

# The effectiveness of airline crisis management on brand protection: A case study of British Airways

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## A B S T R A C T

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This paper considers extant studies on crisis communications, crisis management and brand management and examines how British Airways react in order to protect the airline's brand when confronted with a crisis. Theory dictates that different strategies should be employed for different crisis situations. British Airways' response to four crises is critically evaluated. The effectiveness of British Airways' crisis management on brand protection is evaluated using a quantitative brand metric that measures consumers' perception on a daily basis. The paper thus analyses how the airline company and the airline's brand responded to the original crises and the exposure that followed which results in the identification of clear conclusions from each of the four crises.

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## 1. Introduction

Brand management has an important relationship with air transport. Historically, aviation branding has been important because airlines had to try and differentiate themselves despite having nearly homogenous products (Doganis, 2006). As restrictions were eased and the regulatory environment liberalised, there became less commonality in the product being offered. The diversity of service has increased dramatically following deregulation with airlines allowed to experiment with different levels of service, varying from “no-frills” transport to all first class service (Collison and Boberg, 1987). As a result, brand management has retained its importance in the industry.

A crisis has the potential to destroy a brand extremely quickly. This is most likely when an organisation acts in a way that is inconsistent with the brand values that it has portrayed. Airline crises are not unusual (Mason, 2001; Ray, 1999) and they tend to suffer great exposure around the world. The role of crisis management within the wider context of brand management has rarely been identified.

Literature on the topics of brand management, crisis communications and crisis management tend to focus on only one discipline at a time. Few studies follow the actions of one particular company through a series of organisational crises over time. This paper aims to address some of these gaps in the research of these topics.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Brand management

Keller (2008) states that any brand is vulnerable and susceptible to poor brand management whilst De Chernatony (2001) notes that the values upon which a brand is built help create the desired image of the brand. Hemus (2010) cites research that shows “when a crisis strikes at the heart of brand values, it has the ability to do most damage.” As a result, firms must “understand what lies at the heart of your brand and be especially vigilant for any activity that runs counter to it.” These values must also be incorporated into the crisis management response. “A brand with a positive brand image is more likely to successfully weather a brand crisis or downturn in the brand's fortunes” (Keller, 1998).

Businesses are faced with a variety of issues every day, many of which could tarnish the brand. However, very few become crises (Riezebos et al., 2003). Meyers (1986), cited in Ray (1999) identified nine types of business crises: crises in public perception, sudden market shifts, product failure, top-management succession, finances, industrial relations, hostile takeovers, adverse international events, and regulation and deregulation. Newsom et al. (1996) place crises into two categories; violent and nonviolent. Violent crises would be those which involve a loss of life or property, are immediate and usually catastrophic. Nonviolent crises would include product tampering for instance where nobody is immediately impaired by the incident. The two categories can then be subdivided into further categories; acts of nature, intentional, and unintentional (Ray, 1999).

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## 2.2. Crisis management and communication

### 2.2.1. Crisis response

Perl (2010) states that “if your crisis response is off to a rapid start, your chances for reputation damage decrease.” Leadership is also particularly important during a crisis. “In times of crisis, leadership becomes an integral cog of a successful organisational crisis outcome. Crisis leaders need to be flexible, adaptive and prepared for tough decision-making challenges whatever the cause or situational context” (Muffet-Willett and Kruse, 2009).

When considering an appropriate crisis response, organisations must assess the type and scale of crisis they are facing. One way of doing this is to consider the level of perceived responsibility that the organisation will face (Jeong, 2009). Weiner et al. (1988) claim the audience will attempt to attribute responsibility for the event in order to achieve greater understanding. Stakeholders will consider what caused the crisis and potentially implicate the company. Coombs (1995) added two further components – crisis history and a negative prior reputation – that can intensify the perceived responsibility and produce greater internal attribution.

The initial response should be accurate and consistent and if necessary, incorporate instructing information (Coombs, 2007; Sturges, 1994). Instructing information informs the audience of what they must do to protect themselves, imperative in cases of public safety. Furthermore, the initial response should express concern or sympathy for victims of the crisis. Coombs and Holladay (1996) found that reputational damage was diminished when organisations incorporated expressions of concern into their response. However, expressions of concern can sometimes be used by lawyers as an admission of guilt.

Image restoration theory has become one of the main focuses of research into the application of crisis communication. Benoit (1995) has created a typology of strategies that can be used to communicate during a crisis. The effectiveness of each strategy depends on the characteristics of the crisis being faced. There are five major image restoration strategies:

1. Denial – the event did not occur or the company was not responsible.
2. Evade Responsibility – the event occurred with minimal company responsibility.
3. Reduce Offensiveness – neither admit nor deny but reduce incident impact. Six approaches are available.<sup>1</sup>
4. Corrective Action – outline changes to prevent recurrence.
5. Mortification – admit event took place, accept responsibility, apologise and ask for forgiveness.

In the majority of crisis situations, a number of these strategies may be employed, particularly as crises often develop in unexpected ways. Depending on the nature of the crisis, the spokesperson should be media trained and often a member of the senior management team. Some crises will be “unnecessarily amplified and extended” by using the chief executive officer (CEO) as spokesperson (Rose, 2008). However, in many cases, the CEO’s visibility during a crisis leads to the perception that senior management is in charge of the crisis and showing it due respect. Hemus (2010) refutes that the chief executive must be the main spokesperson but does warn that “no chief executive can be absent from the public eye when the business is in the middle of a crisis.”

<sup>1</sup> *Bolstering* (improve company image so that damage is reduced), *minimisation* (frame event in more positive light), *differentiation* (compare with less favourable incidents), *transcendence* (broaden the context of the incident), *attacking the accuser* (weaken their position) and *compensation*.

Part of the challenge for crisis communicators is ensuring that the communication reaches its intended audience. As a result, the selection of an appropriate communications channel is important. The number of communications channels available to crisis communicators has increased significantly in recent years with the company website now one of the most prominent. Social media allows the company to have a more direct conversation with its customers which can be important during a crisis. The challenge for companies using social media is to effectively divide the channels to meet key stakeholders’ needs. Video communication from the chief executive of the company has been shown to be very effective at restoring organisation’s reputations after a crisis (Elsasser, 2007). During the crisis response phase, paid media marketing activities should be kept to a minimum where they could be seen as insensitive or help associate the brand with the crisis.

### 2.2.2. Post-crisis phase

“Uncertainty, surprise, stress, threat and limited response time” characterise the post-crisis phase. Media will begin to examine who is to blame and the factors that allowed the situation to occur. The post-crisis phase allows the company to “offer justifications and explanations for the violation of normative routines” (Ray, 1999).

Coombs (2007) recommends that in the post-crisis phase, information that has been promised to stakeholders should be delivered as soon as it is known. Stakeholders should also be kept updated on the progression of any recovery efforts and in particular any corrective measures being taken. The importance of analysing the crisis management effort and integrating any lessons learnt into the system is also underlined. Riezebos et al. (2003) also note that “organisations that have been faced with brand damage usually provide little or no information to third parties about learning experiences, results of the brand damage and so forth”.

## 3. Methodology

This research adopts the case study approach to test the current state of crisis management in the airline industry. British Airways was selected as the overall case study because it is a strong, well-established, global brand that has been identified as the 4th strongest in the UK (Rothwell, 2010). Its core brand values have been identified as network, convenience, facilities, quality of service and experience (Kalligiannis, 2009). The airline has faced a number of different organisational or reputational crises over recent years, providing a rich source of evidence with which to assess its crisis management. Furthermore, it is well covered by the news media enabling a substantial amount of press materials to be obtained.

YouGov’s “BrandIndex” measures consumers’ perception of many global brands (including British Airways) on a daily basis. This allows detailed analysis of how the airline company’s brand has responded to the original crisis and the exposure that followed. YouGov creates the “BrandIndex” by interviewing 2000 UK adults every weekday.<sup>2</sup> The responses cover the perceived quality, value, satisfaction, corporate reputation, recommendation and general impression of the brand. Together, the responses (positive, negative or neutral) in each of these areas reveal the overall brand health or “BrandIndex” which can be used to ascertain the strength and movement of the brand (YouGov, 2010). Furthermore, a “Buzz”

<sup>2</sup> For any individual brand, the daily sample size for the “BrandIndex score” is 750 because it examines the responses of 125 people each across 6 different measures.

score is obtained by measuring current brand sentiment and brand awareness. It reflects the respondents' answer when they are asked if they have heard anything positive or negative about the brand in the media or through word of mouth. The daily sample size for the "Buzz" score is 125 for each brand. Both "BrandIndex" and "Buzz" scores can range between +100 and –100. Typical top ranked brands each year can score up to +50 for these measures whilst –50 could be indicative of the worst performing brands.

The crises faced by British Airways over two years enable a detailed analysis of the airline's crisis management and communications strategies to be conducted. The effectiveness of this crisis management on the airline's brand was evaluated by using the brand metrics "BrandIndex" and "Buzz" thus allowing analysis of how consumers' perceptions of the brand changed during the crises.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Crisis 1: Heathrow crash

The first case study covers the crash of a British Airways Boeing 777 on 17th January 2008 at Heathrow Airport. On board were 152 people, all of whom survived. The crash was one of product failure and a violent unintentional act. It called into question the airline's safety, and its operations at one of the world's busiest airports and its home base. British Airways benefited from having a low crisis history, having maintained an excellent safety record since its formation in 1974. As a result, its perceived responsibility was diminished but remained high.

#### 4.1.1. Initial crisis response

Operationally, activation of the emergency procedures at British Airways was extremely successful. British Airways cabin crew on board the aircraft ensured that everyone was off the plane within 90 s. The crash happened at 12:42 (Webster, 2008a) with the news breaking on BBC News 24 at 13:06. The first pictures of the wreckage were shown at 13:14. British Airways crisis management team was only convened 2 min before the story broke (Court, 2010). They immediately released a holding statement to the media. This referred to specific flight details and was timely, accurate and consistent. It incorporated instructing information and it is likely that this statement was pre-drafted. A later statement was attributed to Willie Walsh, CEO of British Airways who became the face of the organisation in the immediate aftermath of the crisis. Walsh praised his crew and the emergency teams. Both statements were made available on the company website.

British Airways attempted to reduce offensiveness by employing a minimisation strategy and framing the incident in a positive light. They also used bolstering to promote the training that had gone into averting the accident. During the crisis, British Airways operated from a "press log which was constantly being updated with new information" (Allport, 2010).

British Airways exposure in all media coverage was significant. However the coverage was largely positive and focused on the ability of the crew to avert disaster (Webster, 2008a, b).

#### 4.1.2. Post-crisis response

The following day, British Airways held a meticulously planned press conference at their headquarters just outside Heathrow. The Captain of the crashed aircraft became the face of the company and was praised for his performance (Communicate, 2009).

#### 4.1.3. Brand analysis

Fig. 1 illustrates the effect of the crisis on the British Airways brand. On 18th January 2008 (the day after the crash), the "BrandIndex" score increased by 21%. No research was carried out on the 19th and

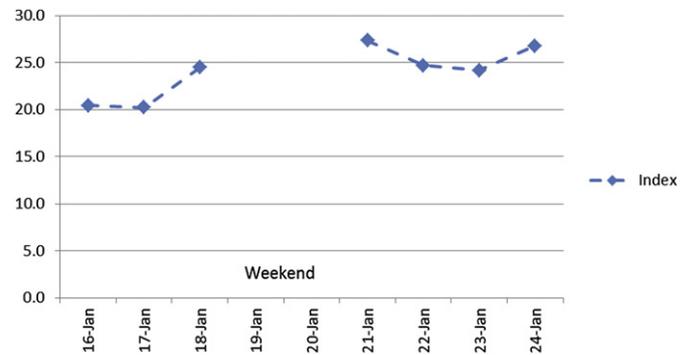


Fig. 1. British Airways score for "BrandIndex" (16th January–24th January 2008). Source: YouGov (2010).

20th January because it was the weekend. However, the impact of the action taken over the weekend by British Airways was revealed in the figure for Monday 21st January. The measure rose again with the score being reasonably maintained throughout the rest of the week.

British Airways' "Buzz" score<sup>3</sup> is shown in Fig. 2. It fell on the 18th January with the majority of respondents identifying recent negative stories about the company, almost certainly the crash at Heathrow. However, it is noticeable that following the weekend's media coverage of its heroic crew, positive responses just outweighed negative responses. The subsequent fluctuations in the "Buzz" score are likely to be a result of the media coverage shifting to the investigation.

### 4.2. Crisis 2: Heathrow Terminal 5 opening

The second case study is focussed on the opening of Heathrow Terminal 5 on 27th March 2008. On the first day of operation, "technical glitches" turned the opening into "an occasion of national embarrassment" (Transport Committee, 2008). The crisis was primarily one of product failure but also a crisis in public perception. The fact that Terminal 5 was to be British Airways' main base means that the airline is also implicated by association. Furthermore, British Airways had a negative prior reputation at the time of losing luggage (Miles and Rumbelow, 2008; Robertson, 2008).

#### 4.2.1. Initial crisis response

British Airways' response to the crisis at Terminal 5 on 27th March 2008 was slow and ineffective. Reports claimed that senior management were aware of problems from the first flight but external communication from the airline did not begin until 12:30pm (Webster, 2008d). British Airways' head of corporate communications Julia Simpson, has explained how "journalists wanted to know what had happened to the baggage system. The blunt truth was at that stage we did not know" (Brown, 2008).

One of the characteristics of this crisis was a definitive lack of leadership. The CEO, Willie Walsh was invisible throughout the day as the chaos unfolded. The Times (2008) described how he "was present and effusive for the first touchdown...but conspicuously absent when chaos set in." Malvern (2008) reported that the CEO's voluble promise of the convenience and comfort of the terminal when it opened was followed by an "awkward silence" as it disintegrated into chaos. Internally, there also appeared to be a lack of leadership. Baggage handlers complained about being led by hand-held computers rather than "having people on the ground we could actually speak to" (Swinford et al., 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Average "Buzz" is given by  $100 \times \{(\text{number of positive responses}) - (\text{number of negative responses})\} / (\text{total number of positive, negative and neutral responses})$ .

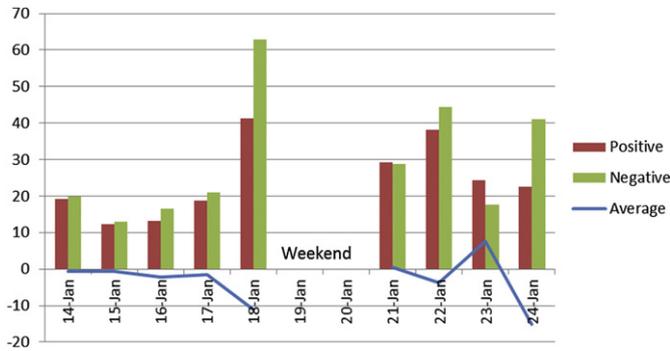


Fig. 2. British Airways "buzz" response. Source: YouGov (2010).

Throughout the crisis, social media was not used. The company website was not updated (Corkindale, 2008). However, two statements were released. The first attempted to reduce the offensiveness of the incident by framing it in a more positive light, citing only minor problems. However this strategy failed as problems got worse. The final statement expressed both sympathy and instructing information. Mortification was primarily employed though there was no description of any corrective action. Unofficial comments that were widely reported in the media attempted to shift the blame onto BAA and therefore evade responsibility (Webster, 2008d).

With the CEO absent, the Director of Operations Gareth Kirkwood read from a prepared statement and refused to take questions. As a result, the company appeared guarded and elusive (Millward, 2008). Furthermore, the absence of the CEO may have been interpreted as a lack of respect to the crisis situation.

#### 4.2.2. Post-crisis response

The following day, as operations continued to suffer, the CEO took over full communicating duties. Rather than read from a prepared statement, he answered journalist's questions directly (BBC, 2008). A statement also appeared on the company's website that alluded to the apparent disagreement with BAA claiming "both British Airways and BAA made mistakes" (BA, 2008). The statements released during the post-crisis phase were much more effective at restoring the company's image. Mortification was once again the major strategy being employed, though this time it was used in conjunction with corrective action. British Airways did not attempt to reduce offensiveness or evade responsibility and critically, the CEO refused to attack BAA.

#### 4.2.3. Brand analysis

British Airways' brand declined substantially following the opening of Terminal 5. Fig. 3 identifies the "Buzz" score for British Airways along with its chief long-haul competitor, Virgin Atlantic and main low-cost competitor Easyjet.

On the 28th March, British Airways' buzz score declined to -52.0. The Index, Buzz and Corporate scores measured during this period were the worst for British Airways since YouGov started tracking the company in 2005. On the 10th April, it had the lowest Buzz score of all brands on the "BrandIndex" (YouGov, 2010).

### 4.3. Crisis 3: British Airways cabin crew dispute

The third case study details the cabin crew dispute that began in October 2009 and continued into 2011.<sup>4</sup> The cabin crew strikes

<sup>4</sup> The dispute effectively ended in May 2011 when the cabin crew union recommended acceptance of a revised management offer.

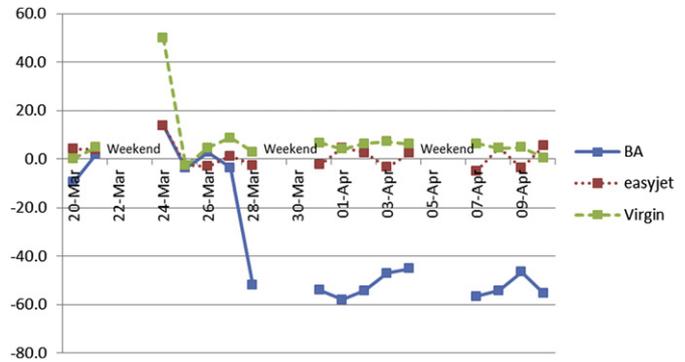


Fig. 3. Competitors' "buzz" scores: 20th March 2008–10th April 2008. Source: YouGov (2010).

were the result of internal disagreements within British Airways. As a result, the company was heavily implicated in any problems that arose from it. Moreover, British Airways had a negative crisis history of worker's disputes with a cabin crew strike only averted at the last minute in 2007. Perceived responsibility and internal attribution were high. The crisis was one of industrial relations and is considered nonviolent and intentional.

#### 4.3.1. Initial crisis response

The dates of the strike action were known to management and contingency plans were in place to deal with the disturbance to operations. Furthermore, the original strike around Christmas 2009 was cancelled but would have allowed the team to review contingency plans.

A number of different communications channels were used during the dispute with social media playing a particularly significant role across a number of platforms. Youtube and the company website were used extensively to communicate with passengers. By driving traffic to their own website, British Airways continued to control the passengers' information feed. The website also contained a search box that allowed customers to type in their flight number and see if their flight had been affected (Cowen, 2010). Special phone lines were set up to assist passengers with cancelled flights and emails and text messages were being used to alert passengers of cancellations (Pank, 2010). British Airways also utilised paid media during the dispute. Many major UK newspapers carried full-page adverts extolling the virtues of British Airways operational successes during the strike action. Strategies of bolstering and evading responsibility were used.

The CEO had been particularly noticeable during the period leading British Airways' negotiations. During the first set of strikes all Youtube videos were presented by him, generally at the Operations Control Centre at British Airways' Head Office (PR Week, 2010).

The videos released during the actual strike period were presented by the Director of Operations, the Head of Brand, a British Airways pilot and volunteer cabin crew. The use of several company members reinforced the idea that the whole company was supporting the effort. The media regularly highlighted the significant amount that British Airways' cabin crew earn and the perilous financial position of the airline (Robertson, 2009; Pank, 2009; The Times, 2009). Prevalent themes also included the effect on British Airways operations, often being drawn straight from British Airways press statements and the ongoing discussions between senior management at the airline and union officials.

#### 4.3.2. Brand analysis

Despite public support and excellent crisis communications, the airline's brand suffered. It is clear that the consumer was becoming

“increasingly embittered, sceptical and less brand loyal” (Rogers, 2010).

Fig. 4 illustrates the movement of the “BrandIndex” throughout the first wave of strikes. The large decline of 50% between the 22nd February and the 23rd February is as a result of Unite announcing the results of the ballot and the forthcoming strike action. The strike dates were then announced on 12th March, affecting traveller’s Easter holiday plans. During the first strike (20–22 March) the Index fell from 2.4 to –3.4. Interestingly, during the second strike (27–30 March) the Index increased from –5.3 on the 26th March to 0.0 on the 30th March. Both strikes were centred on the weekend making a complete analysis of the disruption impossible.

PR Week’s own reputation survey found consumers “losing patience with [British Airways’] travails and shifting favour to rival brands” (Rogers, 2010). Virgin Atlantic claimed that 50,000 British Airways passengers had migrated to them during the dispute with call centre volumes rising by 48%. The “BrandIndex” performance of both is shown in Fig. 5 as the dispute continued into May and June 2010.

#### 4.4. Crisis 4 – Icelandic volcano eruption

The final case study examines the closure of European airspace for six days in April 2010 after a large ash cloud surfaced following the eruption of Eyjafjallajokull volcano in Iceland. The unprecedented nature of the volcanic eruption affecting UK and European airspace meant that British Airways’ perceived responsibility was negligible. The crisis was a violent act of nature that resulted in an adverse international event and excessive regulation. It was an operational crisis that affected many different stakeholders.

##### 4.4.1. Initial crisis response

The closure of UK and European airspace was unprecedented. British Airways was slower than its European counterparts at conducting test-flights in order to add empirical evidence to its claims that airspace should be reopened. Lufthansa and Air France had already begun extremely limited operations by the time British Airways had received the results of its test flight (Pank and Charter, 2010). CEO Willie Walsh was on board the British Airways test flight that reported no effect from the ash. By boarding the test flight, he appeared in control of the situation and leading the industry’s campaign to reopen skies.

British Airways released one press statement during the crisis. The statement outlined the airline’s belief that the EU and national governments should compensate the airline for the airspace closure. Throughout this crisis, British Airways focused primarily on providing instructing information and evading responsibility by attacking the regulators and national governments.

One of the striking characteristics of this crisis was British Airways’ use of social media to converse with consumers. The airline’s twitter feed directed passengers to the company website for the

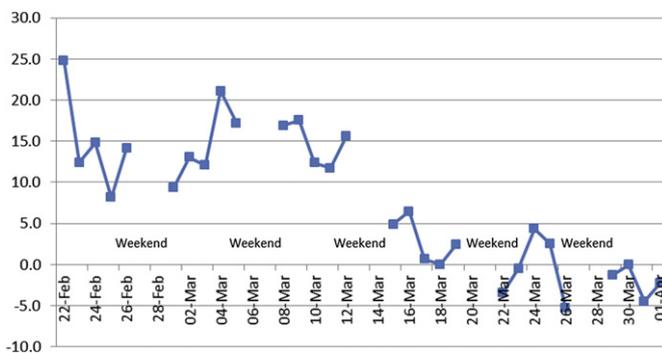


Fig. 4. “BrandIndex” score for British Airways during first set of strikes.

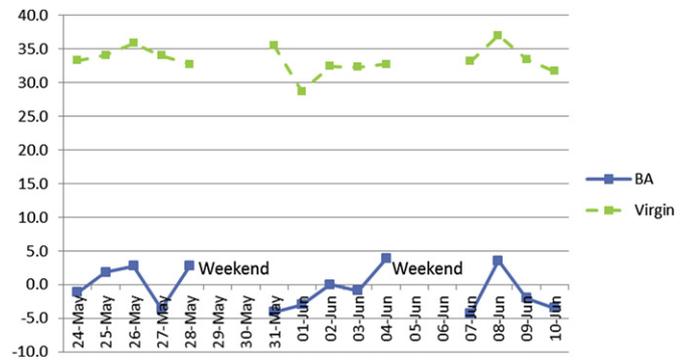


Fig. 5. “BrandIndex” score for British Airways and Virgin (24th May–10th June 2010). Source: YouGov (2010).

latest information but also allowed the airline to respond directly to more specific customer queries and will have taken some pressure off over-stretched call-centres.

British Airways’ website hosted a special “frequently asked questions” section for those passengers stranded by the volcano. This allowed them to find out whether their flight was operating, how they could rebook and other useful information.

##### 4.4.2. Post-crisis response

A statement from the CEO referring to the re-opening of British airspace was released on 20th April reiterating the company’s commitment to safety and outlining the airline’s operational plan (BA, 2010). Youtube was incorporated into the communications mix with a video released of him in front of a busy looking operations room. On the video, he addressed many of the criticisms being made towards British Airways and, aware of the volatile internal climate in which he was speaking, praised his staff. During the post-crisis phase, British Airways introduced a strategy of bolstering arguing that they had successfully encouraged the authorities to reopen airspace.

Once the skies had reopened, the CEO remained the spokesperson for British Airways. Communication during this period involved him putting pressure on governments and authorities for compensation. As chief executive, his was the only voice that carried enough strength to request it. British Airways was championed as the airline that brought an end to the crisis with flights setting off before the ban had been lifted (Turner, 2010; Waller, 2010). It was claimed that this forced the airspace to be reopened, though this was denied by the CAA (Hutton, 2010).

##### 4.4.3. Brand analysis

This crisis not only affected British Airways but every airline that flew into Europe or had code-share passengers on such routes. As

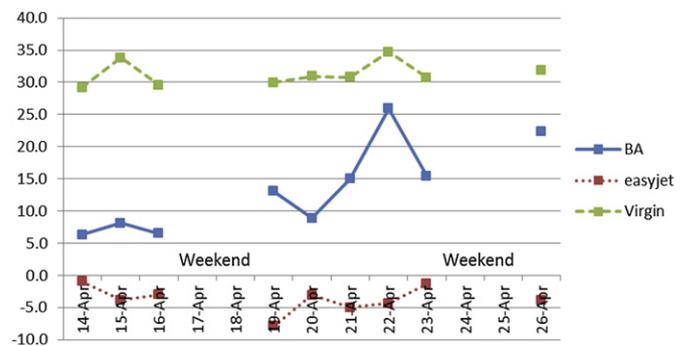


Fig. 6. “BrandIndex” scores for British Airways, Easyjet and Virgin Atlantic (14th–26th April 2010). Source: YouGov (2010).

a result, any negative coverage of British Airways was often countered with even greater negative coverage of rivals. Fig. 6 shows the effect on British Airways', Easyjet's and Virgin Atlantic's brands. British Airways was the only one to significantly rise during the period. It is important to note however, that the British Airways brand was artificially low because of the cabin crew action just weeks before. Therefore the brand was still recovering. However, the clear rise in its "BrandIndex" score suggests that the crisis management British Airways adopted during this crisis helped it win back disgruntled passengers and enhance the brand.

## 5. Conclusions

Prior research has identified that those crises which affect the brand's core values had the greatest potential to cause a decline in brand equity. The Heathrow crash crisis saw British Airways' brand values of safety, experience and its facilities at Heathrow attacked. Heathrow Airport was perceived to play a major role in British Airways' brand due to the significance of the airline's operations at the airport. This crisis had the biggest potential to produce negative brand equity of all the crises studied. However, British Airways' handled the crisis admirably, communicating effectively, efficiently and accurately. The care shown to the victims of the crisis, not just during the crisis response, but also during the post-crisis phase was particularly effective.

Conversely, the crisis at Terminal 5 was handled less successfully. There was little evidence of communication, both internally and externally. The organisation appeared divisive and without effective leadership. Again, the crisis had attacked some of British Airways' core brand values; in particular experience and quality of service. The fact that the crisis occurred at Heathrow only helped to increase perceived responsibility for the crisis.

It seems clear that the major difference between these two events was the amount of contingency planning that had occurred during the pre-crisis phase. Communication after the crash was swift, despite the speed with which media outlets were able to report the incident. British Airways was able to set the news agenda by communicating with the media promptly. This was only possible because the likelihood of a crash will have ensured a high amount of crisis provision. However, the airline did not seem to contemplate the possibility of a crisis occurring at the opening of Terminal 5. When operations went wrong, there seemed not to be a crisis contingency plan in place to put into action. Combined with a lack of leadership, communication broke down and the airline's brand suffered accordingly.

These two case studies show the importance of planning during the pre-crisis phase, even though not every crisis can or even should be prepared for. Sometimes, the monetary cost of creating contingency plans can outweigh those of the crisis occurring. However, if the crisis has the potential to attack the core brand values, even if considered unlikely, contingency plans should be created.

The eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano created an operational crisis that had the potential to cause a great reputational crisis. British Airways' crisis management response had to reflect the core values of quality of service and experience that their brand is built on. The airline achieved this and successfully averted the operational crisis from turning into a reputational one. Fundamental to this crisis was the appearance of many stakeholders. All airlines in Europe and many others from around the world were caught up in the crisis. This illustrates the benefit of having other stakeholders implicated in the crisis. The highlight of the crisis response during the volcano was the split between communications to stranded passengers and the more general communication expressing a desire for compensation from the EU. Statements

released to the media tended to focus on the financial implications and the request for compensation. The website and Twitter feed were used for passenger communication. This was a perfect example of using the right communications channels to get to the right stakeholders.

The industrial dispute that forced several disruptions to operations in 2010 was also managed effectively. British Airways' brand declined during the period but the decline could have been far worse, had communication not been delivered as effectively as it was. All available communication channels were being used and this included both "traditional" and "new" media. There was some dilution of messages through the various channels and this could have been more effectively managed.

Ultimately, there will be crises that no amount of preparation and management can withstand. However, the brand can be protected by following the measures discussed throughout this study. The extent to which brand equity is degraded during the crisis will affect the recovery after the crisis. Therefore brand protection is vital and this can only be successful with effective crisis management. Sometimes a crisis is unexpected, but airlines must learn to expect the unexpected.

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