THE EFFECT OF MODALITY AND RESPONSE STRATEGY ON EVALUATIONS OF CREDIBILITY AND REPUTATION

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and hereby certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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To Celia: Grad school would have been a calmer, more restful, and an even more productive place without you. You being in it, however, made it the amazing experience that it was.

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THE EFFECT OF MODALITY AND CRISIS RESPONSE ON EVALUATIONS OF CREDIBILITY AND REPUTATION

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Dr. Glen Cameron, Thesis Adviser

ABSTRACT

Crisis situations represent major threats to the perceptions of companies by their key publics. This study draws from existing research in an effort to understand how the crisis response message characteristics of modality and response strategy influence evaluations of credibility and reputation. The primary goal was to understand if and how modality and response strategy interact to influence key publics’ assessments of an organization in a crisis situation. This was accomplished through an experiment that measured subjects’ pre-existing evaluations of a company’s reputation and credibility and compared them to evaluations made after a crisis had been simulated and a response was received.

Results showed that the response strategy used during a crisis has significant implications for reputation assessments, and credibility assessments are significantly impacted by the modality in which a message is received. Significant interactions also exist that indicate both credibility and reputation assessments have less variance when the response is viewed in an audio/visual modality than when the response has a text modality. Findings also included implications of modality and crisis response strategy on credibility and reputation assessments based on whether or not subjects were able to correctly discern message characteristics after viewing the stimuli.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In a time of increased marketplace competition and advanced information and communication technologies, effectively and strategically communicating with audiences is of high interest for companies. A company’s reputation is a strategic resource that has a direct effect on business processes and must therefore be carefully managed and protected (Deephouse, 2000). Public relations and communication practices in general have become vital for companies to manage reputations and effectively compete in today’s market, and these tools become especially crucial when situations arise that can threaten or degrade reputations. These situations, referred to as crisis situations, can be anything from product malfunctions to natural disasters or scandals involving top executives (Coombs, 2007b).

Research on how to best communicate during a crisis situation has rapidly increased over the last few decades. Multiple theories exist that suggest the appropriate response strategy, and multiple factors have been identified that determine which response strategy to utilize. However, other factors exist that determine the message’s effectiveness, including whether or not the message receiver deems the message to be credible. Creating credible messages and being seen as a credible source of information is therefore vital to crisis communication due to its central role in the persuasion process. Furthermore, changing information technologies have increased industry interest in how message form impacts message evaluations. Research has shown that modality, or the use
of text, graphics, sound, and video on a single communication platform, could impact credibility evaluations (e.g. Ibelem & Powell, 2001) making it imperative to consider modality when creating credible messages that will be accepted by the audience.

Relating back to crisis communication, professionals charged with communicating on behalf of a company in crisis must not only choose the response strategy used in the message, but must also choose a form for that message to be delivered. Understanding how these two factors interact to impact the message receivers’ evaluations of company credibility and reputation can increase the likelihood of successfully navigating a crisis situation and protecting a company from further damage.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the present research is to evaluate how the crisis response chosen by a company in crisis and the form in which the response is delivered impacts the message receivers’ evaluation of the credibility and reputation of the company delivering the message. Whereas multiple studies have looked at how crisis response impacts perceptions of reputation and how modality impacts perceptions of credibility, modality and response strategy have not been looked at together to understand if or how the two interact to affect both reputation and credibility perceptions.

This study aims to examine how crisis response strategy and modality interact to affect assessments of company reputation and credibility to provide communication professionals with more insight on how to most effectively communicate messages to relevant audiences in a crisis situation in order to protect reputations and remain credible. Companies spend millions of dollars every year preparing for and recovering from crisis
situations. A better understanding of how modality and crisis response strategy work together to protect reputation and credibility assessments will allow companies to more effectively and efficiently accomplish their communication goals.

**Rationale**

Research has shown that when crisis situations occur, it is imperative that companies communicate with relevant publics in a way that will help to mitigate the damage the crisis situation has on the company’s reputation (Griffin et. al., 1991 and Romeo et. al., 1994). Multiple factors have been shown to influence what strategy is best suited for accomplishing this goal, such as crisis type, crisis responsibility, and crisis history of the company (Coombs, 1995). Factors surrounding the crisis and the company must be considered when determining the appropriate response strategy, as that response strategy can have a significant impact on the evaluation of the crisis situation by publics.

In a time of rapid advancements of information technologies, communication has never been easier. Information is more accessible and instantaneous then ever before. This is primarily good news for companies in a crisis situation. However, the changing landscape of how information is gathered and sent — specifically the Internet — has significantly impacted how people evaluate messages (Johnson & Kaye, 1998 and Stavrositu & Sundar, 2008). Credibility is one area of increased interest sparked by the Internet. The Internet offers a medium through which message senders can easily manipulate the form of messages in order to best convey them, increasing research around how different message forms, or modality, influence message evaluations.

It is clearly of the utmost importance that messages communicated during a crisis are effective and accepted by relevant publics. Modality as it pertains to credibility can
play a major role in whether or not a message is accepted by an audience. If the source of the message is deemed not credible, the message will fail to be persuasive and be rejected, therefore failing to aid the company in crisis. Crisis response as it pertains to reputation also plays a large role in how effective the message is at mitigating the harmful effects a crisis situation has on a company. The wrong communication during a crisis can worsen the situation and result in even more harm to a company’s reputation and other assets. Therefore, it is essential to understand what impacts credibility and reputation assessments of varying online crisis responses, and how modality and crisis response strategy, specifically, work together to influence these assessments.

**Research Questions**

To extend existing research on crisis communication, it is necessary to consider how modality and crisis response strategy interact to affect message evaluations. Considering the importance of a firm’s reputation to business success, the importance of response strategies when communicating with publics during a crisis, as well as the importance of message credibility and how it may be affected by message modality, the following research questions are posed:

- **R1a:** How does message response strategy impact the perceived reputation of a company?
- **R1b:** How does message response strategy impact the perceived credibility of a company?
- **R2a:** How does modality impact the perceived reputation of a company?
- **R2b:** How does modality impact the perceived credibility of a company?
- **R3:** How do response strategy and modality interact to impact the perceived credibility and reputation of a company?
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundations

Numerous theories exist surrounding how a company should respond in the midst of a crisis. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory developed by Timothy Coombs (1995) and Image Repair Theory developed by William Benoit (1997) are two of the most influential theories in the field of crisis communication. Both lend insight into what influences appropriate strategies for responding to reputational threats posed by crisis situations in order to mitigate damage.

Situational Crisis Communication Theory. According to Coombs (2007a):

“Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) advances and tests hypotheses related to how perceptions of the crisis situation affect the crisis response and the effects of crisis responses on outcomes such as reputation, emotions, and purchase intention” (p. 137).

SCCT requires crisis communication professionals to evaluate the level of reputational threat that the crisis presents, which includes determining the responsibility of the reputational threat as well as the company’s current reputation and crisis history. These factors then help to determine how the crisis will be viewed by stakeholders, so an appropriate response strategy can be developed and employed (Coombs, 2007a).

As part of SCCT, crises are grouped based on type, and evaluating crisis type is the first step when using SCCT to respond to a crisis (Coombs, 2007b). Crisis type is
conceptualized as the frame that the public uses to interpret the event or crisis situation. The main objective is to evaluate personal control (how much control the company had over the event) as well as crisis responsibility (the extent to which the company is to blame for the event). Coombs has verified that as perceived control over the event increases, perceived responsibility for the event also increases (Coombs, 1998). In fact, control and responsibility seem to be so strongly and directly correlated that they are often treated as two parts of the same concept.

This level of perceived responsibility is a key indicator to companies about the amount of reputational damage a crisis could inflict. In part determined by this severity of reputational threat, SCCT offers suggestions for crisis communication professionals in the form of crisis response strategies. These crisis communication strategies are used to repair damaged reputations, reduce negative emotions, and hopefully prevent negative behavioral intentions (Coombs, 2007b). The stronger or more severe the reputational threat of the crisis, the more the chosen strategy must aim to accommodate the victims of the crisis. The more accountable a company is for the crisis, the more the public will expect the company to do for those adversely affected by the situation. This ultimately results in the company meeting the public’s expectations of the company’s behavior, which in turn helps to mitigate the reputational damage caused by the crisis situation (Coombs, 2007b).

SCCT offers nine primary crisis types that help guide the selection of crisis response strategies. This selection is further guided by the performance history of the company, which includes factors such as crisis history and relationship history, or simply put, the past actions and conduct of the organization (Coombs, 2007b).
Crisis type must then be determined, which is done by evaluating the three crisis type clusters provided by Coombs: the victim cluster, the accidental cluster, and the preventable cluster. After crisis type is determined, SCCT offers crisis response strategies that are grouped as either primary or secondary. Primary response strategies are: attack the accuser, denial, scapegoat, excuse, justification, compensation, and apology (Coombs, 1995). Secondary response strategies include reminder, ingratiati-on, and victim image. These responses can be ordered on a continuum ranging from complete accommodation for the victims to a very defensive stance taken by the company. As mentioned, crisis responsibility helps determine the level of accommodation in the response strategy that the company should employ (Coombs, 2007b).

*Image Repair Theory*. Image Repair Theory is another foundational theory that determines crisis response strategies in the wake of a reputational threat. It is based off of the assumptions that an offensive act has occurred and that the accused is responsible for that act. From there, Image Repair Theory offers five broad strategies — some with sub-categories — for responding to a reputational threat. The type of strategy that should be used is determined by situational factors surrounding the crisis, such as responsibility for the crisis and the audience receiving the message (Benoit, 1997).

A primary difference between Image Repair Theory and SCCT is that instead of focusing on crisis type or crisis phase, Image Repair Theory focuses almost exclusively on message characteristics. It is also important to note that Image Repair Theory is less concerned with factual information about the responsibility of the event, and more concerned with the *perception* of who is responsible for the crisis event. Evaluations of crisis responsibility should therefore be based solely on public perception (Benoit, 1997).
This same concept holds true with offensiveness. It does not matter if the act was actually offensive, only if the act was perceived as offensive by key publics (Benoit, 1997). After an evaluation of responsibility and offensiveness, a company should examine possible response strategies.

The five strategies of Image Repair Theory include denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness of the event, corrective action, and mortification. Image Repair theory goes on to provide three suggestions for utilizing the strategies: preparation for the crisis in the form of contingency plans, thorough analysis of the crisis and accusations, and identification of relevant audiences (Benoit, 1997). These suggestions in addition to a complete and honest evaluation of responsibility and offensiveness help guide the selection of a response strategy in an attempt to reduce damage to the company’s reputation as a result of a crisis situation.

These theories help provide the basis for responding to reputational threats. Multiple studies surrounding these theories have demonstrated that the crisis response strategy employed by an organization can have a significant impact on the outcome of the crisis situation (Coombs & Holladay, 2001, 2004, Benoit & Drew, 1997). These theories help lend insight into how best to respond and what factors to consider when drafting that response.

**Crisis Characteristics and Response Strategy**

SCCT and Image Repair Theory suggest various crisis characteristics that influence the appropriate response strategy that should be employed by a company in crisis. Looking just at these two foundational theories, multiple factors are referenced as influencers of the response strategy. These include the company’s history, the company’s
control over the crisis, the company’s responsibility for the crisis, the crisis severity, the crisis offensiveness, and the crisis type (Benoit, 1997 and Coombs, 1995). All of these factors are meant to guide communication professionals toward communicating effectively with their audiences as to lessen or moderate the amount of damage that a crisis inflicts on a company.

Since no two situations are similar, it is challenging to predict how well a crisis response strategy will work. Furthermore, these strategies do not guarantee a company will not experience reputational damage as a result of the crisis. They only aim to minimize the negative consequences as much as possible. Numerous studies verify that the aforementioned characteristics do impact the successfulness of the response (E.g. Coombs, 2006). It is therefore imperative that crisis characteristics be considered when determining the appropriate response strategy during a crisis situation.

The suggested response strategies of the two aforementioned theories have a considerable amount of overlap. Whereas both theories have unique ways of arriving at a crisis response strategy, the theories suggest some very similar responses. As mentioned, Image Repair Theory offers five responses with sub-categories that vary on a continuum from accommodative toward the victim to defensive of the company. Due to their polarity pertaining to accommodation and defensiveness, as well as the distinctiveness of their message characteristics, this study will focus on the response strategies of corrective action and shift the blame when evaluating how crisis response strategy impacts credibility and reputation. These response strategies outlined by Image Repair Theory are very similar to the apology/compensation and scapegoat response strategies suggested and outlined by SCCT.
Corrective action is a general response strategy that involves the company in crisis promising to correct the problem caused by or causing the crisis. This can come in two different forms: the company can promise to restore conditions to the order they were in before the incident, or the company can promise to prevent a reoccurrence of the offensive act in the future (Benoit, 1995). A company can use one or both of these forms of corrective action when using this strategy. This strategy can but does not have to include an apology or an acceptance of the responsibility. On the opposite end of the accommodative/defensive spectrum, shift the blame is a denial strategy response that involves the company claiming that another group or company is actually responsible for the offensive act. This is a very defensive stance and is recommended when the amount of control and responsibility the company has over the incident is low (Benoit, 1997).

Corrective action as a response strategy is more accommodative in nature than defensive. Especially in cases where the company promises to restore the situation to the order that it was in before the crisis, the company is recognizing an offensive act and promising to make good. When utilizing corrective action, a company does not have to admit fault and can use the tactic whether or not the public perceives the company as being responsible for the crisis (Benoit, 1997). For example, in the famous Tylenol tampering case of the 1980s, even though Johnson & Johnson was not held responsible by the public for the deaths associated with consuming cyanide tainted capsules, they promised that they would prevent the situation from occurring again. Backing up this promise, Johnson & Johnson created tamper-proof packaging and helped to change industry standards of medicinal packaging for the safety of all consumers. Often, however, due to the high accommodative nature of the strategy, it is employed when the
company is perceived as highly responsible and in control of the situation (Benoit, 1997). An example of this is the case of the BP oil spill, the world’s largest offshore oil spill in the history of the petroleum industry. BP’s president Tony Hayward promised to restore the ocean and coastline affected by the mass oil spill stating, “We will fix it. I guarantee it. The only question is we do not know when” (Guardian, 2012).

Shift the blame is another tactic outlined by Benoit as part of Image Repair Theory. As a sub-category of denial, this response strategy aims to place another group as responsible for the offensive act in the eyes of the public. It is considered highly defensive of the company and less accommodative toward those affected by the offensive act. When using this response, the company asserts that another company or group is actually to blame for the offensive act (Benoit, 1997). An example of this response is Exxon’s stance during the famous Exxon Valdez oil spill. After the catastrophic spill, the chair of Exxon made statements blaming Alaska state officials and the Coast Guard for not moving quickly and therefore causing a long delay that did not allow Exxon to gain authorization on the scene so that they could immediately begin cleaning efforts (Benoit, 1997). The idea behind this response strategy is that if the company is not to blame for the offensive act, their reputation should not sustain damage.

As previously mentioned, the response strategies of corrective action and shift the blame are on opposite ends of the accommodative/defensive continuum. When each will be successful is largely based off of the public’s perception of responsibility for the crisis. If the public deems the company responsible or in control of the crisis situation, an accommodative strategy will be more successful in mitigating the harmful effects of the
crisis situation. On the other hand, if the public does not believe the company is responsible for or in control of the crisis, a defensive stance would be appropriate. As discussed briefly earlier, accommodative strategies can also be successful even if responsibility is not placed on the company in crisis. The danger the company in crisis faces is in choosing too defensive of a strategy based on the public’s perceived level of the company’s control and responsibility of the crisis event.

**Communication Professionals and Responding in Crisis**

It is well established that the right response strategy is imperative during a crisis situation. However, the job of communication professionals during a crisis is not always as clear-cut as industry research implies. Past research has illustrated the high importance of responding during crisis situations. Regardless of the response used, not responding has been shown to significantly damage a company's reputation (Bradford & Garrett, 1995). Knowing a response is mandatory, communication professionals must quickly decide how to respond. This includes not only what to say, but where and how to say it. For instance, should a written press release be offered to the public? Should an audio/visual response be recorded and posted online? Where should the information be shared? Who should the information be shared with? Etc.

To complicate their job even more, communication professionals often do not have control over what stance their organization decides to take on the issue. Whether the restraints are legal or company policies, situations arise where communication professionals do not get to choose the response they must relay to relevant publics. In these situations, knowing how message characteristics and response strategy interact
could help communication professionals protect their company through strategically designed crisis responses.

This communication with relevant publics through crisis responses is of the utmost importance when companies are facing reputational and credibility threats, as the actions taken by the communication professionals on behalf of the company directly impact how the company is perceived. The perception of a company by its stakeholders is referred to as the company's reputation. Reputations are widely recognized as being valuable, albeit intangible, assets. Strategically and effectively responding can help to mitigate and repair the reputational damage sustained by a crisis, making properly responding of the utmost importance (Coombs, 2007a).

**Modality**

Choosing what to say is the first step when developing a crisis response. After a response is chosen, however, communication professionals must then decide how to present the response. This includes making decisions about what form, or modality, the message is presented in. Modality is defined as the use of text, graphics, sound, and video on a single communication platform (Kiousis, 2001). Modality has become an interesting concept to study due to the changing way in which people send and receive information in today's digital and technological world. Research over the past decade especially has begun to look at how the form of the message impacts the cognitive processes involved with consuming the message.

Modality has been explored within multiple contexts of communication research. A large body of research has focused on modality and learning (Griffin, Stevenson, 1992)
as well as modality and attitude formation (Chaiken & Eagly, 1976). The relationship between modality and credibility has also been examined. For example, Ibelem and Powell (2001) looked at credibility perceptions of newspaper and television news and found that the additional audio and visual elements of television news produced higher evaluations of message credibility compared to text-only newspapers. Another study conducted by Kiousis and Dimitreova (2006) examined the impact of modality on source credibility perceptions as well as salience, attitudes, and evaluation for an online news story. Their findings showed that richer modality heightened viewer’s awareness on the topic.

Modality and media effects have been another popular area of study. Because the study of media effects includes influences of either the content or the form of the message on the media consumer, modality is at the center of the research (McLeod, Kosicki, & Pan, 1991). Text has long since been considered one of the most important forms through which to communicate information due to its prevalence and the central role it plays at all levels of education (McNamara, 2001). Technological advancements have, of course, led to news being consumed in multiple forms. This has led communication researchers to question how text, pictures, audio, and video (consumed either separately or together) influence the effect of the media messages.

Learning and message comprehension are areas of study that have looked extensively at modality, especially text and video. Studies surrounding reading comprehension have revealed the importance of self-regulated informational processing, which allows the reader to slow down, go back and re-read, or stop to think about the message content (Bazerman, 1985; McNamara, Levinstein, & Boonthum, 2004). These
characteristics of text messages allow for higher comprehension of the printed material (McNamara, Levinstein, & Boonthum, 2004).

When examining video messages and learning/comprehension, studies have found that the transitory characteristics of videos do not allow for self-regulated informational processing and therefore leads to difficulties that were not present in the text condition. This is largely due to cognitive resources in the working memory being limited, which can therefore be overloaded by the transient information of the video if the video moves faster than the viewer's cognitive ability allows for (Sweller, van Merrienboer, & Paas, 1998). This mismatch could lead to insufficient learning because the viewer is overwhelmed. Furthermore, the transient nature of videos means that not paying attention could lead to the loss of relevant information (Lowe, 1994 and Sturm, 1984).

Annie Lang’s Limited Capacity Model of Motivated Mediated Message Processing (LC4MP) attempts to explain how mediated messages are processed. This model has direct implications for modality’s effect on message processing. The model assumes that people are information processors and that their ability to process information is limited. The model posits that information processing is actually conceived as a group of subprocesses that people perform simultaneously. These subprocesses can be either automatic (without conscious volition on the part of the message recipient) or controlled (intended by the message recipient). Three major subprocesses are identified by the LC4MP: encoding, storage, and retrieval. These subprocesses happen simultaneously while media messages are being processed and help the message recipient to successfully process that message (Lang, 2000).
The LC4MP predicts that due to message recipients' limited ability to process media messages, if the messages are complex (i.e. presented in multiple modalities simultaneously) they will overload the processing system and negatively impact recall abilities (Lang, 2000). Multiple studies have supported this theory showing that adding extra modalities to text-only messages degrades memory for content (e.g. DeFleur et al., 1992). Inference, distraction, over-stimulation, cognitive overload, and fatigue have all been cited as possible explanations for these findings (e.g. Heller, 1990).

Another area of study interested in modality is credibility research. Source credibility has been shown to be an important factor when looking at the influence a message has on the viewer's attitudes and behaviors. Research suggests the more credible the source, the more persuasive the message (Albright & Levy, 1995). Findings concerning the effect of message modality on perceptions of source credibility are mixed. Factors such as the characteristics of the communicator, message characteristics, and message content might influence the effect that message modality has on the receiver (e.g. Chaiken & Eagly, 1983). Research done by Chaiken and Eagly (1976) found that text-only messages were perceived as more persuasive than audio or video messages, which aligns with the predictions of the LC4MP. Other studies found that print enables and even encourages systematic thinking and requires message receivers to rely less on peripheral factors such as likeability and trustworthiness. Along the same logic, audio and visual forms distract message receivers and disrupt the processing of important facts or arguments (Bootb-Butterfield & Gutowski, 1993).
Modality’s influence on credibility and message appraisals could have direct implications to crisis communication professionals. One of the primary goals of communicating during a crisis is protecting the company’s strategic resources. This includes protecting the public’s perception of the company in crisis. Relevant publics accepting the crisis response involves the strategy employed as well as whether it is comprehended, persuasive, and deemed credible. If crisis response messages are being perceived as more persuasive, the viewer is theoretically putting more merit into the company’s response, hopefully leading to mitigated damage of the company’s reputation and credibility.

As the Internet has developed and allowed for more variety in how information is presented, modality and its impact on message evaluations has become of increased interest to communication professionals. Research on modality’s influence on major factors such as credibility, comprehension, learning, attitudes, and behaviors suggest that it could play a major role in developing effective crisis response messages. By understanding how crisis response strategy and modality independently and interactively impact reputation and credibility assessments of a company in crisis, communication professionals will be better equipped to effectively respond during a crisis situation, protecting the company from further damage.

**Reputation as an Asset**

In addition to understanding how to respond in crisis situations, it is also important to understand why companies must respond. One of the main reasons companies must respond is to protect their reputation. Research done over the last decade
has given companies reason to believe that reputation may be the key to gaining a competitive advantage in a crowded marketplace. Perhaps due to the “information age” and the availability and extent of information readily available, reputation has become a topic of increased interest. Reputation is defined as an “aggregate evaluation stakeholders make about how well an organization is meeting stakeholder expectations based on its past behaviors” (Wartick, 1992, p. 35).

Reputation is an intangible asset that belongs to a firm and is created through the interaction of the firm and stakeholders. The information regarding the firm and its actions are circulated among stakeholders through various channels. Stakeholders rely on the reputation of firms to make decisions regarding investments, purchases, and career decisions (Dowling, 1986). Due to stakeholder reliance on reputation, having a favorable reputation can lead to excess returns for an organization and even inhibit the mobility of rivals in the industry (Caves & Porter, 1977).

A positive reputation can be a tremendous asset to a company as it signals to stakeholders that it is a desirable option to interact with. Protecting and maintaining a positive reputation is therefore crucial to the continued and future success of a company. The favorable consequences of a good reputation include signaling consumers about product quality, which allows a premium price to be charged, attracting better applicants, enhancing access to capital markets, and attracting investors (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). On the opposite side, a bad corporate reputation can result in many negative effects for the organization. Unwillingness of customers to do business, stricter governmental regulation, and poor supplier relationships are all consequences of a bad reputation that
can have a direct impact on an organization’s performance in a marketplace (Benoit & Pang, 2008).

During a crisis, companies experience an increased amount of media exposure surrounding the details of the crisis. There have been many studies focused on understanding how increased media exposure impacts corporate reputation (Wartick, 1992). One study found that the magnitude of negative media exposure leads to proportional declines in corporate reputation (Romeo, Weinberger & Antes, 1989), whereas another study found that more media exposure — regardless of whether it was positive, negative, neutral, or mixed — negatively affects corporate reputation (Fombrun & Shanely, 1990). Other studies have found that negative media exposure does negatively impact corporate reputation, but other factors, such as source credibility, company responsibility, history, etc., are also important (Griffin, Babin & Attaway, 1991). These studies all illustrate the connection between media exposure and corporate reputation.

This is important because media exposure tends to increase during crisis situations, and communication with the media during a crisis is often a major defense against the negative publicity. Negative publicity is of interest to crisis communicators not only because of the possible negative effects it can have on corporate reputations, but also due to the fact that negative information influences consumers disproportionately more when compared to positive information (Mizerski, 1982). It is therefore of the utmost importance that companies mitigate the effects of negative publicity as much as possible.
The importance of corporate reputation is well understood. Protecting corporate reputation, then, is vital to business leaders and communication professionals. Companies recognize the imperative of a good reputation and take preventative and restorative approaches to reputational threats (Allen & Caillouet, 1994). During a crisis, these actions take the form of crisis communication tactics, which include the aforementioned response strategies. These are a company’s first line of defense when a crisis situation arises. Picking a response strategy and message form that will most effectively mitigate the reputational damage caused by a crisis is therefore imperative to the continued and future success of a company. However, choosing the appropriate response strategy is only half the battle; getting the audience to accept the message is the other.

**Credibility**

One of the major factors involved in an audience accepting a message is credibility. In fact, within the field of communication, few concepts have seen more attention than the issue of credibility (Metzger, 2003). Due to its central role in the persuasion process, understanding credibility has been a focal point of communication professionals over the last century. Scholars have primarily focused on three types of credibility to better understand how audiences perceive persuasive messages: source credibility, message credibility, and media credibility.

Source credibility began being studied heavily in the 20th century, as it was thought to be a significant component of persuasive speakers. Credibility was often defined as “judgments made by a perceiver concerning the believability of a communicator” (O’Keefe, 1990). Carl Hovland and his colleagues did a significant study
surrounding credibility at Yale University. The study focused on communication and attitude change, as well as source credibility and how it affected the formation of attitudes (Hovland, Janis & Kelley, 1953). In this study, credibility was defined as the speaker’s perceived expertise and trustworthiness. The Yale study suggested a deductive approach in which the credibility of the message was determined by the audience’s perception of the communicator and the message, therefore being a receiver-based construct (Hovland, Janis & Kelley, 1953). This idea has led to hundreds of studies continuing into today that look at the dimensions of source credibility from the perspective of those receiving the message.

The many studies done on source credibility since the Yale study have identified multiple dimensions that have been linked to source credibility. The primary dimensions identified are expertise and trustworthiness (Hovland, Janis & Kelley, 1953). However, many other secondary dimensions include dynamism, composure, sociability, as well as how much the message receiver liked and was similar to the communicator (Hovland, Janis & Kelley, 1953). Prior research strongly correlates the importance of source credibility on the persuasiveness of the message. Quantifying source credibility as a measurement was therefore vital to understanding how it directly influences message perceptions.

McCroskey is credited with developing one of the most notable and widely used scales to measure source credibility. This scale assesses five dimensions of credibility: character, competence, sociability, extroversion, and composure. As the dimensions suggest, they have been used primarily to quantify the characteristics of a person
delivering a message to an audience (McCroskey, 1966). It wasn't until years later that studies started to look at organizations as the source communicator instead of a specific person. Even then, the scales used to assess the credibility of an organization as a source are similar to those developed by McCroskey and include expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, prestige, competitiveness, and familiarity (Metzger, 2003).

Previous credibility research has highlighted the importance of credibility on message effectiveness. However, message effectiveness is not the only reason companies are interested in maintaining high credibility in the eyes of their publics. It has been claimed in both business publications and academic research that the perceptions of a corporation by its key publics play a significant role in how these publics form attitudes about company communication, products, and purchase intentions (Caminiti, 1992 and Lee, 1997). Therefore, if a company lacks positive credibility perceptions, they could have difficulty creating successful messages, selling products, and stimulating demand.

Research by Goldberg and Hartwick (1990) noted the importance of company credibility perceptions and found that as with source/spokesperson credibility, companies perceived as credible would be in a better position to get publics to believe their claims. LaBarbera (1982) had similar findings that highlighted the important interaction between credibility and overall reputation assessments: “A firm without a reputation has an issue with credibility; that is the firm is lacking in trustworthiness and expertise. In turn, this credibility deficit is likely to influence persons receiving the message to respond unfavorably.” Both business publications and academic research have stressed the
importance of company credibility. Often these conversations take place when discussing evaluations of the overall image of a company (e.g. Johnson & Wilson, 1993).

Along with having high overall public perceptions, research shows that when people perceive the source of information to be highly credible, they tend to rely more on the information provided by the source (Wanta & Hu, 1994; Wanta, 1997; and Beaudoin & Thorson, 2005). More importantly, stakeholders are more likely to believe and forgive a company with high credibility (Coombs, 1999). Maintaining credibility as a source communicator is therefore essential to managing key publics’ perceptions of a company.

Relating back to crisis communication, response strategy and message modality could play a significant role in how credibility assessments of the company are made by relevant publics. As discussed, crisis communication practitioners attempt to match the crisis response strategies to the message receivers’ expectations of the company. Meeting the public’s expectations with an appropriate strategy then decreases the damage done to the reputation of the company. As mentioned, credibility and reputation are closely related concepts, and the concept of source credibility is based on perceptions of expertise and trustworthiness. These are closely linked to the concepts of control and compassion that crisis communication experts assert as vital for a company in crisis. Therefore, credibility is considered to be an underlying concept in crisis communication literature.

If a company’s response in a crisis reinforces the concepts of expertise and trustworthiness, it can be posited that the company would be perceived as more credible than if its response did not reinforce these traits. If an organization loses credibility in the
eyes of its publics, it is likely that its reputation will suffer as well (Coombs, 2011). Maintaining both is therefore crucial to organizations in crisis.

**Hypotheses**

After reviewing the research and considering the impact that crisis response strategy and modality can have on reputation and credibility, several hypotheses are posed. For the purposes of this study, two hypothetical crisis situations were simulated in an experiment. In both instances, the crisis situation involved a key public becoming angered over a policy change. This represents a situation in which the company has a high level of perceived control and responsibility over the crisis-inducing event. Because of this high level of responsibility and control, a more accommodative strategy would theoretically be better suited as a crisis response. Corrective action is the accommodative response strategy chosen for the purposes of this study. Based off of the suggestions of Image Repair Theory, this response should better meet the key public’s expectations of the company. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

\[ H1: \text{A corrective action response strategy will result in higher evaluations of the company’s reputation as compared to a shift the blame response} \]

Similarly, a corrective action response in this experiment should be perceived as being more trustworthy and demonstrate more expertise. This should match the key public’s expectations of the company based on responsibility and control being perceived as high. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

\[ H2: \text{A corrective action response strategy will result in higher evaluations of the company's credibility as compared to a shift the blame response} \]
Furthermore, the form in which the two responses were presented in was manipulated by the messages being shown in either text or audio/visual form. Previous research has suggested that text-only messages allow for more cognitive allocation and self-regulated informational processing. Although little research has been done on how modality impacts reputation assessments, research done by Chaiken and Eagly (1976) found that text-only messages were perceived as more persuasive than audio or video messages. If the crisis response message is more persuasive as text than audio/video, reputation evaluations should not suffer as severely.

**H3:** A text response will result in higher evaluations of the company’s reputation as compared to an audio/visual response

Following similar logic, the ability to allocate more cognitive resources in the text condition as compared to the audio/visual condition should lead to higher comprehension of the message. Additionally, since print enables systematic thinking and provides less distraction, it is hypothesized that:

**H4:** A text response will result in higher evaluations of the company’s credibility as compared to an audio/visual response
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Study Design and Participants

To better understand how response strategy and modality impact perceptions of a company's reputation and credibility, data were collected in an experiment that employed a 2 (Crisis Response Strategy: corrective action vs. shift the blame) × 2 (Modality: text vs. audio/visual) × 2 (Messages) × 2 (Order) mixed design. Crisis response strategy and modality were manipulated as between-subject factors. Message was a replication factor and was manipulated within subjects. Order effects were controlled for by randomly assigning participants to groups with the two stimuli messages presented in different orders. The stimuli used in this experiment included both text and audio/visual representations of two different crisis responses pertaining to two different issues.

The experiment was conducted in a pre-test/post-test design. The pre-test measured the participants' pre-existing views of the company's reputation and credibility. This was done through a questionnaire that was identical for all participants. The pre-test survey measured evaluations of the reputation and credibility of three different universities. It also gathered general demographic information and an experiment code unique to each participant so the pre-test survey could be matched to the post-test survey for each participant.

In the post-test survey, participants viewed two messages describing hypothetical policy changes in higher education. After each message, respondents’ perceptions of the
company’s reputation and credibility were reassessed. In addition to questions measuring credibility and reputation, participants were also asked two content-specific questions as a manipulation check. These questions were designed to see if the participant was able to successfully discern message characteristics. General demographic information and the unique experiment code were also collected. The conditions for this phase of the study were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Modality</th>
<th>Crisis Response</th>
<th>Order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Print</td>
<td>Corrective Action</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Print</td>
<td>Corrective Action</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Print</td>
<td>Shift the Blame</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Print</td>
<td>Shift the Blame</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Audio/visual</td>
<td>Corrective Action</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Audio/visual</td>
<td>Corrective Action</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Audio/visual</td>
<td>Shift the Blame</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Audio/visual</td>
<td>Shift the Blame</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants in this study were undergraduate students at the University of Missouri who participated in exchange for course credit in a freshman-level journalism course. All students were recruited with the consent of the professor.
Of all of the participants who received both the pre-test and post-test, 178 participants’ data were able to be correctly paired in order to compute change scores. Of these, the average age was 19, ranging from 18 to 25. Males made up 30 percent of the sample and 70 percent were female. This was the primary data set used for the purposes of this study. From this, scale reliabilities, analysis of significant main effects and interactions of response strategy and modality on reputation and credibility assessments, and analysis regarding ability to discern message characteristics were calculated.

As part of post-hoc analysis, the primary data set was filtered based on whether or not participants answered a content-specific question correctly. This was done as a manipulation check as well as to look exclusively at data in which the participants correctly understood the stimuli messages. Correctly understanding the stimuli messages was determined by them correctly answering the question: “The organization’s response placed the blame on someone else.” Of the 178 participants mentioned above, 63 were able to discern message content by answering the content-specific question correctly. Of these 63 discerning subjects, the average age was 19, ranging from 18 to 21, 22 percent were male and 78 percent were female.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Subject Demographic Characteristics</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paired Pre-test and Post-test</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filtered Data Set</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stimuli

The stimuli for the present study were messages from the University of Missouri in response to hypothetical policy changes designed to invoke opposition from the student body. The University of Missouri was chosen as the company in crisis for the purpose of this study in an attempt to encourage engagement with the experiment stimuli and have relevance to the participants. Each participant saw two messages that were either both audio/visual or both text and both either corrective action response or both shift the blame response. One message was regarding a parking issue while the other was regarding a tuition issue.

Crisis Response Strategy. The crisis response strategies of corrective action and shift the blame were chosen based on the characteristics of the message as well as when the messages should be employed. The message characteristics considered were defensiveness of the company and accommodation to the victims. When the message should be employed is based off of the suggestions of Benoit’s Image Repair Theory, which looks at company control and responsibility.

A corrective action response is very accommodative and is on the opposite end of the accommodative/defensive spectrum as a shift the blame response, which is considered a highly defensive strategy. Furthermore, corrective action is recommended to be used when company control and responsibility over the crisis are high, as compared to low when a shift the blame response is suggested. These extreme differences of message
characteristics and when the message should be employed are why these particular response strategies were chosen.

The response strategies were relayed through university statements made in response to a hypothetical crisis situation. When the response was corrective action, the company’s statement reversed their crisis-inducing decision and restored policy to how it was before the crisis. When the response was shift the blame, the company’s statement blamed another group for the crisis-inducing decision and offered no resolution to the victims of the policy change. Both responses were kept as similar as possible in terms of style and format. See appendix 1 for the messages used in each condition.

Modalities. Message modality selections of text and audio/visual were based on common presentations of information in a web environment as well as their differences in complexity in terms of modality. Audio/visual and text presentations of information during a crisis are much more common than just audio. Furthermore, audio/visual is considered a much more complex modality than text. For these reasons, text and audio/visual were the two modalities chosen for the purposes of this study.

To manipulate modality, what the company said was held constant, but the form it was presented in was manipulated to either text or audio/visual. In the text condition, the company’s response was presented in text on university letterhead. Throughout all of the text conditions, the letterhead remained identical. In the audio/visual conditions, the exact same responses as the text conditions were used, but they were presented as a voice-over and played over generic video clips of the university.
These video clips were obtained from a University of Missouri promotional video created in 2010. Since modality was manipulated as a between-subject factor (each participant viewed either two text responses or two audio/visual responses) two videos were necessary to ensure the same participant did not view the same video footage twice.

All video clips were obtained from the same promotional video, and quality, length of and number of video clips, and the voice used to convey the crisis response were all held constant. This was done to ensure that differences in message appraisals were due to the message modality.

Messages. Two messages were used in this experiment as a replication factor. The messages represented two different crisis situations faced by the University of Missouri. Those crisis situations included a decision to increase student tuition to support higher faculty salaries and a decision to eliminate on-campus parking for students. These two issues were arbitrarily chosen with the hope they would be relevant and angering to the student research participants, as well as allow for message replication.

Order. This experiment included each participant viewing two stimuli messages. Therefore, order of the messages was controlled to ensure it did not affect evaluations. This was done by having half of the participants in each condition view the two messages in the opposite order as the other half of the participants in that same condition, and then collapsing across order.

Dependent Variables

Credibility. Source credibility was assessed using Meyer’s credibility scale. This 7-point Likert scale measures credibility based on five dimensions: trust, accurate, fair, whole story, and unbiased. In other words, it measures the extent to which the message receiver
believes the message source can be trusted, is accurate, is fair, tells the whole story, and is unbiased (Meyer, 1994).

Reputation. Reputation, or the image the message receiver holds toward the company, was measured using a 7-point Likert scale originally created by McCroskey and then modified later by Coombs and Holladay to better address organizations as the object of the assessment (1996). Questions include, “The company is basically honest,” “The company is not concerned with the well being of its publics,” and “I do trust the organization to tell the truth about the incident” (McCroskey, 1996).

Instrument

Data for this study were collected through the online research software provider, Qualtrics. This research software was used for the pre-test survey as well as all eight experiment conditions of the post-test survey. The pre-test survey included questions regarding credibility and reputation assessments of three universities: University of Kansas, University of Missouri, and Washington University. Questions regarding University of Kansas and Washington University were included as distracters and were not analyzed for the purposes of this study. The pre-test survey also included questions regarding the participants' general demographic information. See appendix 2 for the questions asked in the pre-test survey.

The eight conditions of the post-test survey included two stimuli messages, questions regarding the credibility and reputation of the University of Missouri, and general demographic information of the participants. With the exception of the stimuli
messages, all eight conditions were identical. See appendix 3 for the questions asked in the post-test surveys.

**Procedure**

The study participants were recruited in their classrooms with the consent of their professors and were emailed instructions about participation. The first email the participants received contained a link to the pre-test survey. As mentioned, the pre-test survey was the same for all participants. When the participants clicked on the link in their email, they were taken to the online pre-test survey where they were asked to consent and enter their experiment code provided in the email. After consent was gained and their unique experiment code was entered, the participants were asked questions that assessed their perception of the University of Missouri’s credibility and reputation using the scales outlined above. As mentioned, distracter questions were used but not considered during data analysis.

A second email containing links to the post-test experiment survey was sent out five days after the pre-test survey email to the same group of participants. These recruited participants were assigned to one of the eight conditions by choosing the experiment survey link that corresponded to their birthday month and day. After clicking on the link, the participants followed these steps:

1. Indicated consent to the experiment by choosing “yes” to a consent question
2. Entered their unique experiment code
3. Viewed stimulus 1
4. Answered questions regarding the content of the stimulus message
5. Answered questions about the credibility of the University of Missouri
6. Answered questions regarding the reputation of the University of Missouri
7. Viewed stimulus 2
8. Repeated steps 4 through 6 with stimulus 2
9. Answered general demographic information questions including age, year in school, gender, and program of study
10. Exit the experiment site

Participants were informed before participating that there were two parts to the study and that both parts would take approximately 15 minutes each.

Analysis

Data analysis was done using the analytic software, SPSS. The data were initially cleaned and incomplete data sets were removed. The data were then collapsed across order to control for any effect order may have had on the participants’ evaluations of the messages. This resulted in the following four conditions:

<table>
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<th>Table 3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experiment Conditions Collapsed Across Order</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
From there, scale reliabilities were computed using data from all participants who took the pre-test survey. McCroskey’s reputation scale used in this study had a Cronbach’s alpha of .904 and Meyer’s credibility scale had a Cronbach’s alpha of .832.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale Reliabilities</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
<th>N of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>McCroskey’s Reputation Scale</td>
<td>.904</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meyer’s Credibility Scale</td>
<td>.832</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the scales were deemed reliable, a repeated measures ANOVA was done on the post-test data to ensure there were no interactions of message on response strategy and/or modality. The hypotheses regarding the change in reputation and credibility perceptions based on response strategy and modality were then tested by matching pre-test data to post-test data and computing change scores for reputation and credibility assessments. Analysis was then done using these change scores to test the hypotheses and evaluate any possible main effects of response strategy and modality on reputation and credibility assessments. Change scores were used for two reasons. First, any predispositions the participants had toward the university were controlled for. Second, by using change scores, the direction of the change in these assessments was able to be identified.

A planned comparison was done to see whether or not the participants recognized if the responses included blame shifting. This was done as a manipulation check on the matched pre-test/post-test data set. As a final post-hoc analysis, a filter was applied to the
matched pre-test/post-test data that removed all data sets that answered a content-related question incorrectly. This was done to eliminate participants who may not have been fully engaged with the stimuli or who simply did not understand the response. The original hypotheses were then reanalyzed using the filtered data.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

Initial Data Checks

Before the hypotheses were tested and additional tests were run, a repeated measures ANOVA was done to test if any significant interaction effect was observed of message (either parking or tuition) on response strategy and modality. This was done to ensure that any significant effect observed for modality and response was not different based on the message viewed. Since this study is focused on examining the effect of response strategy and modality on perceived reputation and credibility, with message being used solely as a replication factor, there should be no interaction of message and response strategy, message and modality, or message and response strategy and modality on reputation and credibility assessments.

A repeated measures ANOVA revealed no observed interaction of message and response strategy (p = .33), message and modality (p = .26) or message and response strategy and modality (p = .22) on reputation assessments. A similar repeated measures ANOVA was conducted and found no interaction of message and response strategy (p = .25), message and modality (p = .21) or message and response strategy and modality (p = .2) on credibility assessments. It is therefore assumed that message was not a significant factor in the differences observed in credibility and reputation assessments across all conditions.

A final initial data check was done to ensure that the crisis messages chosen were actually perceived as negative by the participants. As mentioned, the crisis messages used
for this study included a tuition increase as well as an elimination of student on-campus parking. To ensure that these messages were perceived as negative and therefore representative of a crisis situation, the change scores for both reputation and credibility were examined to determine the direction of the change. Across all conditions, both reputation and credibility assessments decreased from before the crisis to after the crisis. This suggests that the stimulus messages used were perceived as negative and indicative of a crisis situation.

**Hypothesis Testing**

The first hypothesis (H1) posited that a corrective action response strategy would result in higher evaluations of the company’s reputation as compared to a shift the blame response. To test H1, change scores for each participant were calculated by subtracting pre-test reputation scores from post-test scores. These scores were then compared across conditions and analyzed using a univariate ANOVA. There was a significant main effect of response type on change of reputation assessments, $F(1, 174) = 9.88, p = .002$. The direction of the change was such that those participants who received a corrective action response ($M = -.76; SD = 1.04$) rated the reputation of the company more favorably than those who received a shift the blame response ($M = -1.37; SD = 1.33$). Therefore, H1 is supported.

**Supported:** H1: A corrective action response strategy will result in higher evaluations of the company’s reputation as compared to a shift the blame response.
Estimated Marginal Means of Change of Reputation Assessments

Figure 1 presents a line graph showing the estimated marginal means of the change of reputation assessments of participants who received the corrective action and shift the blame response strategies.

![Graph showing estimated marginal means of change of reputation](image)

Figure 1. Estimated marginal means of change of reputation

The second hypothesis (H2) posited that a corrective action response strategy would result in higher evaluations of the company’s credibility as compared to a shift the
blame response. To test H2, change scores were again computed for each participant by subtracting pre-test credibility scores from post-test scores. These scores were then analyzed across conditions using a univariate ANOVA. There was not a significant main effect of either corrective action (M = -.69; SD = 1.11) or shift the blame (M = -.94; SD = 1.10) response strategy on change of credibility assessments, F(1, 174) = 1.47, p = .23. H2 was not supported.

**Not Supported:** H2: A corrective action response strategy will result in higher evaluations of the company’s credibility as compared to a shift the blame response

The third hypothesis (H3) proposed that participants who viewed a text response would rate the reputation of the company higher as compared to those participants that viewed an audio/visual response. To test H3, change scores for each participant were again calculated and analyzed across conditions using a univariate ANOVA. There was not a significant main effect of either text (M = -.84; SD = 1.22) or audio/visual (M = -1.25; SD = 1.19) modality on change of reputation assessments, F(1, 174) = 2.78, p = .10. Therefore, H3 was not supported.

**Not supported:** H3: A text response will result in higher evaluations of the company’s reputation as compared to an audio/visual response

The fourth and final hypothesis (H4) suggested that participants who viewed a text response would rate the credibility of the company more favorably than those participants who viewed an audio/visual response. To test H4, change scores were again computed and the means were compared across conditions and analyzed with a univariate ANOVA. There was a significant main effect of modality on change of credibility assessments, F(1, 174) = 5.39, p = .02. The direction of the difference was such that those
participants who received a text response (M = -.58; SD = 1.05) rated the credibility of the company more favorably than those who received an audio/visual response (M = -1.03; SD = 1.13). H4 was supported.

Supported: *H4: A text response will result in higher evaluations of the company’s credibility as compared to an audio/visual response*

**Interactions**

The primary research question posed was regarding how response strategy and modality interact to influence perceptions of company reputation and credibility. Significant interactions existed in evaluations of both company reputation and company credibility. A repeated measures ANOVA revealed significance. An interaction effect between modality and response strategy was found, F(1, 200) = 4.25, p = .04, such that reputation assessments had less variance when the response was viewed in audio/visual form than when the response was viewed as text. When the response was viewed as text, shift the blame responses (M = 4.01; SD = 1.26) resulted in worse reputation assessments than corrective action responses (M = 4.99; SD = 1.21). Less variance was observed in reputation assessments between the shift the blame (M = 4.24; SD = 1.17) and corrective action (M = 4.60; SD = 1.24) responses when they were viewed in audio/visual form.
Estimated Marginal Means of Reputation based on Modality

Figure 2 presents a line graph showing the estimated marginal means of the change of reputation assessments of participants who received the corrective action and shift the blame response strategies based on whether or not they received the responses in text or audio visual.

![Figure 2. Estimated marginal means of change of reputation based on modality](image)

A second interaction was observed with company credibility assessments. A repeated measures ANOVA revealed an interaction of response strategy and modality,
F(1, 200) = 7.67, p = .01. This analysis found that credibility assessments varied less based on response strategy when viewed in audio/visual form than when the response was viewed in text form. When the response was viewed as text, shift the blame responses (M = 4.66; SD = 1.25) resulted in worse credibility evaluations than corrective action responses (M = 5.46; SD = 1.26). Less variance was observed in credibility assessments between the shift the blame (M = 4.92; SD = 1.21) and corrective action (M = 4.85; SD = 1.12) responses when they were viewed in audio/visual form.

**Estimated Marginal Means of Credibility Based on Modality**

Figure 3 presents a line graph showing the estimated marginal means of the change of credibility assessments of participants who received the corrective action and shift the blame response strategies based on whether or not they received the responses in text or audio visual.

*Figure 3. Estimated marginal means of change of credibility based on modality*
Planned Comparison

A planned comparison was conducted on questions pertaining to the content of the messages the participants viewed. This was done with the purpose of understanding whether or not participants perceived different levels of blame shifting by the organization based on the type of response strategy they viewed (corrective action or shift the blame). An independent sample t test was run to compare the average responses for the groups who received corrective action responses and the groups who received shift the blame responses. The questions were: “The organization’s response met the demand of its public” and “The organizations response placed blame on someone else.”

An independent samples t test on the first question found that there was a significant effect for response, t(202) = 5.32, p < .001, with those participants who received corrective action responses believing the organizations response met the demand of its public more so than those participants who received a shift the blame response. Similarly, an independent samples t test on the second questions found there was also a significant effect for response, t(199) = 5.28, p < .001, with those participants who received a corrective action response believing the organization’s response placed less blame on someone else than those participants who received a shift the blame response.

This analysis serves as a manipulation test and verifies that the participants who took both the pre-test and post-test surveys were viewing the stimuli messages correctly as intended. The participants viewed the stimuli messages significantly different from each other based on response type.
Post-Hoc

A post-hoc analysis was conducted in an attempt to filter the data based on whether or not a question pertaining to the content of the message was answered correctly. The question used to filter the data was “The organizations response placed the blame on someone else.” This question was chosen over “The organizations response met the demand of its public” because it was thought to be clearer and easier to discern and identify blame than “meeting demands.” Answers to the question were recorded using a 7-point Likert scale, agree receiving a score of seven and disagree receiving a score of one. For those subjects who received a shift the blame response, a correct answer was considered to be any response five or greater. This indicated that they agreed with the statement “The organizations response placed the blame on someone else” more than they disagreed. For those subjects who received a corrective action response, a correct answer was considered any response 3 or less. This indicated that they disagreed that blame was used in the response more so than they agreed. The idea behind this filter was to only analyze data from participants who were actively engaged with and understood the stimuli messages. Any response of 4, stating the participant neither agreed nor disagreed, was not included in the filtered data set.

This was intended as an exploratory analysis and should be taken with due caution. It is possible that even though content verification questions weren’t answered correctly, the stimuli still had an effect on the participants’ evaluations of company credibility and reputation.
Before the filter, N = 178, there were 54 participants who received corrective action responses in text form, and 41 who received corrective action responses in audio/visual form. Of the participants who received shift the blame responses, 34 received the response in print form and 49 received the responses in audio/visual form (See Table 5). When the filter was applied, N = 63. There were 28 participants who viewed a corrective action response in text and 11 who viewed it in audio/visual. Of the participants who received shift the blame response, 18 viewed it in text and 6 viewed it in audio/visual (See Table 6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5</th>
<th>Condition Numbers before Filter</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corrective Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio/visual</td>
<td>41</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6</th>
<th>Condition Numbers after Filter</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corrective Action</td>
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<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio/visual</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the participants who viewed a corrective action response in text, 52 percent answered the content question correctly, compared to only 27 percent who viewed the same response strategy but in audio/visual form. Of those who viewed a shift the blame response in text, 52 percent answered the content question correctly as compared to only 12 percent of those who viewed the same response strategy in audio/visual form. When
the response was viewed in text, the same percentage of participants answered the question correctly. This percentage was significantly higher than the percentage of participants who correctly answered the question when it was viewed in audio/visual form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage of Participants Who Were Discerning</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrective Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio/visual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The hypotheses were then re-tested with the filtered data set through univariate ANOVAs. As with the full data set, there was a significant main effect of response type on change of reputation assessments, $F(1, 59) = 22.94, p < .001$. The direction of the change was such that those participants who received a corrective action response ($M = -.49; SD = .87$) rated the reputation of the company more favorably than those who received a shift the blame response ($M = -1.95; SD = 1.37$). H1 was, again, supported.

**Supported:** *H1: A corrective action response strategy will result in higher evaluations of the company’s reputation as compared to a shift the blame response*
**Estimated Marginal Means of Change of Reputation (Filtered)**

Figure 4 presents a line graph showing the estimated marginal means of the change of reputation assessments of participants in the filtered data set who received the corrective action and shift the blame response strategies.

---

*Figure 4. Estimated marginal means of change reputation for filtered data set*
Unlike the full data set, however, analysis of the filtered data set resulted in an observed significant main effect of response type on change of credibility assessments, $F(1, 59) = 24.57, p < .001$. The direction of the difference was such that those participants who received a corrective action response ($M = -.16; SD = .71$) rated the credibility of the company more favorably than those who received a shift the blame response ($M = -1.30; SD = 1.21$). H2 was supported when the filtered data set was used for analysis.

**Supported:** *H2: A corrective action response strategy will result in higher evaluations of the company’s credibility as compared to a shift the blame response*
Estimated Marginal Means of Change of Credibility (Filtered)

Figure 5 presents a line graph showing the estimated marginal means of the change of reputation assessments of participants in the filtered data set who received the corrective action and shift the blame response strategies.

A univariate ANOVA was run to test hypothesis 3 and resulted in similar findings. There was no significant main effect of modality, either text (M = -1.10; SD = 1.27) or audio/visual (M = -.99; SD = 1.43), on change of reputation assessments, \( F(1, 52) = .13, p = .72 \).
**Not supported:** \( H3: A \text { text response will result in higher evaluations of the company’s reputation as compared to an audio/visual response} \)

Unlike with the full data set, H4 was not supported using the filtered data set. No significant main effect of modality, either text (\( M = -.50; SD = .95 \)) or audio/visual (\( M = -.89; SD = 1.39 \)), on change of credibility assessments was observed, \( F(1, 55) = 3.09, p = .09 \).

**Not supported:** \( H4: A \text { text response will result in higher evaluations of the company’s credibility as compared to an audio/visual response} \)

In both the full and filtered data sets, H1 was supported and H3 was unsupported. This indicates that crisis response strategy does have a significant effect on evaluations of reputation (such that a corrective action response strategy will result in less damage to a company’s reputation than a shift the blame response), but that modality will not significantly influence reputation assessments.

H2 was not supported using the full data set, but became supported when the filtered data set was used. This indicates that whether or not response strategy has a significant effect on credibility assessments might be determined by whether or not participants are able to discern message characteristics. This would suggest that a discerning audience’s assessment of a company’s reputation would be worse when the company used a shift the blame response strategy than when they used a corrective action response strategy. However, if the audience is not discerning, response strategy will not impact credibility assessments significantly.

H4 was supported using the full data set but was not supported using the filtered data set. This finding suggests that to a more discerning audience, modality will not
impact credibility assessments of a company in crisis, but modality will impact these assessments when the audience is not discerning.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This study sought to explore the relationship between modality and crisis response strategy and the impact they have on perceptions of company reputation and credibility. Through a mixed-design experiment, perceptions of company credibility and reputation changes from before a crisis to after a crisis were analyzed as well as how these changes were influenced by whether the company utilized a corrective action response strategy or a shift the blame response strategy, and by whether these responses were viewed as text or in audio/visual form.

An initial analysis of change scores revealed that regardless of crisis response strategy or modality, perceptions of both reputation and credibility decreased after a crisis situation. This supports previous research and has significant implications for communication professionals as it shows that crisis situations do represent threats to a company’s credibility and reputation. This suggests to communication professionals that crisis situations, big or small, should be handled strategically to mitigate as much damage to the company’s strategic assets as possible.

Interpretations

Although perceptions of credibility and reputation decreased across all conditions, hypothesis testing did reveal significant differences in how much these perceptions decreased based on crisis response strategy and modality. This study found that response strategy significantly impacted perceptions of company reputation but not credibility.
Modality, on the other hand, did not impact reputation assessments but did impact credibility perceptions. Interesting findings emerged in the interaction of crisis response strategy and modality on perceptions of both reputation and credibility. In both cases, less variance between the two response strategies was observed when viewed in audio/visual form. When the responses were viewed in text, what response strategy was used resulted in significantly different assessments of reputation and credibility. Filtering the data based on whether the participants could discern message content also revealed interesting findings. Those discerning participants seemed to be driven by a text condition assignment. Analysis of these participants revealed that modality had no effect on either reputation or credibility assessments, but response strategy was significant for both credibility and reputation assessments.

_Hypothesis Testing._ This study's finding that response strategy impacts reputation assessments in the hypothesized direction is consistent with past research. Multiple studies have shown the direct relationship between choosing an appropriate strategy and higher reputation assessments by key publics (Coombs, 2006). Foundational theories suggest using a more accommodative approach based on the crisis characteristics of the crisis simulated in this study. It is therefore not surprising that accommodative messages were more effective at mitigating damage to the company's reputation than messages that took a defensive stance. This finding adds to past research that response strategy should be a serious consideration of crisis communicators during a crisis situation.

Crisis response strategy appeared to have less of an impact on how credibility was assessed during the crisis situation. Unlike evaluations of reputation, it did not matter if
the participants viewed corrective action responses or shift the blame responses. Evaluations of credibility did decrease from before the crisis to after viewing the crisis response. However, what response strategy was used did not significantly influence this decrease. Little research is available linking the relationship between crisis response strategy and credibility assessments. According to the findings of this study, communication professionals should be less concerned about their credibility being disproportionately influenced based on the type of response used.

When examining modality's influence on reputation assessments, it does not appear to matter whether responses were viewed in text or audio/visual form. This study found that regardless of the modality of the message, reputational assessments were not significantly different. Again, both modality conditions rated the reputation less favorably after the crisis, but one modality of the message did not significantly influence this change more than the other. It might be interesting to note, however, that where not significant at a .05 level, modality was approaching significance and under the .10 significance level, F(1, 174) = 2.78, p = .09, on assessments of company reputation. The direction of the effect was in the direction predicted, such that text resulted in higher evaluations of reputation as compared to audio/visual.

This study produced a significant finding in the case of modality's effect on credibility assessments. Findings showed that modality did influence participants’ change in credibility evaluations from before the crisis to after the crisis. The direction supported the hypothesis of text resulting in higher credibility assessments than audio visual.
The hypothesis testing in this study suggests to communication professionals that choosing an appropriate response strategy has significant implications for how key publics make reputation assessments but not credibility assessments. However, the modality of the response significantly impacts how key publics make credibility assessments, but not reputation assessments.

*Interactions.* Data analysis revealed significant interactions in the case of both reputation and credibility assessments. Less variance was observed between response types in audio/visual form than was observed when the responses were in text. When the response was viewed as audio/visual, changes in credibility and reputation evaluations toward the company were very similar regardless of the response strategy used. However, when the response was presented in text, shift the blame responses resulted in much worse evaluations of both reputation and credibility as compared to corrective action responses.

Support for these finding could be founded in the Limited-Capacity Informational Processing model that suggests media messages that are delivered in multiple modalities simultaneously overload the processing system because they become too complex (Lang, 2000). The audio/visual condition in the present study has a more complex modality (audio and visual as compared to just text) and could therefore be more difficult to process and encode. Differences in reputation assessments based on which response strategy was used would therefore be less drastic in audio/visual than in text due to the more complex modality which leads to weaker message encoding. Research backs this idea, showing that text-only message presentations are more effective as they allow for greater mental elaboration because they allow readers to read at their own pace and/or re-read parts of the message that were unclear (Wright, 1974). If the message content is not
effectively encoded, it is expected that the content of the response (strategy) would impact reputation assessments less than when the content is more successfully encoded, as it is when viewed as text.

Another interesting factor to consider is that these interactions of modality on response strategy did not exist when the discerning subjects were used for analysis. When the data set included only discerning participants, no variance existed that supported one response being more effective based on the form it was presented in (either audio/visual or text). This alludes to the idea that whether or not the message is properly comprehended determines whether or not there is an effect of modality on response type. Additional research is needed, however, to better measure message comprehension using more reliable indexes before strong assertions can be made.

For communication professionals, these findings suggest that the content of the message matters less when presented in audio/visual form than when presented in text. At an application level, this suggests that if a response is going to be made in text, a better matched response based on crisis characteristics is more important. An example of where this could be useful is if the company is demanding to take a defensive stance in a crisis situation where a more accommodative stance is suggested by theory. In this situation, it would be better to present the information in audio/visual form than text. Of course presenting the response in audio/visual will not guarantee reputation or credibility protection. This study only suggests that reactions may be less negatively severe than if the response was received in text.

According to the findings of this study, successful crisis communication could lie in successfully analyzing the audience. The finding that response strategy matters more in
text than audio/visual is supported by research that audio/visual messages might be harder to process. When the data for this study were filtered based on whether or not participants were able to discern message content, over half of the participants in the text condition were successful as compared to 27 percent and 12 percent of the participants who received the crisis response messages in audio/visual form.

*Filtered Data Set Analysis.* When the filtered data set was used to re-test the original hypotheses, differences in the findings emerged. Similar to the findings using the full data set, Hypothesis 1 was supported using the filtered data set. This finding suggests that regardless of whether or not participants are able to comprehend and correctly discern message characteristics, the crisis response strategy used significantly influences perceptions of reputation.

Analysis on the full data set revealed no impact of response strategy on credibility assessments. However, response strategy became a significant influencer on credibility when the filtered data set was used for analysis. Therefore, there might be some implications for how message comprehension impacts the effect that response strategy has on evaluations of credibility. In this filtered analysis, reputation assessments for those who received shift the blame response strategies were much worse than those who received corrective action strategies.

When using the filtered data set, modality was insignificant at influencing credibility and reputation assessments. In the original data set, modality significantly influenced credibility perceptions, and its influence on reputation assessments was approaching significance and under the .10 significance level. These findings suggest that
modality does not influence assessments when participants are able to properly discern and comprehend the message.

Summary. The findings of the present study have significant implications for communication practitioners facing a crisis situation. The most noteworthy findings are in the interactions of modality and response strategy on reputation and credibility assessments, which suggest crisis response strategy matters more when presented in text as compared to audio/visual. Past research has shown the influence of crisis response strategy on how a company is perceived through the crisis situation. Little research exists, however, that looks at how these strategies are influenced by the form in which they are presented.

The findings of this study suggest that the form of the message could be a strategic decision for communication during a crisis. Whether due to better message comprehension or text being an intensity factor (negative response perceived more negative and positive response perceived as more positive), the form of the message does have implications for how the response strategies are perceived. The analysis of the filtered data set supports these findings, showing that when the message is comprehended and message characteristics are correctly discerned, modality matters less and crisis response matters more. The key, then, could be in the characteristics of the audiences. If the audience is highly engaged, it could be posited that they will pay more attention to the message and be able to discern message characteristics more successfully than an audience who is less engaged. To a more engaged audience, the crisis response strategy would be the most important influence on perceptions of the company, whereas to a less engaged audience, modality could mediate those effects.
When not considering engagement and ability to discern, however, reputation and credibility assessments vary much more between crisis response strategies when viewed in text rather than audio/visual. Knowing this could help public relations professionals create the most effective crisis response possible in order to mitigate the harmful effects that crisis situations pose to company credibility and reputation assessments.

**Limitations**

As with any study, certain limitations exist that potentially influence the findings of the research. Since students were used as the subjects of this experiment, the "science of the sophomore" argument comes into play (Hampton, 1979 and James & Sonner, 2001). This argument suggests that using students as subjects in experiments can impact the assumption that the findings are able to be generalized. Significant research exists that both supports and refutes this claim. This study attempted to avoid this limitation by choosing a crisis situation and organization that was relevant and arousing to the student sample. Crisis situations, by definition, have key publics to whom their communication matters. By choosing the University of Missouri as the company in crisis, and by choosing crisis situations that would directly affect students, the “science of the sophomore” argument was hopefully circumvented.

As mentioned, findings and suggestions from the data in the filtered data set should be taken with due caution. Before strong assumptions can be made regarding discerning participants who answered the content question correctly having more message comprehension, additional research should be done to confirm that answering questions related to the content reliably measures message comprehension. At face value,
eliminating those participants who did not correctly answer the content questions allowed for a more engaged and active audience to base analysis off of. This is an assumption, however, and should be empirically tested. Furthermore, once the filter was applied to the data set, the resulting conditions of the data were unequal and largely underpowered. This could have impacted the findings of the study. Replication of the study with larger and equal conditions could highlight whether or not it was a limitation of this study.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

The findings of this study suggest that modality has a significant impact on how well a response strategy mitigates the damage done to perceptions of credibility and reputation of a company in crisis. However, future research is needed to understand other factors that could influence these findings. Severity of the crisis, audience engagement, and source of the message could all influence the findings of this study. The organization in crisis was the source of the message in this study. Understanding how these findings are influenced based on different sources, such as a news organization or consumer generated content, would benefit communication professions. Looking at crisis communication in different modalities on social media would also further knowledge about how modality and response strategy impact perceptions of the company. Social media is a vital outlet for companies to communicate through during a crisis situation. How these results change based on presenting the different responses in different modalities and on different social media platforms could shed insight into how best to respond on behalf of a company during a crisis situation. Lastly, for the purposes of this study, only text and audio/visual format were examined. Looking at more modalities could extend existing research.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

This study furthers existing research on the significance of response strategy on evaluations of company reputation during a crisis and adds to the current, yet conflicting, research on whether or not modality significantly influences credibility perceptions. From these findings, it appears that response strategy has an effect on reputation, and modality has an effect on credibility. However, modality alone does not appear to significantly affect reputation assessments, and response strategy alone does not appear to significantly affect credibility assessments. The interesting finding is in the interaction of modality and response strategy on these perceptions. Little research exists on how these variables interact, and this study helps to provide some limited context. In the case of both reputation and credibility, there was a significant interaction of modality and response strategy. This suggests to communication professionals that when presented in text, a shift the blame (defensive) response strategy will result in less favorable evaluations of reputation and credibility than a corrective action (accommodative) response strategy, when compared to the same responses being presented in audio/visual.

By looking at discerning publics, the findings of this study suggest that whether or not viewers are able to recognize specific characteristic of the message could have implications for how modality and response strategy affect reputation and credibility assessments. Specifically, this study found that discerning subjects’ evaluations of reputation and credibility were significantly influenced by response strategy. Further
research could advance the understanding of how discerning publics are influenced during a crisis as compared to those who are not able to discern message content.

It comes as no surprise to communication professionals in the field of crisis communication that response strategy has significant implications for how the reputation of the company in crisis is assessed. This study does little to clarify how exactly modality influences credibility perceptions during a crisis, but adds to the growing amount of literature that suggests it might play an important role in credibility assessments. The interactions found between modality and response strategy on both reputation and credibility perceptions suggest that strategically responding during crisis situations can and should include consideration of many message characteristics and how they interact to influence perceptions of the company.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX 1
CRISIS RESPONSE SCRIPTS

Tuition Increase Messages

Issue Statement:

The University of Missouri announced a 4% tuition increase to support a 7% raise in all faculty salaries. The University said the increases are necessary in order to remain competitive as a top-notch academic institution. Students, however, believe raising their tuition just to pay faculty more is an unfair use of their money. The University responded to the issue with the following statement:

Corrective Action Response

Recently the University of Missouri announced a 4% tuition increase for all students effective Fall, 2014. The tuition increase was implemented to support a 7% raise in faculty salaries in order to retain and attract the best possible talent at MU.

This cost increase was met with vehement opposition by the student body as well as other concerned members of the campus community. After hearing the concerns and carefully considering all of the factors involved in the issue, the University of Missouri has decided to cancel the 4% tuition increase, effective immediately. Although having the best faculty possible is a top priority, the university will explore other avenues to remain competitive as an academic employer that does not increase costs to the student body.

We understand that at the heart of the University of Missouri are the students who help make this campus the impressive academic institution it is, and the university is committed to serving them in the best way possible.

Scapegoat Response

Recently the University of Missouri announced a 4% tuition increase for all students effective Fall, 2014. The tuition increase was implemented to support a 7% raise in faculty salaries in order to retain and attract the best possible talent at MU.
This cost increase was met with vehement opposition by the student body as well as other concerned members of the campus community. The university would like to make it clear that recent budget cuts at the state and federal level have made this tuition increase necessary. At both levels, a lack of dedication to higher education has forced the University of Missouri to raise tuition in an attempt to remain a competitive academic institution. If federal and state funds were available, they would be used to address the issue of faculty salaries and student tuition would not have to be increased.

**Student Parking Messages**

Issue Statement:

_The University of Missouri announced a change in parking regulations forbidding all students from parking on campus. Instead, all students must use the commuter lots. The University said the regulation change was necessary to accommodate the increased parking demand of faculty and staff. The students, however, believe the regulation is unfair and that they should have access to on-campus parking as well. The University responded to the issue with the following statement:_

Corrective Action Response

Recently, the University of Missouri announced a change in on-campus parking regulations that included no student parking available on-campus. All student parking would be restricted to the AV-14 or Hearnes commuter lots in order to accommodate the increased parking needs of MU faculty and staff.

This change in parking regulations was met with vehement opposition by the student body as well as other concerned member of the campus community. After hearing the concerns and carefully considering all of the factors involved in the issue, the University of Missouri has decided to cancel the parking regulation changes, effective immediately.

Although being able to best accommodate faculty and staff is a top priority, the university will explore other avenues to accommodate them that does not include changing the parking regulations for the student body.

We understand that at the heart of the University of Missouri are the students who help make this campus the impressive academic institution it is, and the university is committed to serving them in the best way possible.
Recently, the University of Missouri announced a change in on-campus parking regulations that included no student parking available on-campus. All student parking would be restricted to the AV-14 or Hearnes commuter lots in order to accommodate the increased parking needs of MU faculty and staff.

This parking regulation change was met with vehement opposition by the student body as well as other concerned members of the campus community. The university would like to make it clear that recent changes to parking regulations on MU’s campus are a direct result of the city of Columbia not cooperating with the University to expand parking options for students. Multiple attempts have been made to work with the city to expand parking options available to the university and its students. A lack of cooperation as well as an increase in faculty, staff and student parking needs has resulted in the new parking regulations prohibiting on-campus student parking.

This change inconveniences the entire university. We hope that the city of Columbia will recognize this injustice and work with MU in the future to better serve the university and its students.
APPENDIX 2

PRE-TEST SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. If you are interested in participating in an experiment titled The Effect of Modality and Crisis Response on Evaluations of Credibility and Reputation Assessments, where you will be asked questions pertaining to your perceptions of various universities and their communication with students, please continue.

This experiment consists of two parts. This is the second part and will take approximately 10 minutes. You will need the code emailed to you previously to complete the survey.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you do choose to participate, your professor has agreed to award you up to two extra credit points, one for participating in each part of the survey. If you do not choose to participate, you can find alternative extra credit assignments on Blackboard.

If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out via email.

Thank you,

Susan Visscher
Srvc6d@mail.missouri.edu
(406) 600-1497

By clicking yes you are agreeing to participate in the following research study.

- Yes
- No

2. Please enter your experiment code:
3. Are you currently enrolled as a student at the University of Missouri?
   - Yes
   - No

4. Please answer the following questions regarding the UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI:
   The organization is:
   Fair ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Unfair
   Unbias ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Bias
   Tells the Whole Story ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Does not tell the whole story
   Accurate ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Inaccurate
   Can be Trusted ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Cannot be Trusted

5. Please answer the following questions regarding the UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI:
   The organization is concerned with the well being of its publics:
   - Strongly Agree
   - ○
   - ○
   - ○
   - ○
   - ○
   - ○
   - Strongly Disagree

   The organization is basically DISHONEST:
   - Strongly Agree
   - ○
   - ○
   - ○
   - ○
   - ○
   - Strongly Disagree
I DO NOT trust the organization to tell the truth about the incident:

- Strongly Agree
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- Strongly Disagree

Under most circumstances, I would be likely to believe what the organization says:

- Strongly Agree
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- Strongly Disagree

The organization is NOT concerned with the well-being of its publics:

- Strongly Agree
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- Strongly Disagree

6. Please answer the following questions regarding the UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS:

The organization is:

Fair ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Unfair

Unbias ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Bias

Tells the Whole Story ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Does not tell the whole story

Accurate ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Inaccurate
Can be Trusted ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Cannot be Trusted

7. Please answer the following questions regarding the UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS:

The organization is concerned with the well being of its publics:

- Strongly Agree
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- Strongly Disagree

The organization is basically DISHONEST:

- Strongly Agree
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- Strongly Disagree

I DO NOT trust the organization to tell the truth about the incident:

- Strongly Agree
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- Strongly Disagree
Under most circumstances, I would be likely to believe what the organization says:

- Strongly Agree
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- • Strongly Disagree

The organization is NOT concerned with the well-being of its publics:

- Strongly Agree
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- • Strongly Disagree

8. Please answer the following questions regarding the WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY:

The organization is:

- Fair ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Unfair
- Unbias ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Bias
- Tells the Whole Story ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Does not tell the whole story
- Accurate ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Inaccurate
- Can be Trusted ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Cannot be Trusted
9. Please answer the following questions regarding the WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY:

The organization is concerned with the well being of its publics:

- Strongly Agree
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- Strongly Disagree

The organization is basically DISHONEST:

- Strongly Agree
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- Strongly Disagree

I DO NOT trust the organization to tell the truth about the incident:

- Strongly Agree
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- Strongly Disagree

Under most circumstances, I would be likely to believe what the organization says:

- Strongly Agree
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- Strongly Disagree
The organization is NOT concerned with the well-being of its publics:

- Strongly Agree
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- Strongly Disagree

10. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

11. Please select your major:

- Journalism
- Undecided
- Other

12. Please select your desired sequence:

- Print and Digital News
- Magazine
- Photo-Journalism
- Strategic Communication
- Radio and Television
- Convergence
- Undecided
- Other

13. What is your year in school?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Graduate

14. What is your age?
APPENDIX 3

POST-TEST SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. If you are interested in participating in an experiment titled The Effect of Modality and Crisis Response on Evaluations of Credibility and Reputation Assessments, where you will be asked questions pertaining to your perceptions of various universities and their communication with students, please continue.

   This experiment consists of two parts. This is the second part and will take approximately 10 minutes. You will need the code emailed to you previously to complete the survey.

   Participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you do choose to participate, your professor has agreed to award you up to two extra credit points, one for participating in each part of the survey. If you do not choose to participate, you can find alternative extra credit assignments on Blackboard.

   If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out via email.

   Thank you,

   Susan Visscher
   Srvc6d@mail.missouri.edu
   (406) 600-1497

   By clicking yes you are agreeing to participate in the following research study.

   • Yes
   • No

2. Please enter your experiment code:
3. Are you currently enrolled as a student at the University of Missouri?
   • Yes
   • No

4. The University of Missouri recently announced a 4% tuition increase to support a 7% raise in all faculty salaries. The University said the increases are necessary in order to remain competitive as a top-notch academic institution. Students, however, believe raising their tuition just to pay faculty more is an unfair use of their money. The University responded to the issue with the following statement:

   **STIMULUS MESSAGE 1**

5. How believable was the organizations response?
   • Unbelievable
   • Somewhat unbelievable
   • Not sure
   • Somewhat believable
   • Believable

6. Please answer the following questions regarding the organization’s response to the issue:

   The organization’s response met the demand of its publics:
   • Strongly Agree
   • ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly Disagree

   The organizations response put the blame on someone else:
   • Strongly Agree
   • ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly Disagree
7. Please answer the following questions regarding the UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI:

   The organization is:
   
   Fair ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Unfair
   Unbias ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Bias
   
   Tells the Whole Story ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Does not tell the whole story
   Accurate ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Inaccurate
   Can be Trusted ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Cannot be Trusted

8. Please answer the following questions regarding the UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI:

   The organization is concerned with the well being of its publics:
   
   • Strongly Agree
   • ○
   • ○
   • ○
   • ○
   • ○
   • Strongly Disagree

   The organization is basically DISHONEST:
   
   • Strongly Agree
   • ○
   • ○
   • ○
   • ○
   • ○
   • Strongly Disagree
I DO NOT trust the organization to tell the truth about the incident:

- Strongly Agree
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- Strongly Disagree

Under most circumstances, I would be likely to believe what the organization says:

- Strongly Agree
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- Strongly Disagree

The organization is NOT concerned with the well-being of its publics:

- Strongly Agree
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- Strongly Disagree

9. Recently, the University of Missouri announced a change in on-campus parking regulations forbidding all students from parking on campus. Instead, all students must use the commuter lots. The University said the regulation change was necessary to accommodate the increased parking demand of faculty and staff. The students, however, believe the regulation is unfair and that they should have access to on-campus parking as well. The University responded to the issue with the following statement:
STIMULUS MESSAGE 2

10. How believable was the organization’s response?

- Unbelievable
- Somewhat unbelievable
- Not sure
- Somewhat believable
- Believable

11. Please answer the following questions regarding the organization’s response to the issue:

The organization’s response met the demand of its publics:

- Strongly Agree
- ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
- Strongly Disagree

The organization’s response put the blame on someone else:

- Strongly Agree
- ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
- Strongly Disagree

12. Please answer the following questions regarding the UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI:

The organization is:

Fair ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Unfair

Unbias ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Bias

Tells the Whole Story ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Does not tell the whole story
13. Please answer the following questions regarding the UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI:

The organization is concerned with the well being of its publics:

- Strongly Agree
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- Strongly Disagree

The organization is basically DISHONEST:

- Strongly Agree
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- Strongly Disagree

I DO NOT trust the organization to tell the truth about the incident:

- Strongly Agree
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- Strongly Disagree
Under most circumstances, I would be likely to believe what the organization says:

- Strongly Agree
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- Strongly Disagree

The organization is NOT concerned with the well-being of its publics:

- Strongly Agree
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- ○
- Strongly Disagree:

14. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

15. Please select your major:

- Journalism
- Undecided
- Other

16. Please select your desired sequence:

- Print and Digital News
- Magazine
- Photo-Journalism
- Strategic Communication
- Radio and Television
- Convergence
- Undecided
- Other
17. What is your year in school?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Graduate

18. What is your age?