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Webcare across public and private social networking sites: How stakeholders and the Netherlands Red Cross adapt their messages to channel affordances and constraints

Previous research has focused on message characteristics of public webcare conversations. However, webcare conversations are increasingly held on private social networking sites. Little is known to what extent organizations and stakeholders adapt their messages to the affordances of these channels. Employing the uses and gratifications theory, this paper reports on a content analysis of webcare conversations (n = 423) between stakeholders and the Netherlands Red Cross on public and private social networking sites. The stakeholder motives and organizational communication style were analyzed. The findings reveal private channels mainly serve the purpose of customer service: stakeholders approach the organization with questions; the organization uses message personalization to enhance the experience of one-to-one communication. Public social networking sites mainly serve the purpose of reputation management: stakeholders post remarks and compliments; the organization adapts the communication style of its messages to the affordances of the individual platform. Implications for theory and practice are discussed.

Key words: webcare, social networking sites, channel affordances, the Netherlands Red Cross, uses and gratifications theory, communication style

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Nowadays, organizations engage in conversations with stakeholders via public and private social networking sites (SNS). This phenomenon called webcare (van Noort & Willemsen, 2012) can serve multiple organizational goals, such as providing customer service by answering stakeholders' questions and managing the reputation by showing to stakeholders and observing bystanders that their messages are taken seriously (van Noort et al., 2014).

Previous research mainly investigated the usage and effects of organizations' monitoring approaches (e.g., van Noort & Willemsen, 2012), response strategies (e.g., van Os et al., 2016), and communication style (e.g., van Hooijdonk & Liebrecht, 2018) in webcare conversations on public SNS, such as Twitter and Facebook. Webcare conversations on private SNS have hardly been investigated, although they are also commonly used by organizations (van Os et al., 2018; Hachmang & Keuning, 2020). Private webcare can be characterized as one-to-one communication (Ghosh & Mandal, 2020). This makes them more suitable for customer service questions that desire a tailored, more personal response. Public webcare can be characterized as one-to-many communication, as bystanders observe the conversation between the organization and stakeholder as well (Weitzl & Hutzinger, 2017). Responding to public stakeholder messages can therefore function as an act of reputation management (van Noort et al., 2014). However, it is still unknown to what extent these functions are reflected in webcare conversations on private and public SNS. Public and private SNS have their own unique norms. Users visit them with slightly different intentions and motivations to interact with each other. For example, Twitter is mainly used to share information and express complaints, Facebook posts contain personal updates in order to maintain relationships, and Instagram posts are oftentimes light-hearted happy personal updates (Manikonda et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2012). Private SNS, such as Facebook Messenger, Twitter DM, and WhatsApp are used to engage in private interactions with friends and family (Church & d'Oliveira, 2013), but nowadays also with organizations (Zarouali et al., 2021). Applied to the context of webcare, stakeholders could approach organizations via these public SNS with complaints, remarks, and compliments, matching the norms of the channel. With regard to private SNS, it is likely that stakeholders approach organizations with personal specific questions for which they need to disclose personal and/or intimate information to a webcare employee.

Furthermore, organizations could include linguistic elements in their messages matching the medium constraints and affordances. In private channels (i.e., one-to-one communication), they could include elements of message personalization (e.g., personal greeting, personal signature of the employee) and conversational elements of invitational rhetoric (e.g., acknowledgements, stimulating dialogue) to stimulate the dialogue. On the other hand, public webcare messages could contain reputational elements of invitational rhetoric (e.g., apologizing, showing sympathy or empathy, Einwiller & Steilen, 2015; Page, 2013) and elements of informal language (e.g., shortenings and contractions, Liebrecht et al., 2021) which

match the affordances of public channels (i.e., one-to-many communication). In order to systematically examine whether stakeholders and organizations adapt their messages to channel affordances, a content analysis on webcare conversations across public and private SNS was conducted. We analyzed webcare conversations between the Netherlands Red Cross and its stakeholders and took a holistic perspective by analyzing both the stakeholders' messages and the organizational responses on several public and private SNS.

Theoretical Framework

The Netherlands Red Cross and Webcare

Webcare can be defined as "the act of engaging in online interactions with (complaining) consumers, by actively searching the web to address consumer feedback (e.g., questions, concerns and complaints)" (van Noort & Willemsen, 2012, p. 133). By responding to stakeholders' messages (i.e., electronic word-of-mouth; eWOM) organizations can address stakeholders' individual needs (i.e., goal of customer care), and decrease potential reputational damage, as not only the initial stakeholder but also other SNS users (i.e., bystanders, Weitzl & Hutzinger, 2017) can observe the conversation as well (i.e., goal of public relations).

Notably, prior research on the usage and effects of webcare almost solely focused on profit organizations (Van Noort et al., 2014), while webcare is employed by nonprofit organizations as well (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; van Os et al., 2018; Hachmang & Keuning, 2020). Webcare especially provides nonprofit organizations with multiple possibilities to enhance their public relations. Based on a content analysis of Twitter practices of the 100 largest nonprofit organizations in the United States, Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) concluded that nonprofit organizations are better at using Twitter to strategically engage their stakeholders via dialogic communication than they have been with traditional websites. Nonprofit organizations can thus profit from the employment of webcare via SNS, although they do lag behind in SNS adoption compared to profit organizations (Waters, 2009).

In the nonprofit sector, the American Red Cross can be seen as a forerunner on the adoption of SNS (Society for New Communication Research, 2008). Briones et al. (2011) interviewed 40 employees of the American Red Cross who manage the organization's communication on Twitter and Facebook and found that building relationships by means of webcare is seen as an essential component of their presence on SNS. The organization aims to engage in dialogic communication with various stakeholders: the general public, volunteers, donors, and the communities during disasters (Briones et al., 2011). Webcare not only allows the organization to respond to and understand sentiments within specific stakeholder groups, the organization can also learn from the stakeholders'

feedback to improve the organization ("We want to know what's going on out there, so we know what we're doing right and what we're doing wrong", cited interviewee; cf. Briones et al., 2011, p. 39).

The current study focused on webcare conversations of the Netherlands Red Cross, a forerunner in the usage of SNS compared to other nonprofit organizations in the Netherlands. The organization's SNS are managed seven days a week, also during evening hours, by a broad webcare team of employees and volunteers (Jepma, 2017). Stakeholders can approach the organization via public channels (i.e., Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram) or via private channels (i.e., Twitter DM, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp). The employment of webcare on public and private channels makes this a suitable case study to investigate stakeholders' messages and the organizational responses across several SNS. Although new webcare employees received training on how to provide stakeholders with unambiguous information, the training did not focus on the adoption of specific linguistic elements in webcare messages via public and private SNS.

Channel Affordances and Constraints

Public and private SNS have different characteristics (i.e., affordances and constraints; see Table 1). Public SNS can be characterized as one-to-many communication in which the conversation between a stakeholder and an organization can be observed by bystanders (Weitzl & Hutzinger, 2017). Moreover, user interaction on public SNS is predominantly asynchronous. The communication between the stakeholder and the organization takes place in deferred time which makes these channels less conversational, that is, replies to messages are often sent after some time has passed (Verheijen, 2019).

In contrast, private SNS can be seen as one-to-one communication in which the interlocutors are limited to the initial stakeholder and the organization (Ghosh & Mandal, 2020). For example, via Twitter DM, a user can send a private message to someone else, but this is only possible if users follow each other. Another characteristic of private SNS is the synchronicity of the communication. The communication between the stakeholder and the organization on private SNS almost takes place in real-time (i.e., near-synchronous). For example, WhatsApp provides delivery notifications, highlighting when a message is sent, when it is delivered to the recipient's device, and when it is read. These notifications influence users' perceptions of immediacy of communication (Church & d'Oliveria, 2013).

Lastly, public and private SNS differ in their imposed message length. In general, the number of available characters is larger on private SNS than on public SNS (see Table 1). However, there are considerable differences between public SNS in their imposed message-length which affects language use. For example, Twitter doubled the character limit from 140 characters to 280 characters on November 8, 2017. Boot et al. (2019) compared the language usage in Dutch tweets two weeks before and after this date. They concluded the character limit

Table 1. Message Characteristics of the Investigated Public and Private Social Networking Sites

	Twitter	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter DM	Facebook Messenger	WhatsApp
Interactivity	One-to-many	One-to-many	One-to-many	One-to-one	One-to-one	One-to-one
Synchronicity	Asynchronous	Asynchronous	Asynchronous	Near synchronous	Near synchronous	Near synchronous
Message limit	Post and comment max. 140 characters < November 2017 ≥ 280 characters	Post max. 63,206 characters; comment max. 8,000 characters	Caption and comment max. 2,200 characters	Message max. 10,000 characters	Message max. 10,000 characters	Message max. 65,536 characters

change affected language use in tweets: articles, conjunctions, and prepositions were more frequent whereas contractions, shortenings, and interjections were less frequent after the change in character limit.

Stakeholders' Messages

Depending on the affordances and constraints of public and private SNS, users have different motivations to engage with a certain SNS, and thus gratify different needs. This can be related to the uses and gratifications theory (U&G; Katz et al., 1974) which postulates that users have specific motives for using media. Driven by their particular needs and desires, they choose a media channel that is expected to fulfill these motives at a satisfactory level (i.e., gratifications). Although the origin of U&G dates to the 1970s, the framework has been applied to SNS as well, because U&G assumes an active audience that carefully picks the media channel that matches its needs. Since SNS require an active user participation, especially from those who create content (Ruggiero, 2000), U&G is considered as a useful framework for understanding people's use of these channels (Muntinga et al., 2011; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010).

Facebook is seen as a mixed-content platform (Arora et al., 2019) where users post personal updates in order to maintain relationships (Smith et al., 2012). In a large-scale survey study on engagement in social media and social media advertising, Voorveld et al. (2018) found Facebook is used for social interaction, to share something with others, and to quickly obtain information. To a lesser extent, users indicated they use Facebook as a pastime, and express negative emotions to Facebook content.

On the other hand, Twitter is mainly a text-based platform where users post complaints (Smith et al., 2012), and share information and news updates (Java et al., 2007; Kwak et al., 2010). Compared to Facebook, Twitter scores higher on the information gratification (Voorveld et al., 2018), as users want to be quickly informed and remain up to date by means of this public SNS. However, Twitter scores lower on the social interaction gratification compared to Facebook.

Instagram is an image-sharing application that focuses on visual content on creativity and inspiration (Arora et al., 2019; Papetti et al., 2018; Zhu & Chen, 2015). In contrast to posts on Facebook and Twitter, Instagram posts are mainly light-hearted happy personal updates (Manikonda et al., 2016). Voorveld et al. (2018) showed pastime and obtaining information are the main motivations for using Instagram. Also, gratifications of entertainment and social interaction scored relatively high. These findings correspond with, for example, the study by Waterloo et al. (2018) who showed positive emotions are prevalent on Instagram, whereas negative emotions occur more often on Twitter and Facebook.

Initially, users engaged in private interactions with friends and family via private SNS, but nowadays, users also use them to communicate with organizations (Zarouali et al., 2021). The private nature of instant messaging channels enables users to engage in more intimate communication and to establish a sense of social connection (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Zarouali et al., 2021). This sense of social connection is also induced as instant messaging channels provide social information to its users, for example, users can see when their contacts are online and when they are typing a message (Church & d'Oliveria, 2013).

Given the differences in SNS affordances and constraints, it can be reasoned that stakeholders approach organizations such as the Netherlands Red Cross via the SNS that matches their needs. Private SNS allow stakeholders to profit from the one-to-one nature of the channels in which they can ask sensitive questions (e.g., with regard to personal help of victims or volunteers during disasters, cf. Briones et al., 2011) or questions that contain personal information (e.g., to change addresses or banking accounts of donors). In contrast, public SNS allow stakeholders to profit from the one-to-many nature of the channels in which bystanders observe the message (Weitzl & Hutzinger, 2017), both in a negative way (by expressing complaints or remarks) and in a positive way (by posting compliments; cf. Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). This way, stakeholders try to force organizations to respond to their public messages (van Noort et al., 2014). Based on the literature about channel affordances and stakeholders' motives, we formulated the first hypothesis of this study:

H1: Complaints, remarks, and compliments are more frequent on public SNS whereas questions are more frequent on private SNS.

Furthermore, the U&G literature allowed us to formulate a hypothesis that distinguishes between the motives of stakeholder messages on public SNS. Especially the negative nature of Twitter posts, and to a lesser extent Facebook posts, where users share information and express complaints, can be contrasted with the positive nature of Instagram posts, where light-hearted, happy personal updates are common (Manikonda et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2012). What is more, stakeholders on Instagram are generally more committed, engaged, and loyal to organizations than stakeholders on Twitter and Facebook (Phua et al., 2017).

Therefore, the second hypothesis was:

> H2: Complaints are most frequent on Twitter followed by Facebook and Instagram. Compliments are most frequent on Instagram, followed by Facebook and Twitter.

Organizations' Responses

To date, little is known about the adaption of organizations' webcare responses to channel affordances, while Krallman et al. (2016) highlighted the need for webcare practitioners to understand the unique characteristics and opportunities offered by each SNS. Therefore, the current study aimed to investigate to what extent organizations strategically match their webcare responses to the public or private nature of platforms. More specifically, we focused on the adoption of a commonly studied factor that impacts webcare effectiveness: the conversational human voice (CHV; Kelleher, 2009).

CHV is defined as "an engaging and natural style of organizational communication as perceived by an organization's publics based on interactions between individuals in the organization and individuals in publics" (Kelleher, 2009, p. 177). This communication style positively affects stakeholders' perceptions of the organization, such as reputation, trust, and engagement intentions (e.g., Dijkmans et al., 2015; Gretry et al., 2017; Schamari & Schaefers, 2015) and can be operationalized by means of linguistic elements belonging to three main tactics (van Noort et al., 2014; Liebrecht et al., 2021).

The first tactic is message personalization. It relates to addressing specific individuals in the conversation (cf. Walther, 2011), which can be obtained by addressing the stakeholder in a personal way (e.g., "Hi Anna!", "you") and giving the organization a human face by addressing the employee at hand rather than the organization as a whole (e.g., "I", "me", "greetings John", Liebrecht et al., 2021). The second tactic is called informal speech. It relates to the formality of the language used in the conversation. In contrast to corporate language that is oftentimes used in formal organizational communication, a more casual, everyday language in webcare enhances the feeling of humanness of the organization (e.g., :-), "tnx", "haha", Liebrecht et al., 2021). The conversational aspect of CHV is represented in the third tactic, the so-called invitational rhetoric, which relates to creating a communicative environment where all parties are stimulated to engage in a conversation. Organizations can create mutual understanding by, for example, explicitly thanking stakeholders for their messages ("Thank you for approaching us"), showing sympathy or empathy ("I can imagine this is unfortunate for you"), or using expressions to stimulate the dialogue ("Could you explain what is the matter?", Liebrecht et al., 2021).

The usage of CHV in public webcare (i.e., on Twitter) has been investigated before, both for profit organizations (Huibers & Verhoeven, 2014; Kwon & Sung, 2011) and nonprofit organizations (van Hooijdonk & Liebrecht, 2018). Results indicated that organizations strongly differ in the adoption of this communication

style in webcare, but elements of personalization are commonly present (Kwon & Sung, 2011; van Hooijdonk & Liebrecht, 2018). With regard to public webcare by nonprofit organizations (i.e., Dutch municipalities), van Hooijdonk and Liebrecht (2018) found that in particular, a signature of the webcare employee and personally addressing the stakeholder were used most often. Moreover, informal language elements appeared less often in nonprofit organizations' public webcare. Interjections were used particularly rarely. With regard to invitational rhetoric, mainly elements of acknowledging, and sympathy and empathy were adopted in the webcare responses.

To the best of our knowledge, Hachmang et al. (2019) were the only researchers who investigated the usage of CHV in both public and private SNS by content analyzing public (i.e., Facebook, Twitter) and private webcare messages (i.e., Facebook Messenger, Twitter DM, WhatsApp) of a Dutch public transport organization. They found the organization used more personal greetings in private SNS, and slightly differentiated in the usage of specific informal language elements in public and private webcare, but any other differences between the channels were slight. However, given the small sample size, its imbalance of SNS, and the scope of their study, more research is needed to systematically examine whether organizations adapt the tone of voice of their webcare messages to affordances of public and private SNS.

Arguably, compared to public channels, webcare via private channels will contain more linguistic elements that match intimate and chatlike one-to-one conversations (Church & d'Oliveira, 2013; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010), such as elements of personalization (e.g., personal greeting, personal signature of the employee). Therefore, the third hypothesis was:

> H3: Webcare messages on private SNS contain more personalization compared to webcare messages on public SNS.

Moreover, the difference in the synchronicity of the communication via public and private SNS might affect the use of elements of informal speech, specifically contractions and shortenings. The communication on private SNS is near synchronous, which causes users to communicate in ways similar to informal speech by shortening and contracting words (Verheijen, 2019). Although webcare messages on private SNS can contain more characters compared to messages on public SNS, we expected users' perceptions of the immediacy of the communication to influence their language use, namely, that they would shorten and contract words (Church & d'Oliveria, 2013). However, since the use of emoji and interjections are not a timesaving strategy, we did not expect webcare messages on private SNS to contain more emoji and interjections than public webcare messages. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis was:

> H4: Webcare messages on private SNS contain more contractions and shortenings compared to webcare messages on public SNS.

Also, a distinction can be made between the public SNS types. Arguably, given the limited character length of posts on Twitter, webcare messages on this channel will contain more contractions and shortenings compared to the messages on Facebook and Instagram. Therefore, the fifth hypothesis was:

> H5: Contractions and shortenings are more frequent in webcare messages on Twitter than on Facebook and Instagram.

Lastly, webcare via private channels will contain more linguistic elements that match intimate and chatlike one-to-one conversations (Church & d'Oliveira, 2013; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010), such as conversational elements belonging to invitational rhetoric (e.g., acknowledgements, stimulating dialogue, well-wishing). In contrast, given the one-to-many nature of public webcare, organizations should take observing bystanders into account (Weitzl & Hutzinger, 2017). Therefore, organizations can manage their reputation by including invitational rhetoric elements (e.g., apologizing, showing sympathy and empathy, humor[1]; Einwiller & Steilen, 2015; Page, 2013; Béal & Grégoire, 2021). Thus, the sixth hypothesis was:

> H6: On private SNS, webcare messages contain conversational invitational rhetoric elements whereas on public SNS, webcare messages contain reputational elements of invitational rhetoric.

Method

Sample

We analyzed webcare conversations held on public and private SNS of the Netherlands Red Cross. These conversations were obtained with the OBI4wan monitoring tool the organization uses for its webcare activities (www.obi4wan.nl). A total of 423 webcare conversations were randomly collected and anonymized by deleting names, addresses, and phone numbers. The conversations were held between March and October 2017 via public or private SNS.[2] Since all messages in the webcare conversation were included in the sample, it consisted of 1,584 messages in total (689 stakeholder messages and 895 organizational messages). The number of conversations and messages per channel are shown in Table 2.

1 The reputational effects of humor depend on several factors, such as brand personality, type of humor, and whether it is directed to bystanders or initial complainers (Béal & Grégoire, 2021).

2 The data were collected and analyzed in 2017 in accordance with the GDPR regulations at the time, meaning the Netherlands Red Cross provided and anonymized the sample for only the purpose of this study, the sample was password protected and saved on a secure cloud storage (i.e., Surfdrive), and all coders signed a nondisclosure form beforehand.

Table 2. Number of Conversations and Messages in the Corpus per Social Networking Site

	Twitter	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter DM	Facebook Messenger	WhatsApp
Conversations	81	75	35	80	72	80
Messages	206	176	117	358	345	382
Stakeholders	103	85	74	151	127	149
Webcare	103	91	43	207	218	233

Analysis Instrument and Coding Procedure

Concerning the stakeholder messages, we manually coded the stakeholders' motives at the start of the conversation. Four motives were distinguished: complaints, questions, compliments, and remarks. Since stakeholder messages could contain multiple motives simultaneously, the presence or absence of each motive was coded per stakeholder message. Next to that, for conversations that also contained follow-up stakeholder messages during the webcare conversation, the sentiment in the last stakeholder message in the conversation was annotated as well. This variable contained a negative, neutral, and positive category, and enabled us to verify whether the final sentiment differed per SNS.

For the webcare messages, the presence or absence of linguistic elements of CHV were coded (see Table 3). The literature review by Liebrecht et al. (2021) showed seventeen categories of linguistic elements of CHV that can be distinguished, belonging to the three main tactics of message personalization, informal speech, and invitational rhetoric (van Noort et al., 2014). The majority of these categories match with the identification model van Hooijdonk and Liebrecht (2018) developed for the purpose of a content analysis of public webcare of Dutch municipalities. We used this instrument as a basis, supplemented with additional categories from Liebrecht et al. (2021, marked with an asterisk in Table 3).

For message personalization, we selected two categories that can be used for personalization towards the stakeholder (i.e., personal greeting and personal addressing stakeholder), and two categories for personalization of the webcare (i.e., signature of the employee and personal addressing the employee). For informal speech, Liebrecht et al. (2021) distinguished verbal and nonverbal cues. Next to the verbal categories of interjections, and contractions and shortenings, the broad category of nonverbal cues was also selected, which emulates both audible (such as capitalization and repeated punctuation) and visual (such as emoticons and emoji) features of face-to-face communication. Lastly, next to the five categories of invitational rhetoric in the instrument of van Hooijdonk and Liebrecht (2018), the sixth category of expressions of well-wishing was added, based on Liebrecht et al. (2021). Acknowledging, stimulating dialogue, and well-wishing were considered as conversational elements, and apologizing, showing sympathy and empathy, and humor were considered as reputational elements

Table 3. Analysis Instrument and Reliability Scores (Krippendorff's α) per Category

	Example	Reliability (α)
Stakeholder		
Initial motive		
Question	Do you have an IBAN for donations?	.95
Remark	I would like to change my address.	.67
Complaint	There is too much money hanging on the bow!!	.58
Compliment	You are heros and doing a good job!	.58
Final sentiment		.94
Negative	I am just so mad. It seems that nobody is really willing to help!	
Neutral	Could we discuss this further via DM?	
Positive	Thanks for your good care!	
Organization		
Message personalization		
Greeting	Hi Peter, Dear Khatalin	.98
Addressing stakeholder	you, your, Robin	.92
Addressing employee*	I, we, my, us	.92
Signature	^BM, ~Cecile	.92
Informal speech		
Contractions and shortenings*	Pls, ok, LOL, DM	.70
Non-verbal cues	??, veeery, :-)	.88
Interjections	Haha, oh, wow	1.00
Invitational rhetoric		
Conversational		
Acknowledgement	Thanks for the message	.96
Stimulating dialogue	Let us know what you think	.32
Well-wishing*	Have a nice day!	.89
Reputational		
Apologizing	I am sorry	1.00
Sympathy/empathy	I can imagine this is disappointing	.59
Humor	#joke, just kidding	.66

Note. Categories with an asterisk are (partly) new additions to the instrument of van Hooijdonk and Liebrecht (2018). To identify the stakeholders' motives to contact the organization, the initial stakeholder messages were analyzed that started the conversation with the organization (i.e., reactive webcare; van Noort & Willemsen, 2012). The sample in which this variable was coded contained 390 reactive webcare conversations.

of invitational rhetoric. This way, almost all linguistic elements of CHV in the taxonomy of Liebrecht et al. (2021) were covered in the current study.

Five persons were intensively trained in using the analysis instrument to code conversations, after which each of them coded a part of the corpus. A sixth coder double-coded 18% of the sample. An overview of the categories used in the study and the intercoder reliability scores (Krippendorff's α) are shown in Table 3.

Results

To examine whether stakeholders and organizations adapt their messages to channel affordances and constraints, several multivariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted in SPSS v.25.0.

Stakeholders' Messages

H1 proposed that complaints, remarks, and compliments are more frequent on public SNS, whereas questions are more frequent on private SNS. Also, H2 proposed that complaints are most frequent on Twitter, followed by Facebook and Instagram, whereas compliments are most frequent on Instagram, followed by Facebook and Twitter. A multivariate effect of SNS channels on the stakeholders' motives was found, Pillai's trace = .58, $F(20, 1536) = 12{,}98$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .15$, indicating that stakeholders oftentimes approached the organization's webcare with questions and remarks (see Table 4). Specifically, stakeholders asked questions more often via private channels than via public channels, $F(5, 384) = 41.75$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .35$. Pairwise comparisons with Bonferroni correction indicated this effect was caused by WhatsApp, which significantly differed from the other SNS ($ps \leq .02$). With regard to remarks, stakeholders most frequently contacted the organization via Twitter and Facebook, $F(5, 384) = 24.07$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .24$. A significant difference was also found for compliments, $F(5, 384) = 21.29$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .22$. Instagram was mainly used to send positive messages to the organization, compared to the other five channels ($ps < .001$). Lastly, a marginal statistically significant difference was found for stakeholders' complaints, $F(5, 384) = 1.90$, $p = .09$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, indicating stakeholders complained more often via Facebook and Facebook Messenger, although pairwise comparisons did not show significant differences with the other channels. Our data thus confirm H1, and largely confirm H2. In the case of complaints only, we did not find a prevailing appearance on Twitter.

Within the sample, 189 webcare conversations contained follow-up stakeholder messages resulting in a dialogue with the organization. We coded the sentiment of the final stakeholder message in the conversation and found a significant relation between the SNS and the sentiment in the last stakeholder message, $\chi^2(10) = 22.94$, $p < .05$, Cramer's V = .25 (see Table 4). We did not find differences for the webcare conversations that ended negatively, but the data did show that conversations via WhatsApp ended more often positively compared to Instagram, Twitter DM, and Facebook Messenger ($ps < .05$).

Organization's Responses

Message Personalization

H3 proposed that private SNS webcare messages contain more personalization compared to public SNS webcare messages. A multivariate effect was found across the SNS on the usage of message personalization, Pillai's trace = .91,

Table 4. Means (SDs) of the Presence of Stakeholders' Motives, Sentiment in Last Stakeholder Message, and Conversational Linguistic Elements in the Oganization's Webcare Response per Social Networking Site

	Twitter	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter DM	Facebook Messenger	WhatsApp	Total
Stakeholder							
Initial motive							
Question	.16 (.37)	.21 (.41)	.14 (.36)	.68 (.47)	.63 (.49)	.90 (.30)	.47 (.50)
Remark	.65 (.48)	.57 (.50)	.37 (.49)	.20 (.40)	.16 (.37)	.06 (.23)	.35 (.48)
Complaint	.07 (.26)	.13 (.34)	.03 (.17)	.09 (.29)	.18 (.39)	.06 (.23)	.10 (.30)
Compliment	.11 (.32)	.09 (.29)	.54 (.51)	.06 (.24)	.03 (.18)	.00 (.00)	.11 (.31)
Final sentiment							
Negative	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (16.7%)	3 (4.8%)	4 (8.7%)	1 (2.1%)	9 (4.5%)
Neutral	5 (31.3%)	5 (41.7%)	3 (50.0%)	21 (33.9%)	16 (34.8%)	3 (6.4%)	63 (31.7%)
Positive	11 (68.8%)	7 (58.3%)	2 (33.3%)	38 (61.3%)	26 (56.5%)	43 (91.5%)	127 (63.8%)
Organization							
Message personalization							
Greeting	.01 (.07)	.19 (.38)	.03 (.17)	.44 (.44)	.59 (.43)	.65 (.39)	.34 (.44)
Addressing stakeholder	.43 (.46)	.62 (.47)	.44 (.50)	.74 (.36)	.89 (.26)	.86 (.27)	.68 (.43)
Addressing employee	.26 (.41)	.34 (.47)	.11 (.32)	.67 (.42)	.78 (.36)	.63 (.40)	.50 (.46)
Signature	.94 (.22)	.97 (.16)	.21 (.41)	.93 (.23)	.93 (.21)	.92 (.21)	.88 (.31)
Informal speech							
Contractions and shortenings	.13 (.32)	.00 (.00)	.03 (.17)	.13 (.28)	.03 (.17)	.12 (.29)	.08 (.24)
Non-verbal cues	.10 (.28)	.03 (.16)	.34 (.48)	.07 (.22)	.06 (.22)	.06 (.19)	.09 (.26)
Interjections	.08 (.24)	.03 (.16)	.03 (.17)	.06 (.21)	.02 (.13)	.03 (.15)	.04 (.18)
Invitational rhetoric							
Conversational							
Acknowledgement	.28 (.43)	.45 (.49)	.31 (.46)	.32 (.43)	.34 (.42)	.25 (.36)	.32 (.43)
Stimulating dialogue	.02 (.10)	.03 (.16)	.00 (.00)	.03 (.11)	.08 (.23)	.10 (.25)	.05 (.23)
Well-wishing	.27 (.43)	.05 (.20)	.06 (.24)	.18 (.33)	.24 (.37)	.15 (.30)	.17 (.34)
Reputational							
Apologizing	.03 (.17)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.03 (.15)	.08 (.23)	.02 (.08)	.03 (.14)
Sympathy/ empathy	.57 (.46)	.26 (.44)	.41 (.49)	.15 (.31)	.33 (.42)	.23 (.35)	.32 (.43)
Humor	.03 (.14)	.03 (.16)	.06 (.24)	.01 (.11)	.01 (.06)	.00 (.00)	.02 (.12)

Note. In order to conduct an analysis of variance (ANOVA), analyses with SNS as independent factor and either the stakeholders' motive, or the number of linguistic elements in the webcare response as dependent factor, we aggregated the identified elements per message into an average score per webcare conversation.

$F(20, 1668) = 24.55$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .23$. The effect indicated addressing the stakeholder and signing the webcare messages were most often used compared to the other elements of the tactic. A significant effect was found for personally addressing the stakeholder (e.g., "you", "your"), $F(5, 417) = 17.98$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .18$. On private channels, stakeholders were more often personally

addressed compared to public channels. The strategy was also more frequent on Facebook than on Twitter (p = .03). Furthermore, a significant effect was found for greeting the stakeholder (e.g., "Hi Sharon"), $F(5, 417) = 42.82$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .34$. Greeting the stakeholder occurred more often on private channels compared to public channels (pairwise comparisons' ps < .001). Webcare messages on WhatsApp contained more greetings than on Twitter DM (p = .003), and messages on Facebook contained more greetings than on Twitter (p = .03). In addition, an effect was found for the presence of personally addressing the employee in webcare messages (e.g., "I", "me"), $F(5, 417) = 25.24$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .23$. On private channels, personally addressing the employee was more frequent compared to public channels. Lastly, a significant difference of personal signature was found (e.g., "Best Niels", "^NS"), $F(5, 417) = 64.02$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .43$. Pairwise comparisons indicated this effect was due to Instagram messages which were signed less often than messages on the other SNS (ps < .001). These results show personalization was more present on private than on public SNS, which confirms H3.

Informal Speech

H4 proposed that webcare messages on private SNS contain more contractions and shortenings compared to webcare messages on public SNS. Moreover, according to H5, contractions and shortenings are more frequent in webcare messages on Twitter compared to Facebook and Instagram. A multivariate effect was found across SNS on the usage of informal speech, Pillai's trace = .16, $F(15, 1251) = 4.69$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$, indicating that contractions and shortenings, and nonverbal cues were used more often than interjections. More specifically, a significant effect was found for contractions and shortenings (e.g., "what's", "DM"), $F(5,417) = 4.59$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. Webcare messages on Facebook contained less contractions and shortenings compared to Twitter (p = .02), Twitter DM (p = .007), and WhatsApp (p = .02). A significant difference was also found for nonverbal cues (e.g., ":-)"), $F(5, 417) = 8.98$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$. Webcare messages on Instagram contained more nonverbal cues compared to the other SNS (ps < .001). No difference between the SNS was found for interjections (e.g., "haha"), $F(5, 417) = 1.04$, $p = .39$. Based on these results, H4 was rejected, whereas H5 was partly supported, as webcare messages on Twitter indeed contained more contractions and shortenings than messages on Facebook.

Invitational Rhetoric

H6 proposed that on private SNS, webcare messages contain conversational invitational rhetoric elements, whereas on public SNS, webcare messages contain reputational elements of invitational rhetoric. A multivariate effect of SNS on the usage of invitational rhetoric indicated webcare messages frequently contained acknowledgements, and sympathy and empathy utterances, Pillai's trace = .25, $F(30, 2080) = 3.69$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. A marginal significant effect was found for

acknowledgements (e.g., "Thanks for the message"), $F(5, 417) = 2.07$, $p = .07$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, indicating this strategy appeared more often on Facebook compared to WhatsApp ($p = .05$). A significant effect was found for apologizing (e.g., "Sorry"), $F(5, 417) = 3.01$, $p = .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. This strategy appeared more often on Facebook Messenger compared to Facebook ($p = .009$). Also, a significant effect was found for sympathy and empathy (e.g., "We understand"), $F(5, 417) = 10.33$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$. Pairwise comparisons showed this strategy was used more frequently on Twitter compared to all private channels (WhatsApp: $p < .001$; Twitter DM: $p < .001$; Facebook Messenger: $p = .005$; Facebook: $p < .001$). Also, Instagram messages contained more sympathy and empathy than messages via Twitter DM ($p = .02$). The presence of well-wishing (e.g., "Have a nice day") differed across the channels as well, $F(5, 417) = 5.12$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$. This strategy was adopted more often in webcare on Twitter compared to Instagram ($p = .03$), Facebook ($p < .001$), Facebook Messenger (compared to Facebook, $p = .005$). Regarding stimulating dialogues (e.g., "Is there anything else I can help you with?"), a statistically significant effect was also found, $F(5, 417) = 2.92$, $p = .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, but pairwise comparisons did not reveal statistically significant differences between the channels. This could be explained by the relatively high standard deviations and the relatively low means. Lastly, the presence of humor (e.g., "Just joking ;-)") did not differ between SNS, $F(5, 417) = 2.28$, $p = .27$. This strategy of invitational rhetoric was rarely used in webcare messages. Based on these results, H6 was only partially confirmed, as sympathy and empathy (i.e., reputational elements of invitational rhetoric) were more frequent on public SNS than on private SNS. An overview of the tested hypotheses is shown in Table 5.

Discussion

The current study investigated whether stakeholders' and organizational messages in webcare conversations differ across public and private SNS. Our content analysis revealed the stakeholders' motives to approach the Netherlands Red Cross differed between SNS. As expected, stakeholders more often used private channels to ask questions, especially via WhatsApp. On this channel, conversations more often ended positively. Remarks were more frequent on Twitter and Facebook, whereas compliments appeared more often on Instagram. These findings corroborated H1, largely confirmed H2, and matched the SNS channel affordances and constraints, as indicated in prior studies (Manikonda et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2012). We thus conclude that stakeholders approach organizations via private channels for customer service questions, whereas they try to put pressure on organizations by sending messages via public SNS.

The Netherlands Red Cross also adapts their messages to the affordances and constraints of the channel. A clear pattern was found between public and private channels in the usage of message personalization. In accordance with our expectations (H3), private webcare messages contained more elements

Table 5. Overview of the Tested Hypotheses.

Hypothesis	Finding
H1: Complaints, remarks, and compliments are more frequent on public SNS whereas questions are more frequent on private SNS.	Confirmed
H2: Complaints are most frequent on Twitter followed by Facebook and Instagram. Compliments are most frequent on Instagram, followed by Facebook and Twitter.	Partially confirmed
H3: Webcare messages on private SNS contain more personalization compared to webcare messages on public SNS.	Confirmed
H4: Webcare messages on private SNS contain more contractions and shortenings compared to webcare messages on public SNS.	Rejected
H5: Contractions and shortenings are more frequent in webcare messages on Twitter than on Facebook and Instagram.	Partially confirmed
H6: On Private SNS webcare messages contain conversational invitational rhetoric elements, whereas on public SNS webcare messages contain reputational elements of invitational rhetoric.	Partially confirmed

of personalization compared to public webcare messages. Stakeholders were more often greeted and addressed personally, and the webcare employees were regularly personally addressed as well. This could enhance the experience of one-to-one communication via private channels. However, a personal signature seems to be mainstream in both public and private webcare, except for messages on Instagram.

With regard to informal speech, we expected that webcare messages on private SNS would contain more contractions and shortenings compared to public SNS due to the near synchronous character of private channels (H4). We did not find such a prevailing appearance of these elements on private SNS, but the data did show that shortenings and contractions are more frequent in webcare messages on Twitter than on Facebook, which partially confirmed H5. This indicates the use of shortenings and contractions is influenced by message-length limit rather than the synchronicity of the communication.

It was expected that the conversational communication style of the Netherlands Red Cross would also appear more often on private SNS, whereas reputational elements would be more prevalent on public SNS (H6). With regard to elements of sympathy and empathy, the organization indeed used these reputational elements more often in public webcare. However, no clear patterns were found for the other elements of invitational rhetoric. Arguably, the use of conversational and reputational invitational rhetoric elements does not only depend on the affordances and constraints of public and private SNS, but also on other factors such as severity and urgency of the stakeholder's message, the communication style of the stakeholder's message, and the content of the webcare message (e.g., defensive vs. accommodative; Van Noort et al., 2014).

The current study's findings provide valuable insights both for webcare

scholars and practitioners. Confirming the U&G theory, it can be concluded stakeholders and the Netherlands Red Cross adapt their messages to channel affordances and constraints of SNS using different linguistic elements. Naturally, the question arises to what extent the findings of this case study can be generalized to other organizations. Given the diverse stakeholders that approach the Netherlands Red Cross via SNS – who vary from the general public, volunteers, first-aiders, and donors (cf. Briones et al., 2011) – it can be reasoned the current study's findings are based on a heterogenous sample and, therefore, show a broad overview of characteristics in stakeholders' and organizational messages across several SNS. This enhances the generalizability of the results.

However, it is also valuable to elaborate more in-depth on the different stakeholder roles and motives. Stakeholders approached the organization with various messages ranging from an address that needed to be changed to a first aid course they had finalized, and questions for immediate help during a natural disaster. The messages differed in severity, urgency, and emotional intensity, which could not only affect the channel chosen to send the message, but also the organization's response (i.e., what is said and how it is said) that would be the most appropriate in such a situation. Further investigation is needed on the usage and effects of strategies (e.g., defensive vs. accommodative; Van Noort et al., 2014) and the linguistic elements of CHV in webcare responses to stakeholder messages that differ in severity, urgency, or emotional intensity.

Moreover, the use of CHV tactics should not only depend on the channel affordances and constraints, but also on the language used by the interlocutor. According to the communication accommodation theory (CAT; Giles et al., 1991) interlocuters tend to adjust their communicative behaviors to the theme and/or each other. There are three accommodation strategies during an interaction: convergence, divergence, and maintenance. In convergence, the speaker adopts the recipient's verbal and/or nonverbal language, whereas in divergence, the speaker purposely creates distance from the recipient by magnifying disparities. In maintenance, the speaker retains their original communication behavior (Giles et al., 1991; Jakic et al., 2017). Moreover, CAT posits that convergence leads to positive outcomes in terms of relationship and trust. This is consistent with the findings of Jakic et al. (2017), who investigated the effects of the convergence or maintenance of an organization's formal or informal language on the perceived organization's relationship investments and trust. Their findings showed that accommodating to a stakeholder's formal or informal language was the preferable strategy for organizations in webcare conversations. Furthermore, Crijns et al. (2017) investigated the effects of message personalization as a convergence strategy organizations could use when responding to stakeholders' comments following an organizational crisis message. Their findings indicated that a personalized organizational response positively affects organizational reputation through higher perceptions of CHV. However, a personalized response to positive stakeholder comments triggers skepticism, which is detrimental for

the organizational reputation. Crijns et al. (2017) explained this finding through the persuasion knowledge model (PKM; Friestad & Wright, 1994). According to the PKM, stakeholders develop knowledge about how the organization tries to persuade them to achieve certain goals. Therefore, a personalized organizational response might trigger stakeholders' critical reflections and, as a defense mechanism, their skepticism towards the response increases. Both Jakic et al. (2017) and Crijns et al. (2017) used experiments to investigate the convergence effects of CHV in webcare conversations. Further studies should explore, by means of content analysis, how and when organizations and stakeholders accommodate their communication style (in terms of message personalization, informal speech, and invitational rhetoric) to that of their interlocuter in public and private webcare conversations, and whether convergence leads to positive conversation outcomes.

Although we can conclude the Netherlands Red Cross adapts its responses to the channel affordances and constraints of SNS, it remains unknown how stakeholders perceive these messages when they are or are not adapted to the characteristics of the SNS channel. For example, how would stakeholders evaluate a private webcare response in which strategies of reputation management are used? Or how would they evaluate the organization if it uses personal and chatlike messages on public SNS? Not only experimental studies could investigate these effects, but also content analysis could be conducted in which both the linguistic elements of CHV as well as the sentiment development within conversations are coded (cf., Hachmang et al., 2019).

Lastly, the current study strictly separated public webcare from private webcare. However, a common phenomenon nowadays is the redirection of public conversations to private channels (van Hooijdonk & Liebrecht, 2021). By transferring the stakeholder to a private channel, organizations try to prevent a public discussion and/or to provide the stakeholder with personalized help for which additional personal information of the stakeholder is needed. It is still unknown how redirections are perceived by stakeholders and how organizations can adapt their communication style to this blending form of webcare. After all, redirections could cover both the customer service and public relations function of webcare. Grégoire et al. (2015) reasoned that in these cases, organizations should solve complex problems via private channels, but thereafter, should summarize the final solution in public. This could positively affect their reputation of being a trustworthy and helpful organization which puts their customers first. However, stakeholders could perceive this strategy also as a less genuine and persuasive attempt. In the latter case, the intended goals of webcare would fail.

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Conflict of Interest Disclosure

The authors do not have any conflicts of interest to report.

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Research Ethics Statement

The study followed the ethical decision-making recommendations for internet research, as formulated by the AoIR Ethics Working Committee and approved by the Ethics Working Committee (Version 2.0), 08/2012 (https://aoir.org/reports/ethics2.pdf).

Authorship Details

Christine Cornelia Liebrecht: research concept and design, collection and/or assembly of data, data analysis and interpretation, writing the article, critical revision of the article, final approval of the article.

Charlotte Miriam Joyce van Hooijdonk: research concept and design, collection and/or assembly of data, data analysis and interpretation, writing the article, critical revision of the article, final approval of the article.

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