ABSTRACT

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.

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.