caution & awaiting official evidence ("Let's wait for the results"), emergence of price-related complaints.	Restored confidence ("We knew you were innocent"), victory celebration, praise for transparency.
Primary Explanation	Engagement driven by wide media coverage, pre-existing brand trust, and reaction to the initial statement.	Decline due to audience anticipation for lab results and potential fatigue from repetitive messaging.	Resurgence due to confirmed product safety and perceived professional crisis management.

Source: Compiled by the researchers based on data from H.A.L.L. Company's official Facebook page.

Crisis Onset (1 – 21 August 2023)

The initial period of the crisis (August 1-20) saw minimal audience engagement, with promotional posts receiving an average of only 17 comments (16 positive/neutral and 1 critical), 444 likes, and 4 shares, as the

crisis had not yet been directly addressed. This changed dramatically on **August 21**, when the company published its first official clarifying statement. Engagement skyrocketed, generating over **2,000 comments** (approximately 85% of which were strongly supportive), **5,500 likes**, and **1,000 shares**.

Key factors driving this surge included:

- **Increased Public Awareness:** Growing media and social media coverage heightened public attention.
- **Existing Brand Trust:** A foundation of consumer loyalty encouraged followers to voice their support.
- **Perceived Transparency:** The initial statement was viewed as transparent and reassuring, mitigating stakeholder concerns.

Predominant themes in supportive comments were expressions of solidarity (e.g., "We are with you"), affirmations of product quality ("Your products are excellent"), and defense of the company's reputation ("This is clearly defamation").

Crisis Peak (22–26 August 2023)
During this period, engagement dropped significantly to an average of **383 comments**, **1,329 likes**, and **269 shares** per post. While **support remained dominant (~70%)**, the overall tone became more cautious. Common themes in comments reflected a wait-and-see attitude, such as "Let's wait for the official results" and "The truth will come out." Notably, only about **7% of comments expressed criticism**, and of these, a very small subset (only 14 comments across all posts) focused on criticizing the product's price relative to quantity—not its quality or safety—with themes like, "The can is expensive compared to the quantity," while still acknowledging product quality.

This decline in engagement can be attributed to two key factors:

1. **Audience Anticipation:** The public was awaiting official laboratory test results before forming definitive judgments, leading to a natural pause in active interaction.
2. **Potential Engagement Fatigue:** The company's messaging during this phase may have become repetitive, reducing the incentive for the audience to continue engaging at the previous high rate.

Crisis Resolution (27 August – 1 September 2023)

As official test results confirming product safety were released, audience engagement rebounded strongly, reaching an average of **1,035 comments**, **3,940 likes**, and **459 shares** per post. Sentiment was overwhelmingly positive (**~90%**), with comments evolving into a celebratory tone, featuring phrases such as *"Congratulations," "We never doubted you,"* and *"Truth prevailed."* Very few critical comments remained (**~2%**), and these were mostly focused on unrelated topics.

This resurgence was driven by several key factors:

1. **Confirmation of Safety:** The official results decisively reinforced public confidence in the product.
2. **Perceived Professionalism:** The audience viewed the company's overall crisis management as competent and reliable.
3. **Appreciation for Communication:** Stakeholders valued the detailed updates, sustained transparency, and post-crisis reassurance provided by the company.

Overall Interpretation:

This pattern demonstrates that social media audiences respond decisively to credible evidence and timely communication. The sharp increase in engagement during this final phase underscores the effectiveness of corrective action and transparent updates in restoring trust, a dynamic that aligns with the principles of Benoit's (1995) Image Repair Theory.

Critical Interpretation of Findings

The findings of this study reveal both strengths and shortcomings in H.A.L.L Company's crisis communication approach. Consistent with Başaran (2024), who emphasized the importance of transparent and empathetic communication in protecting brand trust, H.A.L.L initially demonstrated a more defensive and reactive stance, particularly during the onset stage. This contrasts with best practices recommended by crisis communication literature, such as Coombs' SCCT model, which stresses the need for rapid acknowledgement and swift factual clarification to reduce uncertainty. However, as the crisis evolved, the company increasingly aligned with international best practices, particularly by providing evidence-based updates and certified laboratory results, a strategy that mirrors findings from Bessouh et al. (2024) regarding the role of transparent communication in reinforcing e-reputation within the Algerian market.

Therefore, while the early-stage response revealed delays and defensiveness, the corrective measures adopted in the resolution phase significantly contributed to restoring public confidence, demonstrating a partial but effective alignment with recognized crisis communication standards.

IV -Conclusion:

Through the analysis of all content published on H.A.L.L. Company's official Facebook page during the crisis period (onset, peak, and resolution), the following findings emerged:
H.A.L.L. successfully overcame the crisis stemming from accusations that its products caused two cases of food poisoning. The company implemented a set of effective strategies through its Facebook posts, including:

- Denial Strategy: applying both simple denial and shifting the blame.
- Reducing Offensiveness Strategy: emphasizing bolstering (highlighting positive aspects) and minimization (downplaying the severity of the event).
- Attacking the Accuser Strategy.

H.A.L.L. effectively leveraged Facebook to manage its reputation crisis. These strategies enhanced communication with the public, rebuilt trust, and enabled the company to emerge from the crisis without lasting reputational damage. This validates the first hypothesis, which states that effective use of Facebook positively influences crisis management and corporate image restoration.

Audience engagement with H.A.L.L.'s posts was exceptionally positive. Followers clearly supported the company and praised its responsible and effective crisis response. This positive interaction significantly strengthened transparency and trust between the company and its stakeholders, confirming the second hypothesis that audience engagement plays a crucial role in the success of corporate crisis communication strategies.

However, this study has certain limitations. Theoretically, its findings are primarily interpreted through the lens of Benoit's Image Repair Theory; incorporating other frameworks, such as Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), could provide a more nuanced understanding. Practically, the study is limited by its focus on a single platform (Facebook) and a single case study within a specific cultural

context (Algeria), which affects the generalizability of the results. The reliance on public engagement metrics (likes, comments, shares) also provides a limited view of public sentiment, which could be deepened through qualitative methods like interviews or surveys.

Given the study's findings, the company should adopt advanced social media monitoring systems to effectively track online mentions and detect potential crises early. Such systems would enhance proactive response capabilities and minimize potential damage. Additionally, staff training is essential to equip employees with the necessary skills and knowledge to handle crises effectively on social media platforms.

Finally, this research opens avenues for future studies. Researchers could conduct a comparative analysis of crisis communication strategies across different industries or cultural settings. Quantitative studies could measure the correlation between specific response strategies and reputation recovery rates more precisely. Further research could also explore the role of other social media platforms (e.g., X (Twitter), Instagram) in crisis management within the Algerian context.

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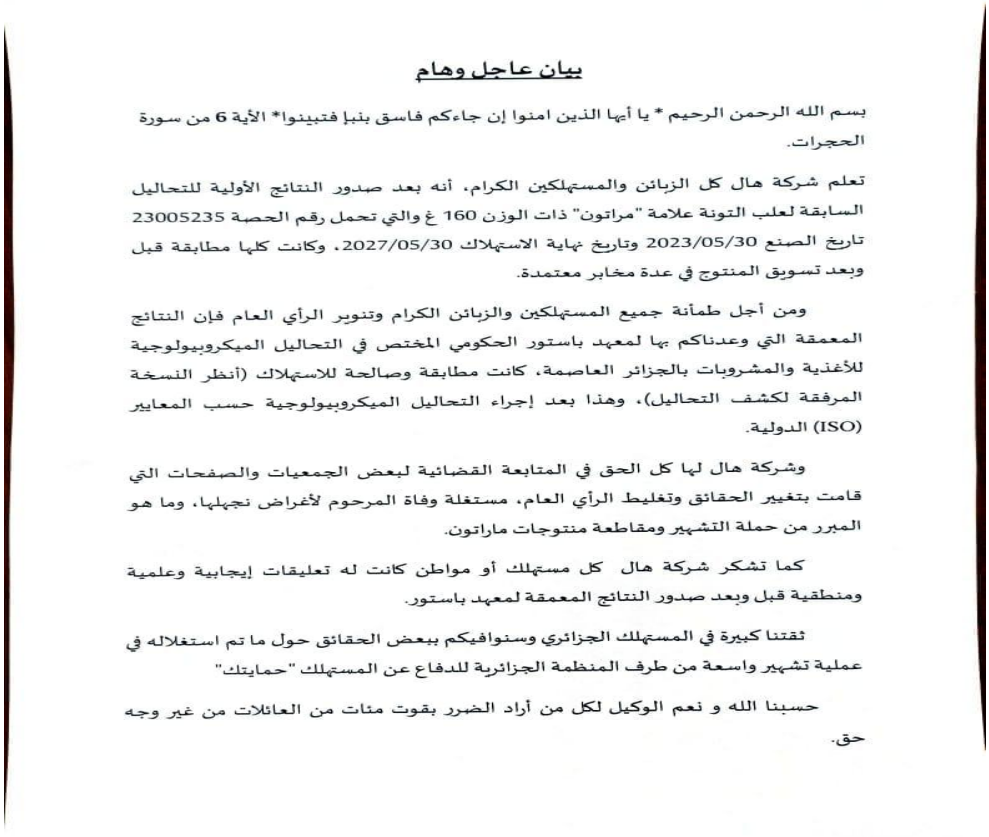
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Annexes

Annex 1: **First Official Statement Denying Accusations**



بيان عاجل وهام

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم * يا أيها الذين امنوا إن جاءكم فاسق بنبإ فتبينوا* الأية 6 من سورة الحجرات.

تعلم شركة هال كل الزبائن والمستهلكين الكرام، أنه بعد صدور النتائج الأولية للتحاليل السابقة لعلب التونة علامة "مراتون" ذات الوزن 160 غ والتي تحمل رقم الحصة 23005235 تاريخ الصنع 2023/05/30 وتاريخ نهاية الاستهلاك 2027/05/30، وكانت كلها مطابقة قبل وبعد تسويق المنتوج في عدة مخابر معتمدة.

ومن أجل طمأنة جميع المستهلكين والزبائن الكرام وتنوير الرأي العام فإن النتائج المعمقة التي وعدناكم بها لمعهد باستور الحكومي المختص في التحاليل الميكروبيولوجية للأغذية والمشروبات بالجزائر العاصمة، كانت مطابقة وصالحة للاستهلاك (أنظر النسخة المرفقة لكشف التحاليل)، وهذا بعد إجراء التحاليل الميكروبيولوجية حسب المعايير (ISO) الدولية.

وشركة هال لها كل الحق في المتابعة القضائية لبعض الجمعيات والصفحات التي قامت بتغيير الحقائق وتغليط الرأي العام، مستغلة وفاة المرحوم لأغراض نجهلها، وما هو المبرر من حملة التشهير ومقاطعة منتوجات ماراتون.

كما تشكر شركة هال كل مستهلك أو مواطن كانت له تعليقات إيجابية وعلمية ومنطقية قبل وبعد صدور النتائج المعمقة لمعهد باستور.

ثقتنا كبيرة في المستهلك الجزائري وسنوافيكم ببعض الحقائق حول ما تم استغلاله في عملية تشهير واسعة من طرف المنظمة الجزائرية للدفاع عن المستهلك "حمايتك"

حسبنا الله و نعم الوكيل لكل من أراد الضرر بقوت مئات من العائلات من غير وجه حق.

Source : H.A.L.L Company's Facebook post dated August 21, 2023 .

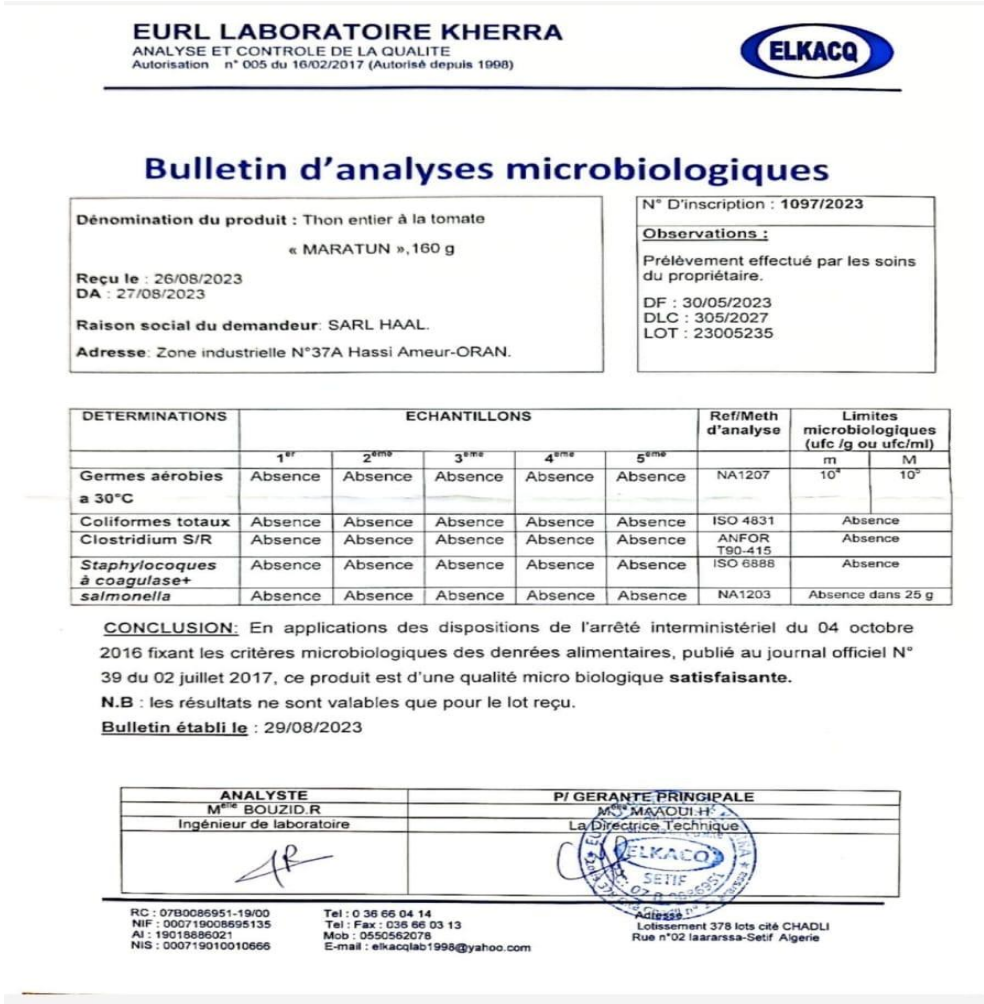
Annex 2: Laboratory test results from Institut Pasteur and Modified profile picture



Source : H.A.L.L Company's Facebook post dated August 27, 2023

Showing: (1) Microbiological analysis report from Institut Pasteur d'Algérie - Laboratoire de Bactériologie des Aliments et des Eaux (Report No. 23J00015, dated August 23, 2023), confirming product compliance with ISO food safety standards.
(2) Modified profile picture displaying the Atun Maratun can topped with a crown, symbolizing the company's restored reputation.

Annex 3: Second Laboratory test results from **EURL Laboratoire KHERRA**



EURL LABORATOIRE KHERRA
ANALYSE ET CONTROLE DE LA QUALITE
Autorisation n° 005 du 16/02/2017 (Autorisé depuis 1998)

ELKACQ

Bulletin d'analyses microbiologiques

Dénomination du produit : Thon entier à la tomate « MARATUN », 160 g

Reçu le : 26/08/2023
DA : 27/08/2023

Raison social du demandeur: SARL HAAL.

Adresse: Zone industrielle N°37A Hassi Ameur-ORAN.

N° D'inscription : **1097/2023**

Observations :

Prélèvement effectué par les soins du propriétaire.

DF : 30/05/2023
DLC : 305/2027
LOT : 23005235

DETERMINATIONS	ECHANTILLONS					Ref/Meth d'analyse	Limites microbiologiques (ufc /g ou ufc/ml)	
	1er	2ème	3ème	4ème	5ème		m	M
Germes aérobies a 30°C	Absence	Absence	Absence	Absence	Absence	NA1207	10^4	10^5
Coliformes totaux	Absence	Absence	Absence	Absence	Absence	ISO 4831	Absence	
Clostridium S/R	Absence	Absence	Absence	Absence	Absence	ANFOR T90-415	Absence	
Staphylocoques à coagulase+	Absence	Absence	Absence	Absence	Absence	ISO 6888	Absence	
salmonella	Absence	Absence	Absence	Absence	Absence	NA1203	Absence dans 25 g	

CONCLUSION: En applications des dispositions de l'arrêté interministériel du 04 octobre 2016 fixant les critères microbiologiques des denrées alimentaires, publié au journal officiel N° 39 du 02 juillet 2017, ce produit est d'une qualité micro biologique **satisfaisante.**

N.B : les résultats ne sont valables que pour le lot reçu.

Bulletin établi le : 29/08/2023

ANALYSTE	P/ GERANTE PRINCIPALE
Mlle BOUZID.R	Mme MAAOUI.H
Ingénieur de laboratoire	La Directrice Technique

ELKACQ SETIF

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NIF : 000719008595135
AI : 19018886021
NIS : 000719010010666

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Tel : Fax : 036 66 03 13
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Adresse
Lotissement 378 lots cité CHADLI
Rue n°02 laararssa-Setif Algerie

Source : Institute H.A.L.L Company's Facebook post dated August 29, 2023

Showing : microbiological analysis bulletin from EURL Laboratoire KHERRA (dated August 26-27, 2023), providing additional independent verification of product safety.