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Johnson & Johnson: Social media and an organization's response to scandal

SHARNAKAE JOHNSON

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Reviewed and approved* by the following:

Jennifer L. Eury

Assistant Clinical Professor of Management and Organization

THESIS SUPERVISOR

Forrest Briscoe

Professor of Management and Sociology

HONORS ADVISOR

*Electronic approvals are on file

ABSTRACT

This research aims to explore the role social media played in Johnson and Johnson's (J&J) response to the talcum powder scandal. To understand the role social media played in J&J's response, the Tylenol case in 1982, which occurred before the rise of social media was analyzed. The research conducted on the Tylenol case highlights the crucial details of what went wrong with the product, how the company responded, the media attention the case received, and how the consumers responded to the news. The same criteria was used when analyzing the talcum powder case with the new addition of social media as a media component. A collection of tweets from Twitter (social media platform) was used to illustrate how consumers responded to the scandal. The study showed that the influence of social media was only limited to J&J's decision to stop the sale of their talc-based baby powder product.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Scandals

Scandals have been a constant theme in the business world since firms existed. Some of the infamous scandals include the Enron case in 2001, the Volkswagen emissions scandal in 2015, and the creation of fake accounts by Wells Fargo that broke in 2015. A corporate scandal can be defined as “an unexpected, publicly known, and harmful event that has high levels of initial uncertainty, interferes with the normal operations of an organization, and generates widespread, intuitive, and negative perceptions externally” (Bundy & Pfarrer 350). Whenever a corporation experiences a scandal, they release a statement known as an ‘account.’ Accounts aim to mitigate the risks and detrimental effect the scandal may have on the company’s public perception as well as its business performance (Scott & Lyman). An account is crucial to any company’s crisis management tactics, as it is the first statement that will be shared with all of the stakeholders (Scott & Lyman). A stakeholder is an individual or entity that has an interest in a company with the ability to affect or be affected by the organization (Freeman).

Accounts have changed and developed over time to appease stakeholders, as well as the company’s image. The form in which accounts have been presented has also changed. In the past, accounts came from the CEO in a televised press conference or a written statement to newspaper outlets or television news coverage. However, during the last decade, accounts have been made on behalf of the company utilizing their own social media accounts across different social media platforms. The purpose of this study is to analyze whether a company’s account is influenced by social media.

In order to definitively answer this question, the study will focus on one company, J&J, to illustrate how social media has affected the way their account to recent scandals is drastically

different from that of previous years. In order to highlight the difference in the company's accounts, the Tylenol case and the talcum powder case will be analyzed to understand the role social media played in their shift in crisis management. A possible reason for this shift could be that most corporations are currently focused on stakeholder management which allows the companies to consider all communities affected by their company and its decision making (Freeman). Additionally, it can be argued that J&J has learned from their past with the Tylenol scandal and has changed their crisis management methods. However, a new variable that is present in the talcum powder case is the usage of social media by businesses. This elicits the research question that I aim to answer: *how has social media affected businesses?*

What is Social Media?

Social media is “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan and Haenlein 61) The first social media website, Six Degrees, was founded in 1996 by Andrew Weinreich. This platform allowed users to make a profile and connect with others across the platform. Since then, blogs became a popular social media platform in the early 2000s, then in the mid- to late- 2000s, MySpace, Clickr, and most notably Facebook was founded (Lomborg). The success of these platforms, especially Facebook, gave rise to two of the most used platforms, Twitter and Instagram, in the late 2010s. Social media has since evolved from being simply an online networking site. Social media now incorporates business strategy with the launch of business accounts on Instagram in 2016 and the introduction of advertisements across all platforms in 2013.

The Influence of Social Media in Business

Social media has had a significant impact on how the business world operates.

Consumers are able to buy products, view ads, and engage with the company itself through their business pages. The introduction of the Internet resulted in the phenomena of e-commerce and now with the creation of social media, there is a significant rise in social commerce (s-commerce), which is defined as the trend of e-commerce sites publishing user-generated ad content to aid with selling a particular product (Beisel). With millions of users globally practicing s-commerce, companies have created strategies to market their products on social media and simultaneously create an influential social media presence (Ashley & Tuten). These strategies are not only limited to marketing but can include crisis management, as well. A study conducted by Akman and Mishra concluded that “a user’s intention to partake in s-commerce is significantly and positively related to perceived trust, enjoyment/easiness, social pressure, satisfaction, and awareness” (Akman & Mishra 5). By proving that all of these components are significantly important in consumer behavior, it is only logical that companies will alter their strategies to improve firm performance. Most companies, including J&J, have a social media presence to market their products and keep consumers updated on their products, as well as their company.

J&J’s Social Media Presence

J&J joined Twitter in 2009, then Facebook and Instagram shortly after. On their social media profiles, J&J directly communicates with consumers about their products through posts, comments, and replies. These interactions can include directly answering consumer questions about a particular product, as well as sharing company milestones and achievements.

Conversely, social media can be used for consumers to share their distaste for a product. To

discern whether social media has influenced the way in which corporations respond to scandal, the Tylenol case and the talcum powder case were strategically chosen. These are among some of the biggest corporate scandals that occurred during two different periods of history involving the same company. The Tylenol scandal occurred in the early 1980s, when print media and broadcast news coverage were the sole sources for current news (Shearer). Conversely, the talcum powder case became prevalent in an era where the majority of the population obtains their news coverage from social media headlines with print media and broadcast news coverage becoming less predominant (Shearer). By observing the issues with each product, J&J's account in each case, the media attention the cases received, and how the consumers responded to the news, a content analysis was conducted to determine whether social media influenced J&J's response to the talcum powder scandal.

This paper will begin by exploring the existing literature about the influence of social media on the business world, specifically in marketing, customer experience, and overall firm performance. The Tylenol case as well as the talcum powder case will be explained and analyzed. Lastly, the ways in which a company, including J&J, responds after they experience a corporate scandal will be analyzed.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Companies Response to Corporate Scandals

Foss and Frombun (2004) found that after a company experiences a corporate scandal, they go through three steps. These steps include the infusion of ethical principles and values into corporate cultures, the appointment of a 'Chief Ethics Officer', and the adoption of stricter ethical guidelines and codes of conduct. Their study has proven that most corporations follow this three-step guideline after going through a scandal to rebuild their image and their trust with the public. Another study conducted by Benson and Gottschalk (2020) discussed a company's use of 'accounts' and crisis response strategies to mitigate the repercussions that occur with a scandal of great magnitude. Although corporations are not actors, they utilize the account strategy because they have immense social and economic power over their stakeholders that experience the detrimental effects of the company's mistakes (Cohen).

A company's initial response to a scandal is extremely important because it will forever shape the way in which stakeholders view the company, as it is associated with the scandal (Bundy & Pfaffer). These initial statements can come in the form of denial, justifications, excuses, or admissions (Benson & Gottschalk). However, Benson and Gottschalk proved that a company's initial account is either a denial of wrongdoing, an acknowledgement but obfuscates the nature of the wrongdoing, or an acknowledgement but denial of responsibility for some kind of wrongdoing. These two articles provided readers with what companies experience after a scandal has occurred. However, the purpose of this paper is to analyze how have these responses to scandal changed overtime, specifically with the rise of social media as a business tool.

Social Media in Business

The existing literature surrounding social media on the business world focuses on the influence of social media in business marketing and why consumers use social media. Research has revealed that 88 percent of marketers spend more than \$60 billion on social media advertising (Gil-Or; Smith). Engaging with consumers on social media is hypothesized to demonstrate supernormal returns for marketers in the future (Okazaki et al). Some features that exist within social media platforms such as “refer a friend” have proven to have a significant impact on new customer acquisition and increased sales (Trusov et al.). The common ways that people use social media are (1) communicating with family and friends, (2) communicating with strangers who have shared interests with the user, and (3) utilizing and contributing to content such as product reviews, news, or gossip (Appel et al.). Social media, across all platforms, has an omni social presence (Appel et al.). The platforms can influence consumer decisions from what to eat, where to travel, and what clothes to buy (Appel et al.) The continued persuasiveness of social media has resulted in consumers residing in an omni social world (Appel et al.). The previous studies that have been conducted on social media have illustrated the influence social media has on consumers and its advantages as a marketing tool. It does not address its influence on a corporation’s crisis management strategy.

Social Media and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

The omni presence of social media has also given rise to consumer’s corporate social responsibility (CSR) activism. CSR reflects the voluntary unification of social concerns and practices into the everyday operations of a company (Oberseder et al.). In the past decade, companies have used social media platforms to highlight their CSR efforts to consumers (Handelman). Consumers are engaged in CSR activism when their actions aim to impact any

CSR-related company activities (Boyd et al.). These actions can range from acknowledging a company's CSR efforts through a 'liked' post or commenting on how a company has failed to meet specific CSR goals (Corning & Myers). Research has proven that social media can also cause a technological paradox which occurs when a consumer's use of technology results in unforeseen and contradicting experiences (Mick & Fournier). This paradox is exemplified in the controversy surrounding Dan Cathy, president of Chick-fil-A, discussing his opposition for gay marriage. Some users responded by organizing boycotts on social media while others showed their support for his opinion through social media comments (Boyd et al.). Researchers have discovered that to prevent being socially judged on social media, individual users may engage in avoidance by removing posts or comments that portray them in a negative light (Boyd et al.).

Prior research surrounding social media and CSR provides a foundation in understanding how individual users will use social media to comment on a company's CSR efforts. While that is of great importance, these studies have failed to highlight how firms respond when social media users show outrage to a company and their products. Additionally, these studies discuss CSR in a broad context. In the context of these studies CSR encompasses a firm's triple bottom line, people, planet and profit. This paper aims to narrow the context of CSR by only focusing on a scandal that has been sensationalized on social media, rather than a firm's entire CSR report.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Tylenol Case

The first case under review is the J&J Tylenol case in 1982. The Tylenol scandal was J&J's first time dealing with a widely publicized scandal. In September 1982 in Chicago, three people died over a three-day period after ingesting Tylenol. A month later in October, seven more people died after taking Tylenol, resulting in skepticism from investigators, as well as J&J. After this news spread, more deaths occurred which created a media frenzy surrounding J&J's Tylenol product as being lethal. There were approximately 125,000 print media news stories surrounding the topic when the scandal first broke. (Mitchell). It was later discovered that the pills those victims had ingested contained cyanide. Investigators discovered that someone had removed the pills from the shelves and contaminated some pill bottles with cyanide. After the evidence was released, J&J immediately recalled all bottles of Tylenol across America. In the month of December, J&J put Tylenol back on the shelves with a new triple sealed safety feature.

Talcum Powder

The second case under review is the talcum powder scandal. In 2013-2018, many women in the state of Missouri sued J&J, alleging that their talc-based products caused ovarian or breast cancer. J&J marketed their talc-based products as being gentle and natural to their consumers (Zhang). It was reported that women used the talc-based products on their genitals and sanitary napkins as a form of hygiene to reduce unwanted odors (Prefontaine). The court documents stated, "These claims list counts including strict liability for failure to warn and design defect, negligence, breach of express and implied warranty, negligent misrepresentation, deceit by concealment and fraud" (Prefontaine 2). The investigation included company memos and emails that proved that J&J knew that their products were consistently testing positive for asbestos, and

they were unsure how to address the news to the public. The article states, “from at least 1971 to the early 2000s, the company’s raw talc and finished powders sometimes tested positive for small amounts of asbestos, and that company executives, scientists, doctors, and lawyers fretted over the problem and how to address it while failing to disclose it to regulators or the public” (Dyer). A Missouri Judge found J&J liable and required the company to pay the victims \$4 billion in damages.

Data Analysis

To analyze the Tylenol case, I collected a total of 20 newspaper headlines from sources including *The New York Times*, and local newspapers in Chicago. The articles were from the year 1982-1984 and they demonstrate how the media portrayed the scandal to the public. The headlines from these newspapers were used as they were most comparable with the collection of tweets on Twitter (and headlines from news broadcast channels) that I later used to analyze the talcum powder scandal. The headlines represent how the media portrayed and sensationalized the Tylenol case to all J&J’s stakeholders. From those headlines, I have compiled different themes that are consistent within all the articles that will help me further decipher the stakeholders’ response towards the Tylenol scandal. Next, I compiled J&J’s stock performance history from the years 1980-1985. Although the scandal occurred in 1982, I wanted to include the firm’s financial performance prior to the scandal to determine the effect the scandal had on J&J’s stock prices. The stock prices for the years 1983-1985 illustrate the company’s financial performance before, during, and after the scandal. J&J’s initial account in the wake of the Tylenol murders were assessed through a collection of quotes and interviews held by former J&J CEO, Jim Burke.

I analyzed the talcum powder case by collecting a total of 12 headlines from television news broadcast channels MSNBC, ABC, CNN, and Fox News. This will illustrate how the media presented the scandal to J&J's stakeholders. The criteria for choosing the television news coverage channels were decided based on their rankings. According to the latest data collected by Forbes for the year ending 2022, these television news broadcast channels hold the top four spots for most watched news channels during primetime (Forbes). These networks give the most accurate representation of the information that stakeholders were provided about the talcum powder scandal. Data was not collected from newspapers because the sale of newspapers has significantly declined over the past two decades (Shearer). A study conducted by the Pew Research Center found that more than eight in ten Americans receive their news from digital devices (Shearer, 2021). Furthermore, approximately 53 percent of adults have reported that they get their news information from social media platforms (Shearer). Subsequently, the stakeholders' responses to the scandal were assessed by collecting tweets that referenced the talcum powder case. A collection of 30 tweets were collected that contained the keywords, 'Johnson & Johnson', 'talcum powder', and 'cancer.' The tweets were selected from the trending Twitter thread '#JNJ' in 2020 when the talcum powder scandal first went viral on social media. The company's response to the scandal was shown through statements given by J&J to news outlets. Then, I utilized J&J stock prices from 2018-2021 to assess the firm's financial performance before, during, and after the scandal.

After I conducted a thorough analysis on both the Tylenol case and the talcum powder case, I compared the cases against each other. The comparison determined whether J&J's approach in managing the talcum powder scandal changed in part due to the introduction of social media platforms.

Chapter 4: The Findings

The Outcome of the Tylenol Case

The findings from analyzing the newspaper headlines are represented in Table 1. The first-order codes in Table 1 were determined by key words and common phrases used in the headlines when discussing the Tylenol case. I divided the first-order codes into six different themes that were present in the data. The first-order codes determined the second-order themes found in Table 1. The second-order themes found in this case were negative media coverage, organizational response, consumers negative response, consumers positive response, shareholders negative response, and shareholders positive response.

Table 1. Data Structure for the Tylenol Case*Table 1. Data Structure for the Tylenol Case*

| First Order Codes | Second-Order Themes |
|---|--------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tylenol Kills • Tylenol is dangerous • Tylenol Murders | Negative Media Coverage |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recalling all Tylenol products in the United States • Admitting fault • Creating a triple seal cap for Tylenol and other products | Organizational Response |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear about Tylenol products • Fear about all of the company's product • Responses of uncertainty about the future of the organization | Consumers Negative Response |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence in the company • Confidence in the triple seal cap for Tylenol • Appreciation of honesty and transparency | Consumers Positive Response |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stock prices decreasing • Lack of confidence in the company • Lack of confidence in the CEO | Shareholders Negative Response |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stock prices increasing • Regained trust in the company's ability to rebound • Regained trust in the CEO's crisis management tactics | Shareholders Positive Response |

Negative Media Coverage

In this study, negative media coverage was identified by the headlines in the newspaper articles which incited fear within consumers. Some of the headlines read ‘Avoid Tylenol’ (*Arlington Heights*), and ‘Tylenol Murders’ (*The New York Times*). These headlines incited fear within its readers and affected J&J negatively. This is exemplified by the stock prices of J&J in 1982. The media warned consumers to stop taking Tylenol because it was viewed as a dangerous product. The fear intensified when the media began focusing on the police investigation. Newspaper outlets provided details such as the replacing of Tylenol with cyanide capsules and the investigation into J&J manufacturing warehouses. Although J&J cooperated with the police and the FDA, investigations were being conducted to assess where the contamination took place. During the years of 1982 and 1983, there was negative media coverage surrounding J&J and the Tylenol murders.

Organizational Response

The headlines also focused on how J&J was responding to the murders. There were reports that J&J had isolated the contaminated capsules to the Chicago area. Nevertheless, the media headlines stated that the company recalled all of their extra strength Tylenol product across all 50 states, not just Chicago. One *Arlington Heights* headline stated, “Johnson & Johnson Recalled All Extra Strength Tylenol” (*Arlington Heights*). *The Chicago Tribune* reported, “Johnson and Johnson and the FDA are Working Together” which made it known to the consumers that J&J was working with the appropriate authorities to resolve the issue. The media circus also occurred during a press conference held by J&J’s CEO Jim Burke. The media outlets reported on the press conference in their articles by illustrating pictures of J&J’s new triple sealing component to the new and improved Tylenol product. *The New York Times*

reported, “Johnson and Johnson Introduces a New Triple Seal Safety Feature for Tylenol” (*The New York Times*). An interview held by Jim Burke told the media that they will not increase the prices for Tylenol despite the new safety features (Burke). Jim Burke and the J&J crisis management team were working with the media to be transparent with all their stakeholders about the scandal and what their plans were moving forward.

Consumers Positive Response

The headlines in early 1983 introduced a shift in the consumers response towards the scandal. Once the fear subsided, there were themes of confidence in J&J and its products. After the press conference in November 1982 introducing the new triple-sealed safety feature for Tylenol, consumers began trusting the product and the company. *The Wall Street Journal* conducted a survey in 1983 to discern consumers’ opinions towards J&J and Tylenol after the scandal. More than 90 percent of the consumers that were questioned in the survey strongly believed that J&J was not to blame for the murders (*Wall Street Journal*). Before the murders, Tylenol was the number one pain-relieving over-the-counter medication (Mitchell). During the recall, the product was outperformed by its competitors as it was not sold for about three months. However, Tylenol regained its number-one spot in 1984 which signified those consumers trusted the product once again. *The Chicago Tribune* wrote, “Johnson and Johnson Not at Fault” in response to the survey conducted by *The Wall Street Journal*. This reinforced the notion that consumers had faith and trusted the company despite the scandal.

Consumers Negative Response

Negative headlines such as “Stop Tylenol use” in *The Southern Illinois Carbondale* in 1982 affected the consumers’ perceptions of the product. Across the United States, many consumers did not want to take Tylenol or any other over the counter medication. Even though

the FBI and FDA spokespersons gave many interviews to the media demonstrating that other medications were safe, many consumers were not taking the chance out of fear of dying. For instance, Bill Griggs, an FDA spokesperson said:

“I think we got about 5,000 calls just in the next couple of days,” he said. “And many people didn’t have anything in their medicine cabinets but Tylenol. And even if they did have something else, they were suspicious. We did try to promote the idea that tablets could be safe, but people were already frightened.” (Gutowski and St. Claire).

Even though the FDA and the FBI stated that the contamination did not occur at a J&J manufacturing plant, some consumers were skeptical and did not believe these two organizations.

Shareholders Negative Response

Like the consumers, shareholders had an adverse response to the Tylenol scandal. The loss of confidence in the company is evident by the data provided in Table 2 and Figure 1.

Table 2: J&J Stock Prices*Table 2. Stock Prices for J&J from 1980-1985*

| Year | Average Stock Price | Year Open | Year High | Year Low | Year Close | Annual % Change |
|-------------|----------------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| 1980 | 0.6129 | 0.5841 | 0.7825 | 0.5096 | 0.7806 | 29.41% |
| 1981 | 0.8121 | 0.7816 | 0.9148 | 0.6820 | 0.8941 | 14.54% |
| 1982 | 0.9965 | 0.8820 | 1.2583 | 0.7874 | 1.2243 | 36.93% |
| 1983 | 1.1393 | 1.2213 | 1.2622 | 0.9914 | 1.0326 | -15.66% |
| 1984 | 0.8803 | 1.0326 | 1.0705 | 0.7256 | 0.9445 | -8.53% |
| 1985 | 1.1823 | 0.9314 | 1.4726 | 0.9183 | 1.4153 | 49.85% |

Figure 1
J&J Stock Prices in 1982



Figure 1 J&J Stock Prices in 1982

The stock prices from the years 1980 – 1981, before the Tylenol murders proved that J&J was performing well financially. The year high in 1981 had increased from that of the previous year in 1980 with their annual percentage change decreasing. However, the data from Figure 1 highlights the decrease in J&J's stocks in October 1982, which was the exact same time the public was informed of the contaminations. The decrease in stock demonstrates the negative response shareholders had toward the scandal. The scandal resulted in J&J losing 25.7 percent of net income for the quarter and hitting their yearly low of approximately 78 cents per share. Shareholders were unsure of the future of Tylenol and J&J which resulted in plummeting stock prices in 1982.

Shareholders Positive Response

The rebound in J&J stock prices in the years 1984-1985 proved that shareholders began to have faith in the company once again. *The Wall Street Journal* wrote “Tylenol Back on Top” and “Johnson and Johnson Stock Increases” in response to the product regaining its number-one spot among its competitors. When the company revealed the triple safety feature, shareholders believed this was enough for consumers to regain their trust in J&J and their products. The consumers' decision to use Tylenol after the murders gave the shareholders the confidence to invest in the company. The consumer response to the new triple safety feature alluded to the possibility that J&J may overcome the scandal and continue as a high performing and competitive firm in the healthcare industry. The triple safety feature also reflected well on J&J's CEO Jim Burke in the eyes of the shareholders. They recognized that he was competent enough to manage the company effectively and efficiently throughout the entire ordeal.

Outcome of the Talcum Powder Case

The headlines of the television news broadcast channels, the collection of tweets and J&J's response are illustrated in Table 3. The first-order codes in Table 3 were formulated from the headlines I collected from the television news broadcast channels and the tweets. The common phrases used in the television news broadcasts and tweets when reporting on the talcum powder case determined the first codes. The first-order codes were then divided into six themes that were present in the data set. The first-order codes determined the second-order themes found in Table 3. The second-order themes found in this case were like the Tylenol case with minor differences. A new theme of consumers spreading awareness was present and there was an absence of consumers positive response.

Table 3**Data Structure for the Talcum Powder Case***Table 3. Data Structure for the Talcum Powder Case*

| First Order Codes | Second-Order Themes |
|--|--------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • J&J causes cancer • J&J frauded consumers • J&J knew for decades | Negative Media Coverage |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appealing lawsuits • Discontinue talc-based products • J&J spokesperson states that all of their talc-based products are safe | Organizational Response |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear about talc-based products • Fear about all of the company's products • Fear of the company going bankrupt | Consumers Negative Response |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing information from FDA investigations on social media • Providing updates on the lawsuits on social media • Listing the names of victims on social media | Consumers Spreading Awareness |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stock prices decreasing • Lack of confidence in the company rebounding after the scandal • Fears about the future of the company | Shareholders Negative Response |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • J&J stock will increase • Assumes the social media outrage will be short lived • Confidence in the company's ability to rebound | Shareholders Positive Response |

Negative Social Media Coverage

The headlines collected from the television news broadcast channels were all negative. ABC reported, “Johnson and Johnson Knew for Decades their Baby Powder contained Asbestos” (ABC) Another headline stated, “Johnson and Johnson’s Baby Powder could be Dangerous” (CNN). The headlines always included cancer and J&J. The company was portrayed to be insensitive as the media told stakeholders that the company knew for decades, prior to the lawsuits, that their talc-based products caused cancer (MSNBC). Throughout the duration of the lawsuits, the broadcast channels reported on the appeal J&J made to the Supreme Court when they were ordered to pay \$4.8 billion in damages to the victims (ABC). They also reported on the recall of J&J’s talc-based product in North America. These headlines gave stakeholders an overview of the talcum powder scandal and the effects the product had on the public.

Organizational Response

In the wake of the scandal, J&J released multiple statements claiming that their talc products were safe. A statement from a J&J spokesperson reads,

“We continue to stand behind the safety of Johnson’s Baby Powder, which is safe, does not contain asbestos and does not cause cancer” (Bendix & Wile 1).

After the FDA investigation that found traces of asbestos in their talc-based baby powder, J&J was required to pull about 33,000 bottles off the shelves in the United States (Lovelace Jr.). Throughout 2020, J&J proclaimed their innocence and the product’s safety. They informed stakeholders that even though the small traces of asbestos were found, they were working in collaboration with the FDA to alleviate the issues and concerns. The judgement that required J&J to pay about \$4 billion to the victims was met with a swift appeal to oppose the verdict. This appeal was eventually denied by the United States Supreme Court in favor of the victims. Although J&J alleged that their baby powder is safe, they eventually ceased production on their

talc-based baby powder products. Despite the allegations, J&J claims they will not sell the product anymore due to a decline in sales rather than the potential health risks that consumers believe it poses to the user.

Consumers Negative Response

Consumers expressed their distrust in J&J and their products on social media. The tweets that were analyzed proved that they no longer trust the company or appreciated the way in which the company treated the victims. One twitter user writes:

“Americans, I’d really like to know the answer: when are morals & decency more important than profits?” (Michael Di Giorgio)

Similar tweets were common in the data set collected and showed the hatred consumers had for the company throughout the period of the scandal. The lack of confidence for J&J extended to some of its product lines, not just talc-based baby powder. Consumers were skeptical of their lotions, baby oil, and even baby wipes. In 2020, when J&J announced that they were working on a COVID-19 vaccine, it was met with multiple negative responses from consumers. One Twitter user responded to a tweet that spoke about the J&J vaccine by saying,

“Not a Johnson and Johnson fan... talcum powder ring a bell” (Linda S)

The consumers response to the talcum powder case had negative consequences on the company’s reputation and illustrates distrust with the company.

Shareholders Negative Response

With every mention of the J&J talcum powder case on major television news broadcast channels, the J&J stock would decrease. This is exemplified through Table 4 and Figure 2.

Table 4**J&J Stock Prices from 2018- 2021***Table 4. J&J Stock History from 2018-2021*

| Year | Average Stock Price | Year Open | Year High | Year Low | Year Close | Annual % Change |
|-------------|----------------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| 2018 | 118.0943 | 122.0172 | 133.0709 | 106.0845 | 116.1580 | -5.14% |
| 2019 | 122.7420 | 114.9879 | 134.5147 | 113.1607 | 133.9911 | 15.35% |
| 2020 | 135.7085 | 134.0830 | 148.5311 | 102.7540 | 148.5311 | 10.58% |
| 2021 | 158.0755 | 147.7005 | 171.4952 | 145.3648 | 165.5355 | 11.45% |

Figure 2

J&J's Stock Prices in 2020



Figure 2 J&J Stock Prices in 2020

Figure 2

Although the first lawsuit against J&J in relation to talcum powder occurred in 2016, the media coverage surrounding the topic was first sensationalized in 2018 when Reuters reported that J&J knew for decades that their baby powder contained asbestos. In 2018, their firm's stock performance was the lowest it had ever been in the past 15 years. This was a consequence of the shareholders and consumers losing faith in the company. When J&J announced the recall in 2019, their shares fell by six percent (Monica). When any new information surrounding their talc-based powder was released, shareholders temporarily lost faith in the company. The data proves that without the sensationalism of the scandal, the company was able to rebound. In 2020, the scandal became viral on Twitter and J&J was once again in the news and the company's stock plummeted to the lowest it had been for the last five years.

Shareholders Positive Response

When the scandal was not sensationalized in the media, the data proved that the company was able to rebound. Shareholders had faith in the company's firm performance when the talcum powder was not a subject of concern to the public. In Table 4, we can see J&J experiencing a profitable firm performance in 2019 and 2021. In those years, the scandal was rarely talked about in television news broadcasts and on Twitter. Additionally, many shareholders believed that the social media outrage would blow over. Shareholders anticipated that this would not have a long-lasting effect on the firm's financial performance. Other shareholders believed that the lawsuits were frivolous and remained faithful to the company. One twitter user said,

“As someone with a large family position in J&J I wish they had fought this to the bitter end. It is a total scam, and the only way it continues is the lawyers continuing to troll for their three billion.” (jbc123)

This theme demonstrates that some shareholders react to the volatility of the stock market as well as the media while others will remain faithful despite the negative media attention and decrease in firm performance.

Consumers Spreading Awareness

With the talcum powder getting news coverage sporadically from 2016 to 2020, consumers took to Twitter to warn others about the harm that the product may cause. By utilizing the repost function on Twitter, users were able to link articles posted by major news outlets with their own personalized comments. The articles that were included in those tweets were from CNN, MSNBC, and law websites. To increase the number of people who would see these tweets, they used the Twitter thread ‘#JNJ’ which was trending in 2020. The thread was comprised of numerous tweets about the talcum powder scandal. Updates were given about the lawsuits that were occurring at the time and J&J’s response to the scandal. A health account on Twitter posted,

“Some people who utilize Johnson and Johnson products end up with health problems. For more information on Johnson and Johnson Talcum Powder lawsuit click the link”
(LiftyoLife)

Similar tweets like these are present throughout the data set and demonstrate the eagerness in consumers spreading the word about the talcum powder case.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Comparing the Outcomes

By juxtaposing Table 1 and Table 3, we can see that the findings of the cases are similar with slight but important differences. Themes of negative media coverage, organizational response, stakeholder negative response, and withdrawal were common in both cases. One difference between Table 1 and Table 3 is the absence of consumers positive responses in Table 3. When analyzing tweets to assess the consumer's response, there were no positive responses towards the company's product or the company itself on Twitter. The tweets spoke out against the company and its crisis management strategy. Consumers expressed their disinterest in buying the company's baby powder as well as other products they might provide.

In Table 1, consumers began trusting J&J after the company admitted fault and implemented changes to prevent any analogous situation from occurring. Consumers responses towards the scandal had a direct relationship with J&J's crisis management strategy. J&J's ability to be sympathetic during the Tylenol case made most consumers regain their trust in the company. On the other hand, their initial account towards the talcum powder case lacked transparency and the consumers were not able to trust the company or its product. In Table 3, the theme of organizational response was different than what was found in the Tylenol case. J&J did not admit fault with the talcum powder case, nor did they give any apologies to the victims of the lawsuit. Furthermore, J&J did not voluntarily stop the sale of talc-based baby powder. However, they did decide to cease production due to the decline in sales of the product. The decline in sales was a result of the social media outrage on Twitter, alleging that J&J's product causes cancer. Subsequently, J&J was influenced by social media and reoccurring lawsuits to change one aspect of their organizational response to the scandal.

The Shift in J&J's Crisis Management Strategy

The data shows that J&J changed their crisis management strategy compared to how they responded to the Tylenol case in 1982. The strategy in 1982 was to be as transparent as possible by working with the media. J&J's CEO Jim Burke was constantly giving statements, interviews, and updates about the murders. Scholars have alleged that J&J's ability to rebound after the scandal was a result of their efficient communication. They were able to reach millions of consumers during a time when there was no Internet or 24/7 news broadcast (Adubato). Moreover, admitting fault was a key component in regaining the consumer's trust. The public remained faithful to J&J as they were willing to put the health and safety of the public over their own company's financial gain. However, J&J changed their tactics when they were dealing with the talcum powder case even though they could've maintained a more effective communication strategy by utilizing social media. They decided to proclaim their innocence and the safety of their product.

Influence of Social Media on J&J's Crisis Management Strategy

The negative response from consumers in the talcum powder case was triggered by the use of Twitter. The theme of consumer's spreading awareness allowed users to warn others of the harm the products may cause. The social media frenzy surrounding the topic affected the sale of the product. The collection of tweets proved that consumers were no longer willing to buy the baby powder produced by J&J. Akman and Mishra concluded that "a user's intention to partake in s-commerce is significantly and positively related to perceived trust, enjoyment/easiness, social pressure, satisfaction, and awareness" (Akman and Mishra 5). My analysis shows their conclusion as the trust between the consumers and J&J was broken. Even consumers who were unaware of the details of the scandal may have experienced social pressure to not buy the

product as a result of consumer's spreading awareness of the lawsuits and their own negative feelings. In Figure 2, J&J experienced a significant drop in their stock prices during 2020. However, it is difficult to discern whether this was a result of the pandemic, the scandal, a combination of both or other miscellaneous factors. Regardless of this fact, J&J stopped selling the product due to a drop in sales, which occurred due to the social media outrage from the Twitter thread, '#JNJ'.

Unfortunately, the data was unable to definitively prove that J&J's lack of apology as well as inability to admit fault was a direct result of social media. There were too many variables involved in the talcum powder scenario to have a definitive conclusion. For instance, the lawsuits made it difficult to assess J&J's shift in crisis management. It can be concluded that J&J did not admit fault for their talc-based products being contaminated due to impending lawsuits. If they had admitted any wrongdoing, it is possible that it would have interfered with their litigation process. However, by maintaining their innocence, the company was able to have a chance to defend themselves and hopefully save the company. Another variable to consider is the change in the CEO. Although the company's values, mission, and credo¹ have stayed the same since 1982, the change in CEO does make a difference. In the interviews that J&J's CEO Jim Burke held, he stated that it was essential for the company to be transparent during the scandal in 1982 (Burke). He also attributed transparency as one of the main causes in the company's ability to rebrand Tylenol. Conversely, with the talcum powder case, there was a lack of transparency. The company only provided statements that claimed their product was safe. There were no interviews or communication between senior level management and the media except those repetitive

¹ We Believe that our first responsibility is to the doctors, nurses, hospitals, mothers, and all other who use our products. Our products must always be of the highest quality. We must constantly strive to reduce the cost of these products. Our orders must be promptly and accurately filled. Our dealers must make a fair profit. (Johnson and Johnson).

statements. This decision could have been made by the CEO or a change in the organization's crisis management team. The data could not prove that social media was the sole reason for the lack of transparency and empathy during the talcum powder scandal because the company had changed significantly from 1982-2020.

Potential Theory

Although the data cannot be attributed to social media as the sole cause of J&J's change in crisis management, it is plausible that the fear of cancel culture influenced their approach in managing the scandal. Cancel culture is defined as an expression of agency to withdraw a person's attention from someone or an organization whose values, (in)action, or speech are so offensive that no one wishes to give their time, money, or presence to that entity (Clark). The Tylenol case has been used as an example of impeccable crisis management and business ethics across multiple business schools in the United States. With praise from consumers, colleagues, and scholars, there was no need for Tylenol to change its crisis management tactics unless the environment changed. The themes found in Tables 1 and 3 were a direct result of the type of media that existed at the time. For example, if we look at the theme of organizational response, J&J's response to the Tylenol scandal can be linked to the articles that were written in different newspaper outlets. The newspapers discussed the fears the consumers had when taking Tylenol because of how easy it was to be contaminated. Consequently, J&J decided to be transparent with consumers and introduce a new triple safety feature to alleviate those fears. However, the rise of cancel culture may have impacted J&J's ability to be transparent with consumers about their talc-based products.

In the past decade, cancel culture has affected many organizations. For instance, in 2016, there was a movement to boycott and 'cancel' Wells Fargo on Twitter after their fake accounts

scandal made national headlines. In 2020, they were being ‘cancelled’ again for failing to interview black applicants. In fear of being cancelled, one could argue that J&J utilized the strategy of plausible deniability. By maintaining their innocence and willingness to fight multiple lawsuits, the company would come across as victims of a detrimental conspiracy theory. Research has concluded that admitting fault instead of hiding crucial information is the best way to overcome a corporate scandal (Foss & Frombun, 2004). However, it’s possible that J&J decided to continue to proclaim their innocence due to the fear of being ‘cancelled.’ The fear of being cancelled is illustrated through what has occurred in the business field with companies like Wells Fargo. If J&J analyzed this scenario and others like this in detail, it is plausible that they would want to prevent this from happening to their company. Although ‘cancelling’ does not have detrimental effects on a company’s financial performance in the long term, it can have short-term consequences (Clark). During the Wells Fargo boycott movement on Twitter, the company stock prices decreased by 10 percent (Egan). Moreover, Wells Fargo has had a decline in the number of applicants willing to work for the company since the scandals occurred (Egan). A short-term decline in stock prices and sales, accompanied with a bad reputation is arguably enough for J&J to change their approach to the way they deal with scandals.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The data shows that since 1982, J&J has changed their crisis management response to scandals. An analysis of the Tylenol case illustrated that the company believed that transparency and admitting any wrongdoings was the best course of action in rebuilding trust with consumers. However, J&J arguably utilized the strategy of plausible deniability in the talcum powder case and did not accept any fault for what happened to the victims. The influence of social media can be limited to J&J's organizational response of discontinuing the production of talc-based baby powder. However, social media cannot be named the sole catalyst of J&J changing their entire crisis management strategy. The existence of other variables that were present in the case such as the lawsuits and the change in CEO could have contributed to the shift in crisis management. Moreover, it can be hypothesized that their organizational response changed due to the immergence of cancel culture and its effects on other companies in the business world.

Appendix A

Additional Representative Data for Second Order Themes in the Tylenol Case

Negative Media Coverage

- “Tylenol Kills” (P)
- “Tylenol is Dangerous” (P)
- “Tylenol is Deadly” (P)

Organizational Response

- “There will be a change in the designing” (P)
- “We will not increase the price of Tylenol” (P)
- “Johnson and Johnson recalled all Tylenol” (P)

Consumers Negative Response

- “Tylenol murders represent a twisted new random act of terror” (P)
- “I will not take Tylenol” (P)
- “I am scared to take Tylenol” (P)

Consumers Positive Response

- “Johnson and Johnson not to blame” (P)
- “Johnson and Johnson did nothing wrong” (P)
- “The triple safety feature is a good addition” (P)

Shareholder Negative Response

- “Eroded sales of the nation’s killer” (P)
- “Johnson and Johnson stock decreases” (P)
- “The shareholders were not happy about me [Jim Burke] speaking to the media” (I)

Shareholder Positive response

- “Tylenol has recaptured 28 percent of the market” (P)
- “Johnson and Johnson stock increased this year” (P)
- “Tylenol is back on top” (P)

P- Print News

I-Interview

Appendix B

Additional Representative Data for Second Order Themes in the Talcum Powder Case

Negative Media Coverage

- “J&J knew for decades that asbestos lurked in its Baby Powder” (NB)
- “Internal Documents show that the company’s powder was sometimes tainted with carcinogenic asbestos” (NB)
- “Talc on trial” (NB)

Organizational Response

- “Johnson and Johnson appeals verdict to the US Supreme Court” (NB)
- “Johnson and Johnson to end sales of talcum powder” (NB)
- “Johnson and Johnson on asbestos report: Our baby powder is safe” (NB)

Consumer Negative Response

- “All I ever see on TV is lawsuits about Johnson and Johnson talcum powder leading to some cancer what makes you think I’ll ever trust a VACCINE they’ve made” (T)
- “How many women did Johnson and Johnson kill with Tylenol” (T)
- “After the lawsuits they lost my trust” (T)

Shareholders Positive Response

- “Shareholders reject proposal to stop the sale of talc-based products globally” (NB)
- “J&J stock increases” (T)
- “J&J stock will increase when this dies down” (T)

Shareholders Negative Response

- “Time to sell my J&J stock” (T)
- “J&J stock prices plummet” (NB)
- “J&J Stock Prices Decrease Amidst the News of the Supreme Court Rejecting Appeals” (NB)

Consumer Spreading Awareness

- “I found this on NewsBreak: Johnson and Johnson talcum powder cancer lawsuits expose history of human experimentation on Black prisoners” (T)
- “Johnson and Johnson talcum powder lawsuit via yahoo” (reposted) (T)
- “Read this article about Johnson and Johnson talcum powder causing cancer” (T)

NB- News Broadcast

T- Twitter

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Sharnakae Johnson

Contact Information: Sharnakaej@gmail.com (347) 847-1278

EDUCATION

The Pennsylvania State University

Schreyer Honors College

Smeal College of Business

Bachelor of Science in Management, Minor in Business Law

May 2023

Honors Student

Dean's List: 7/7 Semester

WORK EXPERIENCE

Paragon ONE & PwC Externship

PwC Extern Consultant

Remote

Dec 2022- Present

- Acted as a strategy consultant for a non-profit organization to develop solutions to alleviate problem areas within the firm
- Analyzed complex data and strategies to propose recommendations for problem areas such as talent engagement
- Attended weekly meetings and gave deliverables on my research to senior leaders to enhance my communication skills
- Developed new consulting strategies and frameworks that are applicable to any business scenarios

Torres For Congress

Campaign Staffer

Bronx, NY

Jul 2020- Aug 2020

- Assisted with event day planning for congressman Torres to enhance my project management skills
- Distributed literature in favor of Richie Torres to better market the candidate to residents of New York's 15th District
- Hired members of the community to provide temporary work for various underprivileged individuals
- Attended campaign strategy and budget meetings to decide the next course of action for the campaign

College of Liberal Arts

Peer Tutor

University Park, PA

Mar 2020-May 2021

- Created study guides for 20 college students in economics, college algebra, calculus, and statistics
- Cultivated study tips for at least 10 college students in order to enhance their performance on their exams
- Worked with faculty members to create exams and quizzes for select subjects

LEADERSHIP/ACTIVITIES

START Conference Committee

Committee Member

State College, PA

Oct 2022-Present

- The conference is a diversity conference hosted by Penn State's Smeal College of Business
- Hand selected by Penn State's Dean of Diversity to be on a committee comprised of 15 business students
- Worked closely with the EY campus recruiter to make recommendations to improve their DEI efforts
- Acted as a peer reader and voter when selecting the winners for the essay portion of the conference
- Ensured the operations and management of the conference occurred without difficulty

Management Ambassador

Recruitment Coordinator

State College, PA

Mar 2022-Present

- Created events to promote the management major for the Smeal College of Business for undecided or incoming students
- Worked closely with faculty members develop new and innovative ideas to improve the major
- Promoted the club by utilizing different social media platforms to increase engagement
- Conducted interviews on prospective ambassadors to increase admissions into the club

Penn State Lion Ambassador

Lion Ambassador

State College, PA

Aug 2020-May 2021

- Conducted tours around the campus to potential students and their families with the aim of increasing and encouraging prospective students to attend Penn State
- Provide potential students with a history of the campus and shared Penn State's core values

Missionaries of the Poor

Volunteer Worker

Kingston, Jamaica

June 2010-Present

- Traveled annually to Jamaica to aid the missionaries in providing basic needs for orphaned and disabled children
- Organized fundraisers such as toy, food, and clothes drive to benefit the underprivileged children

SKILLS/OTHER

- Proficient in Microsoft Office Suite (Word, Excel, PPT, Teams), SPSS, and Canva
- LSAT Score in Progress

Interests

- Reading books about the supernatural
- Boxing
- Ballet