

Public Abstract

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Title:THE ESTIMATION OF A CORPORATE CRISIS COMMUNICATION
BASED ON PERCEIVED CEOS LEADERSHIP, PERCEIVED SEVERITY
OF THREATS, AND PERCEIVED OPPOSING PUBLICS SIZE

A latent public outside an organization can become an active public who applies social pressure that influences an organization's stance in a crisis. Based on the contingency theory (Cancel, Mitrook, & Cameron, 1999), this study examined whether the perception of leadership as a powerful inner organizational factor influences the outside latent public's assessment of an organization's crisis communication. This study also looked at whether the perception of the severity of threats and the opposing public's size as important external situational factors moderate the organizational stance and strategy assessment.

The study design was 2 (perceived leadership: transformational leadership vs. transactional leadership) x 2 (perceived severity of threats: strong vs. weak) x 2 (perceived opposing public's size: large vs. small) mixed-subjects administered in a computer laboratory setting. Leadership and Severity of threats were within-subject factor, whereas opposing public's size and stimulus message order were between-subject factor. Dependent variables were the participants' estimation of corporate stance and message strategies.

This study found the main effect of perceived leadership and the interaction effect of perceived leadership and perceived severity of threats on the participants' estimation of organizational crisis responses. The results theoretically indicate that the contingent theoretical argument explaining the dynamics of organizational factors and situational factors in real public relations practices can also be applied when explaining the outside latent public's thought patterns predicting an organizational stance and strategy.

Based on the supported main findings and some unexpected variations, this study provides implications for public relations theory and particularly for the contingency theory of public relations.

Keywords: Contingency Theory; Crisis Communication; Leadership; Threats; Opposing Public's Size; Accommodation; Advocacy; Latent Public