CRISIS COMMUNICATION: CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN ORGANIZATIONAL RENEWAL THEORY

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CRISIS COMMUNICATION: CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN ORGANIZATIONAL RENEWAL THEORY

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ABSTRACT

This study further develops Organizational Renewal Theory through the incorporation of corporate social responsibility as a feature of a post crisis response strategy. Internal publics (e.g., employees of an organization, students of a higher education institution) have strong cognitive and emotional reactions surrounding a crisis because of their distinct connection to a company. This study links the importance of internal publics and the effective strategies to communicate with internal publics following a crisis, and examines if the communication of CSR in the forward-looking, prospective method of an Organizational Renewal crisis response strategy leads to more positive cognitive and emotional responses by internal publics.

The results indicate that when communicating a renewal crisis response strategy, both the type of crisis and the presence or absence of a corporate social responsibility frame can influence the emotions, specifically fear, of the internal public.
Introduction

Organizations face many pressures. From increasing profit margins to satisfying consumer activist groups, organizations have more responsibility than to shareholders alone. Organization stakeholders, also referred to as organization publics, can include shareholders as well as consumers, employees, media, the government, and others. Organization publics can be broadly categorized into internal and external groups.

The perceptions of all organization publics determine an organization’s reputation and influence the image of the organization. Awareness of the perceptions of organization publics is essential to the success of an organization, especially for the success of an organization experiencing a crisis when an organization’s reputation is likely to be at risk (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011).

Over the last 20 years, crisis communication has expanded as an academic discipline. Within the discipline, literature has focused on determining the optimal ways for an organization to respond to or communicate with its publics during and after a crisis. This type of communication is commonly called image repair strategy, and while it can be utilized before a crisis to build the reputation of the organization, it is often used during or following a crisis to help repair the organization’s image and reputation among its publics. Common image repair strategies focus on issues of blame, responsibility, and liability.

Existing literature in crisis communication has primarily focused on the previously mentioned crisis response strategies used by an organization to repair its reputation among its external publics. However, it has been found that internal publics...
(i.e., employees) can have greater cognitive reactions and feelings surrounding a crisis because of their connection to the company (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011). In general, while external publics must deal with a crisis for a product they purchase; employees must deal with a crisis of the organization in which they build their life (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011). That is, there is a clear distinction in the cognitive and emotional reactions of internal publics and external publics who experience an organization crisis.

Employees are crucial to the success of an organization. When an employee believes that they are treated fairly and justly, it leads to greater employee commitment to the organization and a greater degree of job satisfaction (Tziner, 2013). Considering that the emotions of internal publics are likely to be influenced when an organization experiences a crisis, crisis communicators should look at how to effectively communicate with their internal audience.

Despite the importance in understanding communication with internal publics, internal crisis communication is an under researched area (Johansen, Aggerholm, & Frandsen, 2012). There is lack of research on internal publics, thus, little is known if and what modifications crisis communication practitioners should make when communicating with internal versus external publics. This study is designed to link the importance of internal publics and the effective strategies to communicate with internal publics following a crisis.

In doing so, this study follows an integrative framework for research on internal crisis communication suggested by Frandsen and Johansen (2011). The framework identifies how internal crisis communication differs from external crisis communication through two assumptions. The first assumption examines the relationship between
internal publics and an organization to define and characterize internal communication as something different than external communication. The second assumption applies a three-stage approach to a crisis (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011). The three-staged approach originally identified by Coombs and Holladay identifies the stages of a crisis as pre crisis, crisis event and post crisis (1996).

Using the integrative framework, this study examines a newer phenomenon in crisis communication, Organizational Renewal Theory. Organizational Renewal Theory is a crisis response strategy that focuses on the opportunity presented through the crisis. The forward-looking communication focuses on the actions an organization will take in the future and finds the inherent opportunities in the crisis.

One plausible avenue that corporations use to communicate a renewal response after a crisis scenario, and which is examined in the study, is corporate social responsibility (CSR). By communicating corporate social responsibility, an organization can balance its social and economic interests, and demonstrate its commitment to meaningful change – all of which are theoretical elements in Organizational Renewal Theory. Academic researchers are examining publics’ responses to such use of corporate social responsibility. Existing academic research on corporate social responsibility has explored consumers’ (i.e. external publics) perceptions and attitudes of CSR practices. However, research on the internal publics’ perceptions of corporate social responsibility is very limited, particularly regarding CSR as a crisis response strategy.

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of communicating corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a crisis communication response strategy on internal publics. Specifically, the main interest of this study lies in investigating how the presence
of a corporate social responsibility message within a renewal crisis response strategy influences internal publics’ cognitive (i.e., perceptions) and emotional responses.
Literature review

The literature review will focus on crisis communication and tactics for image and reputation repair. Existing literature on crisis communication has focused primarily on the macro-level of analysis, or focusing on the responses and perceptions of publics at the organizational level and of external publics.

Crisis

A crisis is “the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders related to health, safety, environmental, and economic issues, and can seriously impact an organization’s performance and generate negative outcomes” (Coombs, 2014, p. 3). When an organization faces a crisis, its reputation is likely to be at risk and although a crisis might be unpredictable, a crisis is not unexpected considering the array of pressures an organization is faced with in today’s society.

Organizational crises are a dynamic process involving three stages—pre crisis, crisis event, and post crisis (Coombs, 2014). The pre crisis stage is critical to building the reputation of an organization through everyday practices and normal operations. In the pre crisis stage, an organization should be aware of its predisposing variables that might impact crisis preparedness, crisis prevention, and crisis detection (Coombs, 2014). Special consideration should be given to the pre crisis stage to enable crisis communicators to utilize appropriate crisis response strategies should a crisis arise.

The crisis event is marked by a triggering event to start the crisis and includes situational variables. When a crisis occurs, public relations practitioners focus on image repair response strategies that will correlate with the chosen post crisis communication
strategies. The post crisis stage is signaled once the crisis is deemed over, yet this stage of the crisis life cycle does not mean crisis communication should stop. Post crisis response strategies should be strategically chosen to help rebuild the organization’s reputation. No organization is immune to a crisis and crisis response strategies must be strategically chosen during all stages of the crisis.

**Organization Publics**

The array of pressures on an organization comes from its range of publics. Broadly categorized into external and internal groups, organization publics can range from consumers to media, politicians, and employees. An organization should consider its array of publics during all times because an organization is in a crisis, if the public perceives it to be in a crisis (Coombs, 2014).

During a crisis, an organization evaluates its publics’ perceptions in an effort to manage the organization’s reputation, and decides how to appropriately respond (Coombs, 2014). It is the perception of each public that determines an organization’s image and reputation; therefore, crisis communication practitioners work to manage all publics’ perceptions to choose effective and appropriate response strategies.

Extensive research on crisis communication has focused primarily on external publics, with an interest in external publics cognitive and emotional responses following an organization crisis. Crises might trigger emotions in affected publics, and researchers have found that crisis response strategies should be chosen based on the crisis type, how the crisis has been framed by the media, and the potential emotional response of the publics (Kim & Cameron, 2011). “The publics’ different emotional responses would in turn influence their perceptions of the organization’s subsequent responses to the crisis”
Publics’ emotions can be triggered by the type of crisis, their relationship or closeness to the crisis and the emotional appeal used in media news framing of the crisis. The triggered emotions guide the publics’ interpretation of the unfolding crisis, and shape their attitude toward the organization (Jin, Pang, and Cameron, 2007). Knowing this, management of all publics’ perceptions is essential for crisis communication practitioners to plan effective communication (i.e., crisis response strategies) following a crisis. Effective crisis response strategies positively influence the publics’ perceptions and emotions in regard to the organization experiencing the crisis.

**Internal publics.** Internal communication is defined as “the communicative interaction among managers and employees, in a private or public organization, before, during, and after an organizational or societal crisis” (Johansen et al., 2012, p. 271). This communication happens across organizational boundaries, resulting in the employee playing the role of both sender and receiver when communicating with managers, work peers, or external organizational factors (Frandsen and Johansen, 2011).

Academic research interest in internal crisis communication has slowly grown over the last few years but “now is the time to start focusing on the internal dimension of crisis communication, an area clearly suffering from being under-researched” (Frandsen and Johansen, 2011, p. 348). Studies looking at internal publics have helped differentiate the two types of publics, highlighting their differences. Results emphasize the need for more academic interest in the internal public during a crisis due to studies finding significant differences in the cognitive and emotional reactions of internal publics involved in a crisis.
It has been found that internal stakeholders have a stronger, more complex, and closer connection to an organization than most other stakeholder groups (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011). According to the Internal Crisis Management and Crisis Communication survey with 367 of the largest private and 98 public organizations in Denmark, managers perceive employees to have different reactions to a crisis than other publics. For instance, employees are believed to show a higher level of frustration, a higher perception of insecurity, a greater need for information, and they produce more informal communication than other publics (Johansen et al., 2012). That is, employees as internal publics have greater cognitive reactions and feelings surrounding a crisis because of their unique connection to the organization. While other stakeholders must deal with the crisis for simply a product they purchase, employees must deal with the crisis of the organization in which they build their life (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011). Given the closer connection often accompanying employees of an organization, the needs of the internal audience are different than the external audience.

Given previous study results suggesting different connections to an organization, it is assumed that crisis response strategies should be strategically chosen based on the given public (i.e., using different response strategies when communicating with external publics versus internal publics). However, there is a lack of research on the perception and responses of internal publics on crisis response strategies (Johansen et al., 2012). Based on the existing literature surrounding crisis communication, it is evident that future research should examine internal publics more closely, specifically their emotional and cognitive reactions to crisis response strategies. Our assumption is that given the specific forward-looking, confidence-building makeup of the Organization Renewal Theory,
using such response will generate more positive emotions in a human-interest crisis scenario rather over one without an emotionally, human-interest driven component. Therefore, this study proposes the following research question and hypothesis.

**Research Question 1** – Do internal publics’ cognitive and emotional responses serve as a function of crisis scenario when communicating a crisis response through Organizational Renewal Theory?

**Hypothesis 1** – Internal publics’ cognitive and emotional responses will be more positive when communicating Organization Renewal Theory following a human-interest crisis scenario compared to a monetary-interest crisis scenario.

**Reputation Management**

Organizations are often concerned with how publics view their organization, posing both financial concern and a concern for organization reputation, especially following a crisis. Often referred to as reputation management, this occurs during all operations of the organization but specifically following a crisis. Reputation management is an integral part of crisis communication and is essential to an organization’s livelihood.

During a crisis, an organization’s reputation is managed through crisis response strategies. Some researchers view organization reputation similar to a bank account. A favorable reputation during the pre crisis stage, serves as a buffer following a crisis. When an organization has a strong pre crisis reputation, they will likely have a strong post crisis reputation, suffering less and rebounding more quickly after a crisis (Coombs 1996). However, crisis response strategy is primarily used during or following a crisis to help repair the organizations image and reputation among its publics. Existing literature in crisis communication has primarily examined crisis response strategies of an
organization to build or repair the organization’s image and reputation among its external publics.

**Crisis Communicators in the Framing Process**

Erving Goffman first introduced framing in 1974. Primarily, he said that people make sense of the world around them through their primary framework (Goffman, 1974). There has been an abundance of academic research and interest in framing. Perhaps the most common approach to framing is the News Framing Theory (Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2015). In relation to crisis communication, News Framing Theory impacts how reporters and the media approach the presentation of news stories concerning the crisis or the organization in crisis (Ulmer, et al., 2015). “The approach selected results in a pattern of coverage that can frame a topic positively or negatively” (Ulmer, et al., 2015, p. 22). However, News Framing Theory is not the only approach to framing that impacts a crisis.

As previously mentioned, crisis communicators choose appropriate crisis response strategies to manage the reputation of an organization among its publics. Crisis communicators must decided how and when to respond to the organization’s publics. Perhaps most importantly, crisis communicators decided what to include in the crisis response strategies. Consequently, crisis communicators are involved in the framing process of a crisis. Crisis communicators frame the organization’s messages to all publics and decide how to counterbalance or reinforce what is being said in news. “News framing theory advocates that organizations take an active role in the framing process” (Ulmer et al., 2015, p. 23). Organizations cannot remain passive in framing, or news framing will control the crisis and subsequently, the image and the reputation of the organization.
Crisis response strategies are a way for an organization to respond during a crisis and potentially impact how its publics, both internal and external, perceive the crisis. “Public relations practitioners have the ultimate opportunity to frame issues in a mutually beneficial manner for their organization and its publics” (Lundy, 2006, p. 296).

There are four theoretical approaches for responding to organizational crisis that have developed over the last 20 years (Ulmer et al., 2015). Three theories that focus on strategies to repair an organization’s image and reputation after a crisis: Corporate Apologia, Image Repair Theory, and Situational Crisis Communication Theory. The other theory, Organizational Renewal Theory, is newer in the field, and focuses on the opportunity presented in the crisis and learning from the crisis (Ulmer et al., 2015).

**Corporate Apologia.** The oldest among the theories of crisis communication is Corporate Apologia. The theory “provides a list of communication strategies that the organization can use to respond to accusations of wrongdoing” (Ulmer et al., 2015, p. 26). Corporate Apologia is defensive and serves as avenue for the organization to account for its actions when it is guilty of wrongdoing (Ulmer et al., 2015). Other theories of crisis communication were built off of this theory.

**Image Repair Discourse.** Benoit introduced image Repair Discourse in 1997 as a suggested approach to crisis response and communication. Common image repair strategies focus on issues of blame, responsibility, and liability. Image Repair Discourse begins with an analysis of the crisis and the accusation of the crisis responsibility. Benoit suggests any organization that is at fault for the offensive act should take responsibility, but can communicate such responsibility through mortification, corrective action,
minimization, bolstering, etc. (1997). Organizations not responsible for the act can communicate crisis response strategies from denial, shift of blame, etc.

**Situational Crisis Communication Theory.** Coombs (2007) developed the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) off of Benoit’s proposed image repair strategies. The SCCT provides evidence-based understanding of how to protect an organization’s reputation through crisis communication. According to Coombs (2007), it is the responsibility of the crisis manager to examine three factors: initial crisis responsibility, crisis history, and prior relational reputation in a two-step process. The first step is identifying the crisis type, which Coombs establishes as victim, accidental, or preventable. “By identifying the crisis type, the crisis manager can anticipate how much crisis responsibility stakeholders will attribute to the organization at the onset of the crisis, thereby establishing the initial crisis responsibility level” (Coombs, 2007, p. 168).

The second step in the process proposed by Coombs is assessing the reputational threat and choosing the appropriate crisis response strategy through methods like denial, bolstering, and victimage.

After following the two-step process, Coombs (2007) proposes 10 possible crisis response strategies in an effort to repair reputation believing that, “the words used and actions taken by management affect how people perceive the organization and the crisis and emotional response toward and future reactions with the organization” (p. 171). While many studies have applied Coombs’ SCCT model, limited research has specifically examined the variances between internal and external publics’ perception of organization reputation when SCCT is applied in a crisis.
Discourse of Renewal. The final prominent theory of crisis communication is Discourse of Renewal, which emphasizes renewal based upon stakeholder commitment, commitment to correction, and core values. “Renewal replaces the discourse of apology and defense with a more optimistic discourse of rebuilding and renewal, focusing on strong value positions, responsibility to stakeholders, and growth as a result of the crisis” (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002, p. 362). Discourse of Renewal is different than the other previously mentioned theories because while it recognizes that “reputation and image are important organizational concepts, they do not always play a central role in resolving organizational crisis” (Ulmer et al., 2015, p. 29). In today’s society, rebuilding and learning from a crisis are crucial for an organization to be successful. Consumers are not passive, and are more and more demanding of an organization. Discourse of Renewal Theory proposes that a crisis can be a turning point for an organization to create renewal, growth, and new opportunities for the organization and its publics.

There are four theoretical objectives central to Discourse of Renewal: “organizational learning, ethical communication, a prospective rather than retrospective vision, and sound organizational rhetoric” (Ulmer, Seeger, & Sellnow, 2007, p. 29). The first objective emphasizes that in order for an organization to successfully emerge following a crisis, they must learn from the crisis. Not only must organizations learn, they must effectively communicate this with its publics to guarantee against a similar crisis occurring in the future. Learning and communicating this learning enables “the organization to reconstitute itself by capitalizing on the opportunities embedded within the crisis” (Ulmer et al., 2007, p. 132). Examples of opportunities within a crisis are
heroes being born, more technologically advanced buildings and operations, and safer production operations.

The second theoretical objective is ethical communication. “One of the key factors of a crisis is that it reveals the ethical values of the organization. Crises do not build character; they expose the character of the organization” (Ulmer et al., 2015, p. 29). Ethical communication is essential during all stages of the crisis, before, during, and after to create a renewal response and organizations that establish strong value positions before a crisis occurs, are best able to utilize Organizational Renewal Theory (Ulmer et al., 2015).

Third, renewal exhibits prospective rather than retrospective communication, meaning that the model is forward-looking and is based on actions that an organization will take in the future. “When establishing renewal, organizational leaders seek to motivate employees and other stakeholders to stay with the organization and rebuild it to a level that surpasses its pre crisis status” (Ulmer et al., 2007, p. 131).

The final characteristic proposed by Ulmer et al. is effective organizational rhetoric. Renewal is a leader-based form of communication. Leaders play a crucial role in discourse of renewal because of their ability to embody the company and its values.

Both attention to an organization’s pre crisis actions, and its communication, likely determine the organization’s success in engaging in Discourse of Renewal. Organizations that have successfully used renewal do not just walk the walk, they also talk the talk. For renewal to be positively perceived by publics, organizations cannot just communicate that their response will be to correct the problem and renew faith in the company; they must also follow the communication with meaningful action and
observable change (Ulmer et al., 2007). One avenue that corporations use to demonstrate their commitment to meaningful change is corporate social responsibility. In this study, crisis response strategies presented to internal publics will be framed in a renewal approach, emphasizing corporate social responsibility practices of the organization.

**Corporate Social Responsibility**

Academic literature on crisis communication has primarily focused on the external publics’ perceptions and responses to such previously mentioned crisis communication strategies, with little research on the perceptions of such communication on internal publics. This study examines internal publics cognitive and emotional responses to renewal crisis communication.

One plausible avenue for organizations to communicate ethical behavior is corporate social responsibility. CSR is “context-specific organizational actions and policies that take into account stakeholders’ expectations and the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental performance” (Aguinis, 2011, p. 855). Corporate social responsibility practices are a way for an organization to balance social and economic interests. It allows the brand an avenue to act responsibly and offers a way for the brand to be responsive to social issues and consumer expectations.

Corporate social responsibility has caught the attention of both researchers and practitioners. “CSR initiatives have now become common practice for virtually all major corporations around the world and rankings are compiled and published on a regular basis” (Aguinis, & Glavas, 2013, p. 314). Literature on corporate social responsibility is vast and complex with little agreement on approaches to research or theoretical frameworks. “Researchers have approached CSR through different disciplinary and
conceptual frameworks as well as different levels of analysis” (Aguinis & Glavas, 2013, p. 315). Almost half of the 588 articles on corporate social responsibility have been published since 2005, with only 4 percent looking at the individual-level of analysis (i.e., employees) (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012).

While CSR can take many forms, the most commonly thought of are monetary contributions to philanthropic organizations and charities. Additional ways brands partake in CSR efforts are by allowing and encouraging employees to volunteer, as well as by practicing corporate behaviors with future generations and the environment in mind.

While reasons to engage in CSR vary from corporation to corporation, research has suggested three main factors that contribute to the engagement: economic responsibility, ethical responsibility, and community commitment (Aguinis, 2011 & Beauchamp & O’Connor, 2012, p. 495). When it comes to an organization communicating its corporate social responsibility practices previous studies have shown that special attention should be given to the publics’ perception of CSR-organization fit, motivation for the CSR, and timing of the CSR.

A key area in existing literature on corporate social responsibility examines consumer perceptions, placing an emphasis on the “fit” between the CSR practices and the brand or organization (Becker-Olson, Cudmore & Hill, 2005). The majority of research on consumer perception of CSR practices lands on the agreement of the need of “high-fit” CSR. This means that there should be an alignment of CSR with the organization’s mission and values. Results from Becker-Olson et. al (2005) indicate, “high-fit, proactive initiatives lead to an improvement in consumer beliefs, attitudes, and
intentions” (p. 46). Relating literature also incorporates the importance of “fit” but with other factors including brand reputation, timing of CSR and consumers’ perceptions of a brand’s motivation for the CSR practices (Cochran, 2007, Prabu, Kline & Dei, 2003, & Elving 2013).

Consumers are not passively receiving marketing communications; they are active and interpret organization motives. Consumers are interested in supporting organizations that actively demonstrate their commitment to building a just society for all individuals (Becker-Olson et al., 2005). Consumers are not interested in supporting brands that utilize CSR only in an effort to rebuild their image. “Organizations whose reputations regarding social responsibility or national loyalty were questionable prior to the crisis, run the risk of being perceived as opportunists if they use the crisis to recreate their images” (Ulmer et al., 2007, p. 132). Unless prior commitment and communication of CSR and general well being of the publics is happening during all stages of the crisis life cycle, CSR communicated after a crisis will likely not be well received by external publics (Becker-Olson et al., 2005).

The results suggest the significance that today’s publics place on genuine corporate social responsibility efforts. Consumers are interested in supporting brands that actively demonstrate their commitment to building a just society for all. Consumers are not interested in supporting an organization that utilizes corporate social responsibility to solely increase profit margins and repair its image. For this reason, this study only analyzes the internal publics cognitive and emotional responses in scenarios where an organization has a history of actively participating in corporate social responsibility. How
then, can an organization communicate its CSR practices as a crisis response strategy and use CSR to repair an organization’s reputation after a crisis?

**Organizational Renewal through corporate social responsibility.**

Organizations today must respond to an array of external and internal pressures. This is crucial for an organization in a crisis. Brands often utilize corporate social responsibility practices to actively fulfill the range of pressures, and many organizations are looking toward communication of corporate social responsibility practices during all stages of crisis communication.

This study aims to further develop Organizational Renewal Theory through the examination of corporate social responsibility in a crisis response strategy – specifically, in a post crisis response strategy. This study examines the effects of messages of corporate social responsibility in a renewal crisis response strategy on internal publics’ cognitive (i.e., perception of and trust in the organization) and emotional response. “Post-crisis responses that focus on renewal often derive from the values and virtues of the organization” (Ulmer et al., 2007, p. 131). Renewal’s prospective approach focuses on what an organization will do in the future to correct its action and ensure it does not happen again. “This rebuilding typically focuses on what is best for the community as a whole, rather than a strategic response that favors only a few” (Ulmer et al., 2007, p. 132). Logically, corporate social responsibility is one avenue an organization can use to better a community and make a more just society for all, so communication of CSR efforts in a renewal approach after a crisis could lead to positive perceptions and emotions of internal publics.
Literature investigating the effect of corporate social responsibility on employees links CSR as an extension of the values and ethics of the organization. CSR activities have been found to directly affect employees’ perceptions of an organization’s justice and fairness (Collier & Esteban, 2007). “CSR activities are thus seen as proof that the organization endorses the principle of fairness, and they therefore heighten employees’ perception of organizational justice” (Tziner, 2013, p. 92). As previously discussed, academic literature on employees’ attitudes toward CSR is limited, especially following a crisis. However, the existing literature on CSR and employees suggests that “CSR was found to have a significant effect on the level of job satisfaction, both directly and indirectly, mediating the effect on perceived organization justice” (Tziner, 2013, p. 92). From this research stems the idea that corporate social responsibility is a possible avenue for an organization to effectively use a renewal crisis response strategy, particularly when communicating with internal publics. The following research question and hypotheses are presented:

**Research Question 2** – Within a crisis scenario, do internal publics’ cognitive and emotional responses to an organization’s renewal crisis response strategy serve as a function of the history of an organization’s CSR practices?

**Hypothesis 2a** – Within a crisis scenario, internal publics’ cognitive responses (perception of the organization) will be more favorable to the renewal crisis response strategy that includes corporate social responsibility when compared to a renewal crisis response that does not include CSR.

**Hypothesis 2b** – Within a crisis scenario, internal public’s cognitive responses (trust in the organization) will be greater following the renewal crisis response strategy
that includes corporate social responsibility when compared to a renewal crisis response that does not include CSR.

**Hypothesis 3** – Within a crisis scenario, internal publics’ emotions will be more positive following the renewal crisis response strategy that includes corporate social responsibility when compared to a renewal crisis response that does not include CSR.

**An Integrative Framework**

This study follows an integrative framework for research in internal crisis communication suggested by Frandsen and Johansen (2011). The framework identifies how internal crisis communication differs from external crisis communication through two assumptions. The first assumption examines the relationship between internal publics and an organization to define and characterize internal communication as something different than external communication. The second assumption applies the three-stage approach to a crisis developed by Coombs (1997).

**First assumption.** The first assumption of the integrative theoretical framework identifies four elements common to employees that distinguish them as a public different than external publics. While it can be difficult to purely separate internal and external publics, this framework identifies differences in: “the type of relationship, the stakes, the identity and the degree of identification with the organization, and the role of the employees as both senders and receivers of internal (crisis) communication” (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011, p. 352).

The authors propose that internal publics have a different contractual relationship with an organization than external publics. “Employees have an employment relationship in the form of an economic relation where wage and salary earner is compensated for his
work and use of time, as well as a formal relation due to a specific distribution of roles, tasks, and functions that may reflect the power structure of the organization; having an influence on the way employees act, what they are allowed to do and to say” (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011, p. 352).

The second difference identified between internal and external publics is their stake in the organization.

   Stakes such as salary, job security, working hours and working conditions, degree of freedom and autonomy versus control, and motivation and engagement, affect the perceptions the employees have of their organization, as well as play a role in their ways of interpreting and understanding the […] communication of the organization (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011, p. 353).

Stakes can have an influence on the attribution employees make to a crisis situation, such as the possibility that crisis responsibility is attributed to the organization in which they work (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011).

The third differentiation of employees is that they have organizational identification different than that of external publics. Frandsen and Johansen describe the identification as a sense of belonging and commitment to the organization (2011). “Identification influences attitudes and emotions, the self-esteem, and the degree of belonging and having ownership; feeling of pride is negatively influenced by a crisis and may result in the rejection of the role as positive ambassador [of the organization]” (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011, p. 353).
The final differentiation of external and internal publics identified in the theoretical framework is that employees can act as both senders and receivers of information during a crisis (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011). “Employees often rely on internal communications designed to disseminate information or gather support for organizational initiatives to assist them in decision-making” (Lundy, 2006, p. 295).

The four previously mentioned identifications of the employee as an internal public demonstrates that employees have a complex relationship with an organization. It is crucial that crisis communication practitioners recognize these differences and understand the strong and complex psychological connection employees have to an organization when compared to other stakeholder groups. The complex and close relationship of employees with an organization is also why they will be studied in this research. The more complex psychological connection of employees might impact their cognitive and emotional processing of renewal response strategies.

**Second assumption.** The second assumption of the integrative theoretical framework utilizes the three-staged approach established by Coombs and Holladay in 1996. While some researchers have criticized the approach for being too simplistic and linear, the theoretical framework utilizes this approach because it “allows us to integrate and to make preliminary overview” of crisis procedure (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011). Approaching crisis communication in a staged-approach allows crisis communicators to focus on one main approach during each stage, although there is likely overlap and grey areas between stages.

In the pre crisis stage, there is a focus on preventing and preparing; during the crisis event, there is a focus on handling the crisis and sense making;
and in the post crisis stage there is a focus on learning and changing the organization (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011).

The integrative framework provides structure for this study. Through two assumptions, the framework provides an approach to study internal communication. Recognizing the key things that differentiate internal publics from external publics supports the need for more research in the area of internal communication, especially in crisis communication. The overlap of the three stages of the crisis highlights the focus and responsibility of crisis communicators during the stages of a crisis, while still recognizing the nonlinear method of real-life crises. The integrative theoretical framework provided by Frandsen and Johansen also highlights a key component to Organizational Renewal Theory: organizational learning. Unlike other theories in crisis communication, Renewal Theory emphasizes learning from a crisis and improving the organization after a crisis.

Renewal Theory is carried out through chosen crisis response strategies primarily during the crisis event and post crisis stage. This study examines the effects of renewal crisis response strategies on internal publics, specifically concerning the use of corporate social responsibility in the renewal approach.
Methodology

Public relations research has focused primarily on case studies, surveys and content analyses. While these studies have provided useful what to do and what not to do approaches to crisis communication, they leave little evidence-based research. The field of crisis communication needs to shift toward evidence-based scientific research to guide crisis communicators in decision-making (Coombs, 2007). This study uses an experiment method.

This method has been popular since the early 1990s and is the oldest approach in mass media research (Wimmer & Dominick, 1983). However, evidence-based scientific research in crisis communication is very limited, particularly regarding the micro-level of analysis (i.e., internal publics/employees) and specifically regarding Organizational Renewal Theory. This study uses an experiment to contribute to what is known about internal publics and Organizational Renewal Theory.

Sample

In an effort to examine the internal publics of an organization, the participants of this study were students sampled from a large Mid-western university. Following the integrative framework for research on internal crisis communication suggested by Frandsen and Johansen (2011), the study identifies students of the university as an internal public. Students currently enrolled at the university were chosen because of their relationship to the university. The students’ relationship to the university differs from external publics in, “the type of relationship, the stakes, the identity and the degree of identification with the organization, and the role […] as both senders and receivers of
communication” (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011, p. 352). Experiment conditions included crises and other pre crisis and post crisis materials appearing to be from the university.

In order to complete this study, a between subjects experiment was conducted, with participants accessing the experiment through Qualtrics, the online survey software. A total of 307 subjects took part in the experiment. The data was cleaned up to remove participants who did not respond to parts of the experiment. All following analyses were run with N=253.

**Design and Procedure**

The experiment is a 2 (crisis scenario: human interest or monetary interest) x 2 (corporate social responsibility frame: present or not present) between-subjects design. The first independent variable (i.e., crisis scenario) was chosen to broaden the application and weight of the results, and to further examine the relationship of crisis type and emotional responses. The study examined two crisis scenarios. One scenario depicted a human-interest appeal and one depicted a monetary-interest appeal. Each crisis scenario was chosen with the study sample in mind. To be relevant to the students at the university, recent real-life crises that occurred on campus were chosen. The human-interest scenario is in relation to the campus race relations crisis that was brought to light in the fall of 2015. The monetary-interest scenario is in relation to a graduate student insurance crisis that also occurred in the fall of 2015. Study participants were randomly assigned to one of the two scenarios (See Figure 1). Within each scenario, participants were then randomly assigned to the second independent variable (i.e., corporate social responsibility frame: present or not present).
Before viewing any of the stimuli, participants were given questions that gathered basic demographic information such as age, gender, race, and relationship to the university, etc. All participants were currently enrolled at the university and recruited from classes across campus ranging from journalism and history, to economics. Of N=253, the majority of participants, 76.7%, identified their race as Caucasian/White. The second highest race participants identified as was, 11.9% identifying as African American/African/Black, followed by 4.3% identifying as Hispanic/Latina, 3.6% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 3.2% Other. Of the participants, 70.4% were female and 29.6% were male. Approximately 94% of the participants were freshmen and sophomores at the university. Less than one percent of the participants were graduate students.

After demographic questions, participants began viewing the experiment materials. The study was approached in a heuristic method and followed the second assumption of the integrative framework. As previously discussed, this means
approaching crisis communication in a staged-approach of pre crisis, crisis event, and post crisis.

**First experiment material: A history of CSR.** First, participants were shown a stimulus that represents the pre crisis stage of the crisis. To represent the pre crisis stage, a stimuli that modeled the university website was chosen. Research on corporate social responsibility has suggested that CSR is more positively received following a crisis if it is embedded within past operations of the organization (Becker-Olson et al., 2005). This study followed this assumption, and presented the first material (i.e., the website) to the participants that included the mission of the company, which also included a brief history of corporate social responsibility practices relating to each crisis scenario. The participants who were randomly assigned the human-interest scenario read the identical history and mission of the university as those assigned to the monetary-interest scenario. Phrases similar to, “the university advances the health, cultural and social interests of the people of Missouri, the nation and the world” and “the University of Missouri continues to impact Missouri and its citizens in every county, every day,” were used in the stimuli. These phrases illustrated a history of corporate social responsibility and an embedded approach to the CSR practices.

The single difference between the crisis scenarios in the pre crisis stimuli was the type of CSR history communicated. For example, the participants assigned to the race crisis read of the history of the university actively pursuing a relationship with a university if South Africa.

**Second experiment material: The crisis.** The second material participants viewed were the crises of the university. Representing the crisis event stage of the
integrative framework, participants were asked to read a short news story covering the crisis of the university. The news story remained relatively constant between the crisis scenario groups, meaning that the responsibility of the crisis was the same for both the monetary- and human-interest scenarios (i.e., the organization was deemed not directly responsible for the crisis happening). Each news story gave a brief overview of the crisis that had occurred on the campus during the fall 2015 semester.

**Third experiment material: Renewal Crisis Response Strategy.** The third item that experiment participants viewed was the universities’ crisis response. This stimulus represents the third stage (i.e. post crisis stage of the crisis) and is when the second independent variable was presented. In this stage of the experiment, participants were shown either a crisis response strategy for their scenario that included CSR or one that did not include CSR.

In all conditions the response strategy was presented with an Organizational Renewal approach. This means that the post crisis response strategy followed the four theoretical objectives of Organization Renewal Theory: organizational learning, a prospective vision, ethical communication, and a sound organizational rhetoric (Ulmer, et al., 2007). The renewal response strategy was presented as a formal letter from either the system president or the university chancellor. The response emphasized restoring faith in the organizational system by reconnecting to the organization’s core value and beliefs (Ulmer et al., 2015). An example of some phrases that were used in the renewal response strategy include, “this presents an opportunity for real progress,” “we think, listen, challenge, reflect and push one another to be better” or “right now we have the chance to buoy our many strengths, to learn from missteps and to make an even better university.”
Within each crisis scenario, the renewal response was identical except for the manipulation of the second independent variable.

The independent variable, corporate social responsibility frame, was manipulated in this stage of the experiment. The renewal response strategy included either the presence or the absence of a corporate social responsibility frame. For example, the condition that included the presence of corporate social responsibility frame in the human-interest scenario included an announcement of a new program between the university and the university of South Africa. While the crisis response strategy with the absence of a corporate social responsibility frame did not have such previously mentioned new CSR program, but instead only included the renewal approach previously discussed.

**Dependent Variables**

The study dependent variables measured internal publics perceptions and emotions following the renewal crisis response strategy. The intent of a renewal response strategy is to move the focus of the communication from *what did happen* to *what will happen*. The forward-looking approach is intended to reconnect the organization to its core and to create a sense of greater security and a vision for the future (Ulmer et al., 2015). In an effort to examine the successfullness of communicating corporate social responsibility practices via a renewal crisis response strategy, the study will examined the internal publics (i.e., university students’) cognitive and emotional responses after viewing the experiment stimuli.

**Cognitive Response: Reputation of the Organization.** Organizational reputation was measured using a 10-item Organizational Reputation Scale developed by
Coombs and Holladay (1996). “Character is conceptualized as the trustworthiness and good will of the source, that is, an assessment of the degree to which the source is concerned with the interests of others (Coombs & Holladay, 2002, p. 174). Examples of Organizational Reputation Scale items include, “The organization is basically dishonest,” and “The organization is not concerned with the well-being of its publics.” Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The full scale can be viewed in Appendix A.

**Cognitive Response: Trust in the organization.** Organization crises cause apprehension and mistrust. The study measured trust of the internal publics using the scale created by the Institute for Public Relations. The scale uses a 9-point Likert Scale to measure participants’ trust including the dimensions of integrity, competence and dependability (Paine, 2003). Results are intended to give insight into how the presence or absence of a corporate social responsibility frame within a Renewal crisis response strategy impacts the internal publics’ trust in an organization. The full scale can be viewed in Appendix B.

**Emotional Response:** Crises trigger emotions in impacted publics. Emotions of fear, anxiety, uncertainty and others that can be triggered for an external public can often be stronger and more severe for internal publics because of their close connection to the organization. The triggered emotions guide the publics’ interpretation of the unfolding crisis, and shape their attitude toward the organization (Jin et al., 2007). The Crisis Emotion Scales developed by McDonald, Glendon, and Sparks offers “an instrument to measure crisis emotions as a tool for managers and scholars to identify consumers’ crisis emotional responses and intensity, predict behavioral outcomes, guide crisis
communication strategies, and indicate degree of crisis management success” (2011, p. 333). The scale examined three negative emotion scales (anger, fear, surprise) and two positive emotions (joy, sympathy) and were presented on a 7-point Likert-type scale, anchored by not at all (1) and very much (7) (McDonald et al., 2011). The scale was intended to examine the internal publics emotional response to the renewal crisis response strategies. The full scale can be viewed in Appendix C.
Results

Dependent Variables

After participants viewed the three stimuli representing the stages of the crisis, they were asked a series of questions to measure their cognitive and emotional reactions to the stimuli. Cronbach’s α, a rest of reliability, was run for each scale. The scales used to measure participants’ emotions remained separated into five different scales to provide a clear measure of what specific emotions were reported. Consequently, tests of reliability were run for trust in the organization, reputation of the organization, and the emotions: anger, surprise, sympathy, joy, and fear. The results indicated that each test was reliable. For trust in the organization, Cronbach’s α was 0.913; reputation, Cronbach’s α was 0.898; anger, Cronbach’s α was 0.912; surprise, Cronbach’s α was 0.893; sympathy, Cronbach’s α was 0.919; joy, Cronbach’s α was 0.933; fear, Cronbach’s α was 0.938.

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was computed to compare the mean scores of the seven dependent variables for all four participant conditions. MANOVA was used to simultaneously test the difference between groups across several dependent variables (Field, 2009).

Research questions were answered and hypotheses tested by with a MANOVA with experiment condition (Race/No CSR, Race/CSR, Insurance/No CSR, Insurance CSR) as the independent variables. There were multiple dependent variables that made up the cognitive and emotional perceptions of the participants, which included: cognitive responses measured through trust and reputation, and emotional responses measured
through anger, surprise, sympathy, joy, and fear. The Box M test was not significant Box M = 103.34, F = 1.155 (84, 92847.35), p > .05 and therefore homoscedasticity was not violated. Multivariate tests did not show significant difference in participant trust in the organization, participant perceived organization reputation, or participant emotions based on the participant condition in which they were assigned, F (21, 569.1) = 0.610, p > 0.05; Wilk’s Λ = 0.912, partial η² = .030. Univariate tests showed that condition has a significant effect on fear (F (3, 208) = 2.930; p < .05; partial η² = 0.041). Pairwise comparison of mean scores shows significant differences between condition 2 and condition 1 (p < .05), and between condition 1 and condition 3 (p < .05), and between condition 2 and condition 4 (p < .05).

**Table 1**
Mean and Standard Error for Fear

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Condition Race/No CSR</th>
<th>Race/CSR</th>
<th>Insurance/No CSR</th>
<th>Insurance/CSR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M  SE</td>
<td>M  SE</td>
<td>M  SE</td>
<td>M  SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>2.176* .189</td>
<td>2.841* .192</td>
<td>2.713* .189</td>
<td>2.260* .200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p < .05

**Univariate Effects – Demographic Variables**

For further exploration on the results, race was entered into a MANOVA with the DVs. The interaction between the cognitive and emotional responses of participants and the race of participants was significant (Roy’s Largest Root = 0.000, F (7, 199) = 5.25, p < 0.001). The univariate tests showed that race has a significant effect on trust (F (4, 206) = 5.755; p < 0.005; partial η² = 0.102; reputation (F (4, 206) = 4.206; p < 0.005; partial
\( \eta^2 = 0.077 \); and emotion sympathy \((F (4, 206) = 3.072; p < 0.05; \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.057)\).

Pairwise comparison of mean scores shows significant differences in several race groups: trust; between condition 1 and condition 2 \((p < .05)\), between condition 1 and condition 3 \((p < .05)\), between condition 1 and condition 5 \((p < .001)\), and between condition 5 and condition 6 \((p < .05)\); reputation; between condition 1 and condition 3 \((p < .05)\), between condition 1 and condition 5 \((p < .05)\), between condition 1 and condition 5 \((p < .05)\), between condition 3 and condition 6 \((p < .05)\), between condition 5 and condition 6 \((p < .05)\); anger; between condition 1 and condition 5 \((p < .05)\); and sympathy; between condition 1 and condition 2 \((p < .05)\), between condition 1 and condition 3 \((p < .05)\), and between condition 1 and condition 5 \((p < .05)\).
Discussion

Research Question 1: Do internal publics’ cognitive and emotional responses serve as a function of crisis scenario when communicating a crisis response through Organizational Renewal Theory?

A significant difference was found between the participant condition and the emotion, fear. No significant difference was found between any of the other cognitive or emotional dependent variables.

Hypothesis 1: Internal publics’ cognitive and emotional responses will be more positive when communicating Organization Renewal Theory following a human-interest crisis scenario compared to a monetary-interest crisis scenario.

A significant difference in mean scores was found between internal publics’ emotional response, fear, among the experiment conditions. There is sufficient evidence at the alpha level of significance (p < .05) to partially accept the claim that internal publics’ emotional response is more positive when communicating Organization Renewal Theory following a human-interest crisis scenario compared to a monetary-interest crisis scenario.

For fear, the mean score for condition 2 (M = 2.841) was greater than the mean score for condition 4 (M = 2.260). This means that study participants who were assigned to the race condition with the corporate social responsibility frame (Cond. 2) reported feeling more fear than the study participants who were assigned to the insurance condition with the corporate social responsibility frame (Cond. 4). In other words, when the corporate social responsibility frame is held constant, at present, the participants
experience more fear in the human-interest scenario when compared to the monetary-interest scenario.

However, additionally for fear, the mean score for condition 3 (M = 2.713) was greater than the mean score for condition 1 (M = 2.176). This means that the study participants who were randomly assigned to the insurance condition with no corporate social responsibility frame (Cond. 3) reported feeling more fear than the study participants who were randomly assigned to the race condition with no corporate social responsibility. In other words, when the corporate social responsibility frame is held constant, at not present, the participants experienced more fear in the monetary-interest scenario when compared to the human-interest scenario.

While these results might seem contradictory, they give insight into the role that a corporate social responsibility frame could play in a crisis response strategy for an organization that has a history of CSR practices. The results indicate that the type of crisis, or the crisis scenario, can influence the success of an organization’s ability to communicate corporate social responsibility within a renewal response to internal publics.

For internal publics, a corporate social responsibility frame might be more beneficial for an organization experiencing a monetary-interest crisis. Additionally when communicating with internal publics, a renewal response strategy without a corporate social responsibility frame might be more beneficial for an organization experiencing a human-interest crisis.
Research Question 2: Within a crisis scenario, do internal publics’ cognitive and emotional responses to an organization’s renewal crisis response strategy serve as a function of the history of an organization’s CSR practices?

Within the human-interest scenario (i.e., race crisis scenario), a significant difference was found between the participant condition and the emotion, fear. No significant difference was found between any of the other cognitive or emotional dependent variables. Additionally, no other significant difference was found in the monetary-interest scenario (i.e., graduate student insurance scenario).

Hypothesis 2a: Within a crisis scenario, internal publics’ cognitive responses (perception of the organization) will be more favorable to the renewal crisis response strategy that includes corporate social responsibility when compared to a renewal crisis response that does not include CSR.

Within the crisis scenarios, no significant differences in mean scores were found between internal publics’ perception of the organization’s reputation and the renewal crisis response strategy that includes corporate social responsibility and a renewal crisis response strategy that does not include CSR.

Hypothesis 2b: Within a crisis scenario, internal public’s cognitive responses (trust in the organization) will be greater following the renewal crisis response strategy that includes corporate social responsibility when compared to a renewal crisis response that does not include CSR.

Within the crisis scenarios, no significant differences in mean scores were found between internal publics’ trust in the organization and the renewal crisis response strategy
that includes corporate social responsibility and a renewal crisis response strategy that
does not include CSR.

**Hypothesis 3:** Within a crisis scenario, internal publics’ emotions will be more
positive following the renewal crisis response strategy that includes corporate social
responsibility when compared to a renewal crisis response that does not include
CSR.

Within the human-interest scenario (i.e., race crisis), a significant difference in
mean scores was found between internal publics’ emotional response, fear, among the
experiment conditions. There is sufficient evidence at the alpha level of significance (p <
.05) to partially accept the null hypothesis that internal publics’ emotional responses are
*more negative* following the renewal crisis response strategy that includes corporate
social responsibility when compared to a renewal crisis response that does not include
CSR.

For fear, the mean score for condition 2 (M = 2.841) was greater than the mean
score for condition 1 (M = 2.176). This means that study participants who were assigned
to the human-interest condition with the corporate social responsibility frame (Cond. 2)
reported feeling more fear than the study participants who were assigned to the human-
interest condition without the corporate social responsibility frame (Cond. 1). In other
words, when the crisis scenario is held constant at the human-interest, or race crisis, the
participants experience more fear when presented with a renewal crisis response strategy
that includes corporate social responsibility initiatives when compared to a renewal crisis
response strategy that does not include CSR initiatives.
The results indicate that when an organization, which has a history of corporate social responsibility, is experiencing a human-interest crisis, it could elicit more positive feelings (i.e., less fear) from its internal publics by not communicating its CSR initiatives in the renewal crisis response.

**Univariate Effects – Demographic Variables**

After reviewing the previously mentioned results, an additional analysis was calculated to provide further insight and exploration. Although it is not needed to answer the research questions and hypotheses, an additional MANOVA was run using study participant race as the independent variable. The interaction between the cognitive and emotional responses of participants and the race of the participants was significant. It is important to note that of the participants, approximately 3 percent selected other for their race, and in a text submission, indicated they were biracial.

For trust, the mean score for participants identifying as African American/Black (M = 3.641) was significantly lower than the mean score for participants that identified as Asian/Pacific Islander (M = 4.525), Hispanic/Latino (M = 4.646), Caucasian/White (M = 4.603) and Other (M = 3.764). This means that across all of the conditions, participants who identified as African American/Black had the lowest trust in the university after viewing the stimuli.

For reputation, the mean score for participants identifying as African American/Black (M = 3.189) reported the university’s reputation was significantly lower than participants identifying as Hispanic/Latino (M = 3.989), and Caucasian/White (M = 3.892). Additionally for reputation, the mean score for participants identifying as Caucasian/White (M = 3.892) reported the university’s reputation significantly lower
than participants identifying as Other (M = 2.9). Finally for reputation, the mean score for participants identifying as Caucasian/White (M = 3.892) reported the university’s reputation significantly lower than participants as Other (M = 2.9). This means that across all conditions, participants identifying as African American/Black had the lowest rating of the university’s reputation among the other races.

For anger, the mean score for participants identifying as African American/Black (M = 3.447) reported more anger than participants identifying as Caucasian/White (M = 2.788).

For sympathy, the mean score for participants identifying as African American/Black (M = 2.276) reported statistically less sympathy than participants identifying as Asian/ Pacific Islander (M = 3.583), Hispanic/Latino (M = 3.333), and Caucasian/White (M = 3.292). This means that across all participant conditions, those identifying as African American/Black had the lowest report of sympathy for the university following the renewal crisis response strategies.

**Further Literature Examination and Theoretical Implications**

This study aims to expand the academic knowledge on internal publics. Specifically, it aims to further develop Organizational Renewal Theory through the examination of corporate social responsibility in a post crisis response strategy. It was hypothesized that communicating CSR within an Organization Renewal frame would lead to more positive emotions and perceptions of an organization for its internal publics than communicating Organization Renewal in a crisis response without CSR. It was also hypothesized that a human-interest crisis scenario would lead to more positive emotions and perceptions of an organization for its internal publics.
As previously discussed, the results indicate that when communicating a renewal crisis response strategy, both the type of crisis and the presence or absence of a corporate social responsibility frame can influence the emotions, specifically fear, of the internal public. The reviewed literature has supported the idea that crises trigger emotions of affected publics.

Additionally, the previous literature has found that crisis response strategies should be chosen based on the crisis type, how the crisis is framed by the media, and the potential emotional response of the publics (Kim & Cameron, 2011). Publics’ emotions can be triggered by the type of the crises, their relationship or closeness to the crisis and the emotional appeal used in the media news framing of the crisis. Knowing this, management of all publics’ perceptions is essential for crisis communication practitioners to plan effective communication (i.e., crisis response strategies) following a crisis. The results of this study provide indication of how crisis communicators can utilize Organizational Renewal Theory and corporate social responsibility to positively influence the internal publics’ emotions after a crisis – something that very few academic studies have addressed.

**Practical Implications**

The results of this study support the previous literature while providing additional insight into the internal public. The type of crisis (i.e., crisis scenario) was shown to influence one emotion of the internal publics – fear. Interestingly, the absence or presence of the corporate social responsibility frames resulted in significant mean differences among participant level of reported fear among the two crisis scenarios. That is, when the CSR frame was present, participants experienced more fear in the human-
interest scenario. Additionally, when the CSR frame was absent, participants experienced more fear in the monetary-interest scenario.

Similar to what has been suggested by previous literature when communicating with external publics, the results support the need for public relations and crisis communication practitioners to pay attention to the type of crisis in which they are responding to when communicating with internal publics. The results suggest that for internal publics, a corporate social responsibility frame might be more beneficial for an organization experiencing a monetary-interest crisis. It could be hypothesized that a monetary initiative, such as the monetary-focused CSR communicated in this study, makes more sense and is more cohesive when an organization is already discussing monetary issues relating to the crisis. This idea could be further examined in future research.

Additionally when communicating with internal publics, a renewal response strategy without a corporate social responsibility frame might be more beneficial for an organization experiencing a human-interest crisis. This also could be further examined in future research.

The results of the study also provide additional insight into how internal publics respond to corporate social responsibility communicated via a renewal response strategy. Corporate social responsibility is one avenue an organization can demonstrate its commitment to its surrounding community. CSR is a way for an organization to address the demands and concerns of its array of publics. Communicating CSR following a crisis had not been advised by previous literature, unless the organization had previously communicated its commitment to corporate social responsibility. For this reason, the
study examined only how internal publics responded to the absence or presence of the corporate social responsibility frame when CSR was clearly communicated as a part of the university mission (i.e., in the pre crisis stage).

Again, the results provide support for the idea that the type of crisis influences the internal public. When the crisis scenario was held constant at the human-interest, or race scenario, the study indicated that participants’ fear was greater when corporate social responsibility was communicated in the crisis response than when CSR was not communicated in the crisis response.

**Limitations and Future Research**

Over the last 20 years, crisis communication has expanded as an academic discipline. Previous crisis communication research has focused on optimal response strategies with external publics. The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of communicating corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a crisis communication response strategy on internal publics. Specifically, the main interest of this study was to investigate how the presence of a corporate social responsibility message within a renewal crisis response strategy influenced internal publics’ cognitive (i.e., perceptions) and emotional responses. It was hypothesized that communicating CSR efforts in a renewal approach after a crisis would lead to positive perceptions and emotions.

When compared to other image repair theories, Organizational Renewal Theory is fairly new in the crisis communication field. While this study contributes to the field’s understanding of how internal publics perceive Renewal, much more evidence-based, scientific research is needed on renewal as a crisis response strategy. There are four theoretical objectives central to Discourse of Renewal: “organizational learning, ethical
communication, a prospective rather than retrospective vision, and sound organizational rhetoric” (Ulmer, Seeger, & Sellnow, 2007, p. 29). While these four objectives were included in the study stimuli, the participants’ previous knowledge and experience with the real-world crises could have influenced their cognitive and emotional responses during the study. Using real-world crises events also could influence the way participants have previously been influenced via News Framing. The chosen crisis events were talked about around the nation, and depending on what exposure and news coverage participants viewed during the actual crisis in the Fall of 2015, their cognitive and emotional responses could have been influenced.

Additionally, Renewal is a leader-based response to a crisis. While the new leaders of the university were used in the study to communicate the response strategy, the participants’ predisposing feelings and opinions of the leaders could have influenced their responses to the dependent variables.

After running the initial analysis to answer the research questions and hypotheses, a follow-up analysis was conducted to examine how the race of the participants might influence their cognitive and emotional responses to the stimuli. The results of that analysis did support the notion that the race of an internal public influences a number of emotions, trust and their believed reputation of the organization. Further examination into the different race and cultures of internal audiences and the affect this has on their emotional responses to crisis response strategies for different types of crisis would benefit the crisis communication field. For example, this study simply indicated that African American publics might have less sympathy for an organization, but more insight into their response following a variety of crisis types would be beneficial.
Discourse of Renewal Theory proposes that a crisis can be a turning point for an organization to create renewal, growth, and new opportunities for the organization and its publics. However, further research should investigate how each of the four theoretical objectives of the theory influence both external and internal publics. Once this area is further explored, crisis communicators can influence more positive emotions and perceptions of both external and internal publics. Potentially, this could lead to more positive experiences for both the employees and the organization after experiencing a crisis. More positive emotions and perceptions could lead to a greater employee commitment to an organization after a crisis, and greater employee work satisfaction. Consequently, a happier employee leads to an overall more successful organization.
References


APPENDIX A – ORGANIZATIONAL REPUTATION SCALES

STRONGLY DISAGREE 1 2 3 4 5 STRONGLY AGREE

1. The organization is basically honest.
2. The organization is concerned with the well-being of its publics.
3. I do trust the organization to tell the truth about the incident.
4. I would prefer to have NOTHING to do with this organization.
5. Under most circumstances, I WOULD NOT be likely to believe what the organization says.
6. The organization is basically DISHONEST.
7. I do NOT trust the organization to tell the truth about the incident.
8. Under most circumstances, I would be likely to believe what the organization says.
9. I would buy a product or service from this organization.
10. The organization is NOT concerned with the well-being of its publics.
APPENDIX B – QUESTIONS TO MEASURE TRUST, INCLUDING THE DIMENSIONS OF INTEGRITY, COMPETENCE AND DEPENDABILITY

A Typical Trust Measurement Questionnaire, that includes a series of agree/disagree statements pertaining to the relationship. Respondents are asked to use a 1-to-9 scale to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree that each item listed describes their relationship with that particular organization.

1. This organization treats people like me fairly and justly. (Integrity)
2. Whenever this organization makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about people like me. (Integrity; original dimension: faith).
3. This organization can be relied on to keep its promises. (Dependability)
4. I believe that this organization takes the opinions of people like me into account when making decisions. (Dependability)
5. I feel very confident about this organization’s skills. (Competence)
6. This organization has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do. (Competence)
7. Sound principles seem to guide this organization’s behavior. (Integrity)
8. This organization does not mislead people like me. (Integrity)
9. I am very willing to let this organization make decisions for people like me. (Dependability)
10. I think it is important to watch this organization closely so that it does not take advantage of people like me. (Dependability) (Reversed)
11. This organization is known to be successful at the things it tries to do. (Competence)
APPENDIX C – EMOTION SCALES

Responses based on 7-point Likert-type scale, anchored by not at all (1) and very much (7). Four separate Likert-scales were presented for each of the five emotions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anger Scale</th>
<th>Surprise Scale</th>
<th>Sympathy Scale</th>
<th>Joy Scale</th>
<th>Fear Scale</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angry</td>
<td>Surprised</td>
<td>Sympathetic</td>
<td>Contended</td>
<td>Scared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annoyed</td>
<td>Shocked</td>
<td>Sorry</td>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
<td>Apprehensive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disgusted</td>
<td>Amazed</td>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>Glad</td>
<td>Fearful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outraged</td>
<td>Astounded</td>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>Distressed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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