Reputation Repair at the Expense of Providing Instructing and Adjusting Information Following Crises

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Quantitative content analysis of 51 articles published in crisis communication literature in public relations indicates both a prevalent focus on image restoration or reputation management in the crisis responses analyzed in more than 18 years of research and a relative neglect of instructing and adjusting information in subsequent recommendations. This research makes insightful crisis response recommendations regarding consideration of organizational type involved in a crisis (government, corporation, or individual) and targeting active publics when selecting crisis responses.

REPUTATION REPAIR AT THE EXPENSE OF PROVIDING INSTRUCTING AND ADJUSTING INFORMATION FOLLOWING CRISES

In public relations literature few topics have proved as heuristic and enduring as crisis responses. This is not surprising, perhaps, given that crises are dramatic, often reputation-changing moments in the histories of organizations. Such events have drawn the attention of numerous scholars, who have studied processes and outcomes of crises over time and evaluated practices of crisis response managers on a continuum that typically includes "effective" at one end and "ineffective" at the other. Public relations literature, thanks to these scholars, is robust with cases, findings, and recommendations for handling crises.

Yet for all of these published studies, cases, and books on crisis responses, little exists that provides an overview of findings—a distancing and perhaps global perspective. Although a recent study (An & Cheng, 2010) provided an overview of the past crisis research trend in general, it did not address an overall view on crisis responses in the previous crisis research. This study has as its goal partial fulfillment of this broad-perspective void regarding crisis

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responses. Specifically the research reported here uses quantitative content analytic proce-
dures, grounded in meta-analytic rationale, to examine published crisis response articles in an
18-year period from 1991–2009. Overall purposes of the analysis are to examine relationships
between organization types and crisis responses, organizational goals for crisis responses and
response strategy effectiveness, and relationships among crisis response strategies and their
time of use, overall response evaluation, and target audience evaluation of those responses.
Through this examination of 51 scholarly crisis research articles, gaps in knowledge may be
highlighted and generalizations may be derived that provide direction for future studies in this
important area.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Methodological Rationale

Too often, research efforts are reported or published and left to languish except for the occa-
sional inclusion in another's literature review (Wimmer & Dominick, 1987). Revisiting studies
with different questions and pursuing different insights allows researchers to gain a richer overall
understanding and at times draw important conclusions. This rationale has been used to jus-
tify secondary analyses of survey research (Hyman, 1972), replications of experiments (Kelly,
Chase, & Tucker, 1979), meta-analyses for synthesizing findings from multiple studies (Wolf,
1986), and content analyses designed, in a systematic way, to derive meanings of recorded or
printed communications (Scheufele, 2008; Holsti, 1969).

The latter two of these methods provide both the rationale and guiding methodological prin-
ciples for the current study. Meta-analysis is primarily a statistical technique used to summarize,
review, and re-analyze previous quantitative research. Meta-analysis answers the question, "does
what we are doing make a difference to X, even if X has been measured using different instru-
ments across a range of different people?" (Neill, 2006). It is in this rationale that the current
study is grounded: does our collective knowledge of crisis response make a difference, even if
the conclusions have been derived through analyses of different types of crises, different types
of organizations, and differing methods to study them (case study, field observation, experiment,
etc). Thus, while we are not enacting a meta-analysis (we are not combining quantitative data
from numerous studies into one large data set in order to capture a range of methods), we employ
its rationale; real value emerges from re-visiting findings from previously conducted studies,
often disparate in both method and findings (Bushman & Wells, 2001).

Quantitative content analysis is one of the most widely used research methods in commu-
nication (Wimmer & Dominick, 1987, p.165; Baxter & Babbie, 2004, p.233). Its empirical
nature allows for any variety of printed (or spoken if recorded) content to be systematically,
quantitatively, and often objectively analyzed (Scheufele, 2008). Given its relative popularity
as a way to categorize and measure content of various journals over varying periods of time
(Lombard, Snyder-Duch & Bracken, 2002; Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 1998; Kolbe & Burnett, 1991;
Abernathy & Franke, 1996) it was somewhat surprising to us that analysis of crisis content,
a prevailing topic in public relations journals, had not been previously conducted. This study
analyzes that broad body of literature to reveal relationships between crisis types, goals of
response, effectiveness of response strategies, and target audiences; revealing the current "state"

of crisis communication literature illuminates pressing theoretical and applied directions for future research.

Organizational Types

There have been many discussions in organizational literature about how organizations can be classified or what constitutes the basic dimensions for organizations (Grendstad & Strand, 1999; Katz & Kahn, 1966; Parsons, 1960). Parsons suggested four general types of organizations based on their primary goal or function (Parsons, 1960): (1) organizations with economic goals, (2) political goals, (3) integrative organizations, and (4) pattern-maintenance organizations. Later, Katz and Kahn (1966) proposed four types of organizations using a systems approach while extending Parsons' (1966) functional typology: (1) productive or economic organizations, (2) maintenance organizations, (3) adaptive organizations, and (4) political organizations. Some provided four types of organizations based on "who benefits" (Blau & Scott, 1962): (1) mutual-benefit organizations, (2) business-benefit organizations, (3) service organizations that provide the client group primary benefits, and (4) commonwealth organizations that benefit the public.

Despite the different ways to classify organizations, the distinctions between bureaucratic and nonbureaucratic and between public and private sectors have been used to classify different organization types for a long time (Carper & Snizek, 1980; Perry & Rainey, 1988). Public organizations have been considered governmental bureaus, whereas private organizations have been often equated with business organizations (Perry & Rainey, 1988). In addition, scholars made a distinction between public and private bureaucracies and between public and private non-bureaucratic organizations (Carper & Snizek, 1980; Perry & Rainey, 1988).

Extending this distinction, five types of organizations, (1) for-profit firms, (2) government-owned organizations and agencies, (3) nonprofit organizations, (4) employee-owned organizations (or producer cooperatives), and (5) households, have been identified in modern economics (Montias et al., 1994). Based on the classification, our study analyzed relationships between the types of organizations and crisis responses that appeared in previous crisis literature. More detailed operationalization of organization type is discussed later.

Instructing Information, Adjusting Information, and Reputation Repair

Crisis response strategies were first recognized as apologia to defend the reputations of individuals and organizations (Dionisopolous & Vibbert, 1988; Ware & Linkugel, 1973), and since that early work Coombs (2009) notes the majority of crisis communication research has focused on the process of reputation repair. Other functions of crisis response strategy, less visible in the extant body of literature, are the provision of instructing information and of adjusting information (Sturges, 1994).

Instructing information as a response strategy informs stakeholders how to protect themselves amidst crisis from physical or financial harm. Providing instructing information is especially critical during health crises, product recalls, natural disasters, and other events that threaten public safety and well-being. Protection is critical to preventing damage, and stakeholders must believe there is a threat and that the recommended course of action is a viable mean of protection.

Adjusting information facilitates coping with the crisis. Organization transparency and a steady flow of information on how the crisis is being handled are critical to that coping. Adjusting information also relays the corrective action taken by the organization and the steps it is taking to prevent a similar crisis in the future (Coombs, 2009).

As Coombs (2009) notes, "it is important to understand the relevance of instructing and adjusting information to provide a complete picture of crisis response communication" (p. 105); yet, there is little research (Coombs, 2009) and no comprehensive assessment of how scholars are enhancing that understanding and contributing to improve the development and delivery of this critical information. This quantitative analysis will identify trends and relationships between goal of response and the type of crisis as well as the effectiveness of that response to reveal if scholarly focus on reputation management has led to relative neglect of other vital facets of crisis management.

Reputation repair strategy, used to protect or maintain organizational reputation and image during a crisis, has dominated as a focus of crisis communication research. Theories emerging from that strategy's line of inquiry include corporate apologia (Hearit, 2006), impression management (Allen & Caillouet, 1994), and image restoration (Benoit, 1995), to name but a few. Although a number of scholars have identified strategies to manage reputation, two crisis management theories have dominated the total body of crisis communication research, establishing paradigms, for decades: image restoration theory (Benoit, 1995, 1997) and situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 2007).

Each of these traditions is well-documented, and theoretical overviews of each are readily accessible. The first tradition, Benoit's image restoration theory, has its roots in rhetorical theory. As Coombs (2009) notes, the primary recommendation emerging from that body of research is that mortification, the public acceptance of responsibility, is the most effective crisis response. Other basic crisis responses in image restoration include denial, evading responsibility, reducing the offensiveness of the crisis, and corrective action. A broad and diverse range of primarily case analyses have used Benoit's work to study everything from the Archbishop's sex scandal (Kauffman, 2008) to Texaco's image repair efforts when accused of racist practices (Brinson & Benoit, 1999).

Coombs (1995; Coombs & Holladay, 2002) is central to the second dominant theoretical tradition in crisis communication research. With attribution theory (Weiner, 1986)— postulating people will assign responsibility for negative events— at its core, situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) uses crisis type, crisis history, and prior reputation to evaluate the overall threat imposed by a crisis to an organization's reputation. Recent extensions of SCCT move beyond reputation repair to examine effects of a crisis on stakeholder emotion (Coombs, 2009). Coombs (2009) notes that, unlike other reputation repair theories such as image restoration, SCCT is an empirically tested approach to reputation repair research that primarily employs experimental and quasi-experimental methods to move from description to prescriptive recommendations.

These two crisis management theories, Benoit's image restoration theory (Benoit, 1995, 1997) and Coombs' SCCT (Coombs, 2007) have guided crisis response strategy research in public relations crisis literature and served as dominant research paradigms in crisis communication literature for decades. Consequently there has been much research analyzing organizations' crisis response strategy adoption and its effectiveness using the recommendations of these theories for crisis response options. Yet, given that a majority of this work is based on second-hand case

studies resulting in untested speculation, "much of the existing reputation repair research has generated more speculation about what should be done rather than testing of actual prescriptive claims" (Coombs, 2009, p. 113).

The current study investigates and analyzes 18 years of that research using quantitative content analysis to explore the current status of organizations' crisis response strategies and their effectiveness and attempts to diagnose any significant problems involving crisis response selection. Since little exists that offers an overview of the past research on crisis responses, research questions are chosen for this study. The following research questions are asked in order to evaluate crisis response strategies analyzed in the extant body of crisis communication research.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: What relationships exist among organization type and the goal of crisis responses, crisis type, and crisis response strategy employed?

a. Is there a relationship between organization type and the overall goal of the organizations' crisis responses?
b. Is there a relationship between organization type and crisis type cluster analyzed in 18 years of crisis research?
c. Is there a relationship between organization type and crisis response strategy employed and its effectiveness?

RQ2: What relationships exist between crisis type and the overall goals of the organizations' responses and the effectiveness of each crisis response strategy adopted?

a. Is there a relationship between the overall goal of the organizations' crisis responses and crisis type?
b. Is there a relationship between the overall goal of the organizations' crisis responses and the effectiveness of each crisis response strategy adopted?

RQ3: What relationships exist among crisis response strategy and its time being used, overall evaluation of crisis response, and the target audiences of organizations?

a. Is there a relationship between crisis response strategy and its time being used during the crisis response period?
b. Are there significant differences between the overall evaluation of organizations' responses between crisis response strategies used in isolation and in various combinations?
c. Is there a relationship between crisis response strategy employed and its effectiveness and the main target audiences of organizations?

METHODS

Through a quantitative content analysis, this study examines 51 crisis research articles published between 1991 and March of 2009.

Sampling Procedure

A census of relevant articles was retrieved from databases of communication and business related journals, specifically Communication and Mass Media Complete and Business Source Premiere. The key terms "crisis communication," "crisis management," "image restoration strategy," and "crisis response strategy" guided the search. The search revealed 66 articles published between 1991 and March 2009. Next, 15 articles that explored crisis response strategy only theoretically (without analysis of the strategy) were excluded from the sample as this study was interested in crisis response strategy effectiveness and its relation to the nature of crisis. Thus, after excluding 15 inapplicable articles, the census of articles for this study included 51 manuscripts from 11 journals[1]. See Appendix 1 for the complete list of analyzed articles.

Pilot Test Coding Procedure

A codebook was designed to capture the variables under investigation. To insure the validity and accuracy representing each domain, particularly given the novel, exploratory nature of the study, an extensive pilot test was first conducted in which 3 trained undergraduates coded 22 (33%) of the complete sample of articles (100% overlap). Results of the analysis of this preliminary wave of pretesting were not satisfactory (intercoder reliability ranged from 56% to 100% across all articles) and revealed items that measured domains that were not conceptually distinct, necessitating revision of the codebook.

Although this process was productive, the researchers agreed that undergraduate students, however well trained and well meaning, were not the ideal population for coding. Instead, one doctoral student with expertise in and understanding of crisis literature and theory was recruited to code along with one professor in the same area. Prior to a review of the results of the next round of coding and intercoder reliability analyses, the variables measured in the revised, final codebook are presented.

Variables Measured

On the coding sheet, coders first indicated the article title, date of publication, journal title, volume, issue, pages, authors, and institutional affiliation of the author/s. Throughout the codebook, categories were expanded as needed based on overlooked areas/topics that emerged in the extensive pilot testing. To answer questions regarding the organizations studied in this body of crisis literature, coders marked the primary type of organization in the study as government organization, corporation, nonprofit organizations, individual person, or combinations thereof. The study first classified the organization type into government agencies, corporations, nonprofit organizations, and individuals to analyze organizations' crisis responses. We added individual

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[1]*Journal of Public Relations Research, Public Relations Review, Journal of Business Communication, Business Communication Quarterly, Journal of Applied Communication Research, Communication Quarterly, Communication Research, Communication Quarterly, Communication Studies, Management Communication Quarterly, and Journal of Promotion Management, Communication Reports.*

person as another type since many crises were involved with some public figures such as politicians or CEOs in our sample. In addition, we made a distinction between publicly traded and privately owned for corporations and between federal and state/local levels for government organizations. In addition, coders indicated non-U.S.-based (international-based) for corporations and government agencies. In addition industry type of organization in the sample was coded as consumer goods, defense, health, politician/political candidates, petroleum gasoline, sports, or transportation.

For questions related to crisis type and category, coders indicated how the crisis was classified in the article using Coombs' crisis classification (victims, accidents, and preventables). Coders based those decisions only on direct mentions by the authors. Organization's primary goal of crisis communication was also measured—reputation management, public health, public safety, or other. A comprehensive list of strategies was developed through a thorough review of the literature and included denial, shifting-the-blame, attacking-the-accuser, excuse, defensibility, justification, ingratiation, bolstering, transcendence, differentiation, corrective action, compensation, mortification, and apology.

Coders were asked to note the strategies only when the authors analyzed such strategies being used in crisis responses. When the strategies mentioned in the articles were not included in the provided comprehensive list, coders were asked to note the strategies on the coding sheet in an 'other' category. They were also asked to code if strategies were used in immediate responses (first 72 hours after a crisis begins) or the later responses. When specific timeline was not reported in a study, only initial crisis responses were coded to be the early phase of crisis response, and all subsequent responses were coded to be in later phases.

Again, coders did not make those judgments but instead relied on specific mentions by the authors. The target audience of the crisis response strategy was noted as shareholders, customers, general public, activist groups, government agencies/officials, or other. Also measured was if authors themselves (not the coders) deemed crisis response strategy as effective or not and whether each strategy was used alone or in combination with others. Finally, the authors' evaluations of the organizations' and individuals' responses were noted based on their effectiveness.

Reliability Analysis

Initially, two experts coded 11% ($n = 6$) of the articles for a first-wave reliability check. Intercoder reliability was assessed using Krippendorff's Alpha (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007), which is appropriate for measurement level variables from nominal to ratio and accounts for chance agreement, making it a more conservative estimate of reliability (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002). Initial reliability estimates were satisfactory and ranged from .79 to .93 using SPSS macros for Kripendorff's alpha. Next, 13 articles (25%) of the census were independently coded. This second round of intercoder reliability estimates improved and ranged from .81 to .94. Given that methodologists agree that reliability coefficients of .70 or greater are generally acceptable, especially for more conservative indices such as Krippendorff's Alpha (Lombard et al, 2002), intercoder reliability was deemed strong and acceptable, and the remainder of the sample was coded.

RESULTS

Of the 51 articles, rhetorical analysis ($n = 29$, 57%) was the most frequently used methodology for analyzing crisis response strategy, followed by experiment ($n = 12$, 23.5%), case study ($n = 3$, 6%), quantitative content analysis ($n = 3$, 6%), and survey ($n = 2$, 4%). With respect to organization type involved in crisis, more than half of the crises analyzed occurred in corporations ($n = 27$, 53%), and 17 (33%) involved individuals. Only 4 (7.8%) crises analyzed were for government organizations, and even fewer ($n = 1$, 2%) were nonprofit organization-related crises. Regarding industry type, the majority ($n = 10$, 20%) was coded as political candidates or in a political context, and the second most frequent type was the transportation industry ($n = 9$, 18%) followed by the petroleum gasoline industry ($n = 6$, 12%), sports industry ($n = 5$, 10%), a health-related industry ($n = 3$, 6%), and others (telecommunication, consumer goods manufacturer, government, defense, etc.).

To answer RQ 1 (a), analyzing the relationships between organization type and the overall goal of organizations' crisis responses, cross-tab analysis was conducted. The results suggested that organization type was not a factor that affected organizations' primary goal for their crisis responses. Regardless of organization type, image restoration or image repair was the primary goal for the organizations' crisis responses. About 78% of corporations ($n = 21$) had their image restoration as a primary goal, and 94% of individuals ($n = 16$) focused on their image restoration in their crisis responses. All government organizations ($n = 4$) included in the sample revealed image repair as their primary goal of crisis responses. When looking at corporations more closely, 63% of corporations ($n = 17$) involved in crises were publicly traded companies, 22% ($n = 6$) were privately owned companies, and 15% ($n = 4$) were non-US corporations.

However, this more specific specification of corporation type did not make any differences in predominantly focusing on image repair as a goal for crisis responses. For individual person involved crises, 53% ($n = 9$) were U.S. politicians, and 47% ($n = 8$) were either CEO or employee of the corporations. All politicians involved crises responses focused on their image repair (100%). Among 4 governmental organizations related crises, there were two cases for state/local levels of government organization, and one case for both federal and international levels. Again the same results were revealed. Primary goal for crisis responses was image repair regardless of the organization type.

Results of RQ 1(b), investigating relationships between organization type and the crisis type cluster, revealed no significant relationships (χ^2 (3, 49) = 6.3, $p = .39$). Most of the crises involved were in the preventable crisis cluster (53%, $n = 27$), followed by accident crisis cluster (31%, $n = 16$) and victims cluster (19%, $n = 10$). There were no differences in the crisis types analyzed depending on organization type. Regardless of organization type, crises analyzed in previous literature are more likely to be in preventable crisis cluster. The crisis types for 50% of corporations involved ($n = 10$) were in the preventable crisis cluster, whereas only 3 corporation-involved crises were in the victim crisis cluster. About 60% of individual-involved crises ($n = 9$) were also in the preventable crisis cluster, while 20% of them ($n = 3$) were either in the victim or accident crisis type cluster. Only one crisis case that was involved with non-profit organization was in the victim crisis cluster.

RQ1 (c) was written to explore if there were a relationship between organization type, crisis response strategy employed, and effectiveness. Results suggested that there were significant differences among types of organizations in the cases of defeasibility (χ^2 (3, 49) = 14.85, $p = .005$)

and bolstering (χ^2 (3, 49) = 14.54, p = .006) response strategies used. Corporations did not usually adopt the defeasibility strategy (only 3.7% adopted (n = 1); N = 27), whereas more than half of individuals (53%, n = 9) employed the strategy (n = 17) (but none from non-profit organizations and one from public agency/department did so).

There was no difference between publicly traded companies and privately owned companies in adopting the defeasibility strategy. All types of corporations did not adopt the defeasibility strategy as often as individuals did. Regarding the bolstering strategy, 94% of individuals (n = 16) used bolstering in crisis response, while 48% of corporations adopted the strategy. Regardless of individuals' type (politician, CEO, or employees), individuals adopted the bolstering strategy a lot more often than other organization types. In addition, there was significant difference found between shifting-the-blame between organization type and that strategy's effectiveness (χ^2 (3, 49) = 7.78, p = .02). About 72% of shifting-the-blame strategies used by corporations were evaluated as effective by the authors, yet not one of the shifting-the-blame strategies employed by individuals was evaluated as effective. There seems to be an organizational type influence in the case of shifting-the-blame strategy and its evaluations of effectiveness; no such effect was found in other strategies.

Regarding RQ2 (a), there were no significant differences in the overall goal of the organizations' crisis response depending on the crisis type cluster (victim, accident, and preventable) (χ^2 (3, 49) = 10.4, p = .11). In other words, regardless of crisis type, all organizations analyzed in the past crisis research emphasized their reputation restoration or image repair in their crisis responses. Interestingly, about 75 % of victim crisis cluster cases (n = 6) also focused on image repair, whereas only one victim crisis cluster case had public health and one had public safety as primary goals. No cases from the accident or preventable crisis cluster type had public health or public safety as the goal of crisis response: image repair was the primary goal for all preventable crisis cluster cases (n = 20) and all accident crisis cluster cases (n = 12) included in the sample.

RQ 2 (b) asked if there were a relationship between overall goal of the organizations' crisis response strategy and its effectiveness. Among 51 articles, the goal of 80% of them (n = 41) was organizational image repair or restoration. Only one case from public health and one from public safety were identified. Thus, due to lack of variance in the category, detecting significant difference between crisis response strategy and organizational goal was not likely.

Regarding RQ3 (a), there was no significant difference in crisis response strategy in its time being used during the crisis response period (χ^2 (14, 962) = 11.85, p = .618). As seen in Table 1, bolstering was used more often in later phases of organizations' crisis responses (43% to 47%), while denial was more often used in early phases of organizations' crisis responses (42% to 37%). Corrective action and mortification strategies were also adopted slightly more often during later phases of organizations' crisis responses.

As to RQ 3(b), authors in 31% (n = 16) of the census did not provide an overall evaluation of the organizations' crisis response effectiveness. However, when an evaluation was provided (n = 36), the majority of the cases were deemed highly ineffective or ineffective overall by the authors (n = 22, 63%), while 13 (37%) were evaluated to be effective overall, and one was neither effective nor ineffective. Most of the crisis strategies (more than 90% of the cases) were used in various combinations with other strategies when used. There were only two incidents where one was used in isolation during the early phase of crisis response, in the cases of denial (3.4%, n = 1) and shifting- the-blame (n = 1) strategies. One additional shifting-the-blame strategy was used in isolation during the later phases of one organization's crisis response (n = 1). However,

TABLE 1
Crisis Response Strategy Analyzed in Crisis Research

Crisis Response Strategy	Strategy Adoption	Effectiveness of Strategy Employed	Adoption in the Early Phase of Crisis Response	Adoption in the Later Phases of Crisis Response
Denial	56.9% (29)	13.8% (4)	42% (21)	37% (19)
Shifting-the-blame	34.7% (17)	29.4% (5)	22% (11)	18% (9)
Attack-the-accuser	36.7% (18)	16% (3)	26% (13)	24% (12)
Excuse	10.2% (5)	20% (1)	4% (2)	4% (2)
Defeasibility	22.4% (11)	30% (3)	20% (10)	18% (9)
Justification	16.3% (8)	12.5% (1)	8% (4)	10% (5)
Ingratiation	10.2% (5)	20% (1)	4% (2)	4% (2)
Bolstering	58.8% (30)	50% (15)	43% (22)	47% (24)
Transcendence	18.4% (9)	22.2% (2)	12% (6)	14% (7)
Differentiation	12.2% (6)	16.6% (1)	4% (2)	10% (5)
Corrective Action	45.1% (23)	52.2% (12)	30% (15)	33% (17)
Compensation	16.3% (8)	25% (1)	8% (4)	6% (3)
Mortification	45.1% (23)	52.4% (11)	24% (12)	28% (14)
Full Apology	19.1% (9)	71.4% (5)	6% (3)	8% (5)
Other Strategies Mentioned	Minimization (6), Provocations (4), Compassion (3), Accident (3), distance (2), Scapegoating (3), separation (2)		15	13
Total Article N (%)	51 (100%)			

when strategies were used in isolation, they were all evaluated to be ineffective, regardless of the phase. Since there were few cases with strategies used in isolation, no significant differences in the overall evaluation of organizations' responses were found between crisis strategy use in isolation versus use in various combinations.

RQ 3(c) was written to explore the relationships between target audiences of organizations' crisis response strategies employed and their effectiveness. The most frequently targeted audience for organizations' crisis responses was the general public (73%, $n = 37$), followed by customers (30%, $n = 15$), employees (18%, $n = 9$), government agencies (6%, $n = 3$), and, finally, shareholders (4%, $n = 2$). There was no case where the response targeted activist groups. Due to lack of variance in the main target audience category, there was no significant difference between crisis response strategy and effectiveness in terms of target audience (χ^2 (9, 49) < 9.83, $p > .05$), indicating that all crisis strategies in the sample of published research primarily targeted the general public or customers.

DISCUSSION

The results of this research reveal that the most prevalent crisis response strategy used across a variety of crisis and organizational types was for reputation maintenance. This strategic focus on reputation at the expense of providing instructing and adjusting information is problematic, given publics evaluate crisis responses based on how well organizations prioritize public good or

serve public interest (Lee, 2009; Kim & Liu, in press). In addition, our results suggest that image repair was the primary goal of the crisis responses analyzed in past research regardless of crisis type cluster, whereas less than 2% considered public safety or public health their goal of crisis responses.

For instance, image repair was the primary goal of organizations' crisis responses even in cases of crises involving victims, such as natural disasters. In addition to clear implications for public safety, this trend is also problematic as failure to provide proper instructing crisis information sends publics the message that their well-being is not the top priority in response. In any crisis, the most important messages publics expect from the organizations involved are "how the crisis will affect publics" and "what to do to protect themselves from the crisis" (Coombs, 2007). In situations where there is less attribution of crisis responsibility such as the victim crisis cluster type (i.e., natural disasters), instructing information is even more important to cultivate public perception that the organization is in control of the situation.

However, our analyses indicate that organizations tend to predominantly emphasize reputation management or image repair regardless of whether the crisis is in the victim, accident, or preventable cluster. We believe that crisis managers must assign equal importance to maintaining public safety and preserving reputation in their crisis discourse, with the understanding that base crisis responses (instructing and adjusting) meet organizations' basic ethical responsibilities in their crisis responses (Kim & Liu, in press). We conclude that if organizations and practitioners more evenly allocated time on reputation restoration and public safety or education (through instructing and adjusting information), both their short- and long-term reputations would benefit.

Regarding the relationship between organization type and crisis response strategy, our findings suggest that individuals tend to use defeasibility more often than corporations. Defeasibility as a strategy communicates that a responsible actor lacked control and information regarding the crisis. Since publics might perceive corporations to have more adequate resources for information access and control over the crisis than do individuals (Pfau & Wan, 2006), defeasibility is likely to be more acceptable to publics as a response from individuals involved in a crisis. In addition, shifting-the-blame was not an effective strategy in the case of individuals compared to corporations, which offers interesting insight.

When a person is responsible for the crisis, he/she may effectively argue that the crisis was out of his/her own control or he/she lacked information (defeasibility), but shifting-the-blame to others is likely to be ineffective, perhaps because it may lead publics to think the person is irresponsible. Conversely, in the case of corporations, since publics tend to perceive that they have enough resources to control the crisis or gather related information, it may not be advisable for corporations to use the defeasibility strategy but instead shift the blame—if appropriate.

In addition, although denial as a response strategy was used slightly more often during the initial phase of organization responses than in the later phases, overall all it was consistently employed throughout the whole crisis response period (Kim, Avery, & Lariscy, 2009). Crisis managers might be tempted to use denial during the initial phase more than the later phases, as they might not have enough information regarding the crisis and are uncertain about their responsibility. However, this tendency is problematic given denial strategy was consistently used throughout the response phases, even after the initial inclination likely should have subsided.

Given the importance that has been placed on activist groups and their impact on an organization's crisis management (Coombs, 2008; Sallot, Porter, & Acosta-Alzura, 2004), it is interesting

that there was no single case with crisis response targeting activists in our research. These groups are the most active in engaging in the discourse of organizations' crisis responses through a wide range of channels, and new media have given them even more powerful and pervasive voices through blogs and other social media tools.

Corporate crises can be quickly spread via the Internet to others, as the recent Dominos' food tampering crisis (York, April 14, 2009) and Motrin's controversial ad crisis (Belkin, Nov. 17, 2008) illustrate. Crisis managers should pay more attention to activist groups when crafting crisis response messages for more effective and quicker crisis containment, and public relations scholars should do likewise in focusing on those cases in their research in order to yield a richer set of prescriptions specific to that powerful audience.

The finding that several of the analyses run failed to reveal significance largely due to lack of variance across the cases (e.g., target audiences or crisis type) indicates a need for more diversity in the crisis cases scholars are analyzing. In fact, the narrow area of focus also leads to a limitation of this study; running many statistical analyses would have yielded more concrete and heuristic findings (although, of course, in and of itself that limitation is an important contribution). In future research, with a broader sample of articles reporting more thorough quantitative findings, an actual meta-analysis to reveal effect size can be conducted; however, at this point, the sample is inadequate to do so. To conduct an actual meta-analysis that provides more accurate and holistic views on crisis responses in crisis research, scholars should try to be more thorough in reporting related quantitative results (M, SD, p- value, etc.).

Another limitation is that we had to rely on authors' conclusions and classifications; of course, although presumably accurate there is no guarantee their categorizations and assessments are valid. In addition, future research classifying the past crisis articles into three different categories would yield more specific and interesting overviews on crisis responses than the current study: 1) organizations'/ individuals' crisis responses, 2) media coverage of organizations'/ individuals' crisis responses, and 3) publics'/stakeholders' evaluations of organizations'/individuals' crisis responses. In our study, only five articles investigated non-US organizations'/individuals' crisis responses (four for non-U.S. corporations and one for non-U.S. government organization), which makes it impossible to see if culture is a factor for crisis response recommendations. This finding suggests that we might need to focus more on culture issues in future crisis research.

All in all, the results of this comprehensive analysis have revealed several compelling considerations for practitioners and scholars in public relations. Scholars are issued a warning in that we might be focusing too much on reputation repair as the primary goal of crisis response with a relative negligence on instructing and adjusting information that may be critical to preserving public safety. Lastly, new evidence is offered on a comprehensive sample of crisis cases that our crisis research lacks diversity, particularly with regard to target audience, crisis type, and organization type.

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APPENDIX 1

ARTICLES INCLUDED IN CRISIS RESPONSE STRATEGY ANALYSIS

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