

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

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## 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.