Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Public Relations Review

ELSEVIER

Exploring crisis communication in the internal context of an organization: Examining moderated and mediated effects of employee-organization relationships on crisis outcomes

Young Kim[a,*], Minjeong Kang[b], Ejae Lee[c], Sung-Un Yang[d]

[a] J. William and Mary Diederich College of Communication, Marquette University, Johnston Hall, Rm#423, Milwaukee, WI 53233, United States
[b] The Media School, Indiana University 601 E. Kirkwood Ave., Bloomington, IN 47405-1223, United States
[c] Doctoral Student, The Media School, Indiana University, United States
[d] The Media School, Indiana University, United States

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This study seeks to foster a greater understanding of effective crisis communication from the internal context of organizations. The present research conducted an online experimental study of 640 full-time employees in the United States. Results through OLS multiple regression and path analysis indicated 1) employee-organization relationships (EOR) and timing strategy of self-disclosure (*stealing thunder*) were positively associated with the positive internal reputation and employees' supportive behavioral intentions, 2) the positive effects of EOR on the employees' supportive behaviors appeared differently according to whether or not *stealing-thunder* was used, and 3) the effects of EOR and message strategy (accommodative response) on the positive internal reputation were varied when the negative emotions (anger and anxiety) intervened.

1. Introduction

Crisis communication involves dialogues, in various forms and formats between an organization and its publics, regarding a crisis (Fearn-Banks, 2017). Organizations in a crisis situation are expected to implement crisis communication by collecting, processing, and disseminating crisis information in order to reduce publics' uncertainty and minimize reputational damage to the organization (Coombs, 2012; Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2015). In this regard, over the past two decades, scholars have paid substantial attention to finding out what message strategies would be most effective for crisis communication (Claeys & Opgenhaffen, 2016). The current crisis communication scholarship, which focuses on such crisis-response message strategies, has resonated with crisis managers. These managers are tasked with post-crisis reputation management to repair an organization's image and/or garner favorable behavioral outcomes from external publics (Heide & Simonsson, 2014; Kim, Avery, & Lariscy, 2011).

However, scholars recently have voiced concern over an almost exclusive emphasis on "external dimensions" of the current crisis communication scholarship, and corresponding neglect of one of the most strategically important publics for any organization: employees (Heide & Simonsson, 2014, p. 131; Mazzei, Kim, & Dell'Oro, 2012; Strandberg & Vigsø, 2016). Indeed, scholarly focus on crisis communication for internal publics has so far remained limited (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011; Frandsen & Johansen, 2016; Johansen, Aggerholm, & Frandsen, 2012; Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2011, 2015).

Employees play a pivotal role in leveraging an organization's competitive advantage, because they possess both accumulated knowledge about the organization, as well as networks of relationships with coworkers, managers, and customers (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 2000). Such networks are invaluable to organizational success (Bhatnagar, 2007). In a crisis situation, moreover, these crucial invested relationships between employees and their organization can lead employees to experience "peculiar emotional and cognitive reactions, such as insecurity, stress, feelings of betrayal, fear, and anger" (Mazzei et al., 2012, p. 33). Consequently, these unique relational contexts between an organization and its employees can influence how employees interpret and evaluate the crisis and the crisis communication, which ultimately can lead employees to develop specific expectations and responses vis-à-vis their organization that are unique to internal publics (Koehler & Raithel, 2018; Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2011; Men, 2014; Welch & Jackson, 2007).

Additionally, as voluntary and unofficial agents for their organization, employees can also play a critical role representing their organization to external stakeholders, with their views of the organization reflected in the process (Sharma & Kamalanabhan, 2012). In other words, employees can talk about their feelings and attitudes with their colleagues, families, and friends; give interviews or statements to traditional media; and express their own opinions or disclose information to social media (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011; Kim & Rhee, 2011; Strandberg & Vigsø, 2016).

These backgrounds lent impetus to this study. The study aims to explore how internal crisis communication strategies, in the context of existing employee-organization relationships[1] (EOR hereafter), would affect the influence of crisis communication on an organization's internal reputation and on employees' supportive behaviors. Specifically, this study tests how the effects of EOR will be moderated by communication strategies, including message strategy (e.g., Coombs & Holladay, 1996) and timing strategy (e.g., Arpan & Pompper, 2003), and mediated by employees' negative emotions (e.g., Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2007; Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2012). With exploring the context of employee relations, the findings of this study can contribute to the development and advancement of internal crisis communication theories and practice. Integrating EOR in the context of the existing crisis communication literature, the results of this study can shed light on how quality relationship management with employees and effective internal crisis communication can make organizations more resilient against organizational crises by garnering employees' positive view of the organization and their support during organizational crises.

2. Literature review

2.1. Outcomes of effective internal crisis communication: internal reputation and employees' supportive behavioral intention

A crisis is a negative event that can detrimentally affect publics' interactions with and their intentions toward an organization, thus damaging the organization's reputation and its performance (Coombs, 2007a, 2015a, 2015b; Fearn-Banks, 2017). The dominant crisis communication research has mainly focused on communication strategies to minimize damage to organizational image/reputation and reduce external publics' negative behavioral intentions (Fediuk, Coombs, & Botero, 2012; Mazzei et al., 2012). Consequently, possible influence of effective internal crisis communication on employee perceptions and attitudes toward their organization (in terms of internal reputation and employees' supportive behavioral intention) has not been much explored (Heide & Simonsson, 2014; Strandberg & Vigsø, 2016).

2.1.1. Internal reputation

Organizational reputation is a valuable asset to organizations. A positive reputation can create a competitive advantage not only in attracting customers, but also in recruiting top-talent employees and boosting investor confidence (Davies, Chun, da Silva, & Roper, 2003; Fombrun & van Riel, 2004). Organizational reputation is composed of both internal and external stakeholders' perceptions of the organization (Fombrun, Gardberg, & Sever, 2000). Both groups' perceptions of organizational reputation can largely be influenced by strategic organizational communication (Coombs, 2007a; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Men, 2014) and the quality of the relationships an organization has established with its publics (Fombrun & van Riel, 2004; Sung & Yang, 2009; Yang, 2007). Employees' views of their organization (i.e., internal reputation) can have wide influences on the organization's external reputation, as well as on employees' feelings toward the organization and behavioral intentions either to leave or to stay committed to their organization (Balmer & Gray, 1999).

Particularly, internal reputation is composed of employees' perception and view of their organization, determining what they express publicly (Men, 2014). Employees sometimes play the unofficial role of *organizational ambassadors* by seeking and disseminating positive organizational information to other internal and external publics, or by defending their organization against biased opinions (Kim, 2018; Mazzei et al., 2012). Employees also sometimes act as o*rganizational adversaries* by dispersing negative information or their negative emotion to others, amplifying organizational problems and exacerbating already negative situations (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011; Heide & Simonsson, 2014; Kim & Rhee, 2011). Such employees' boundary spanning activities, referring to *the interpersonal transfer of information across organizational boundaries*, are particularly influenced by their own view of their organization (i.e., internal reputation) (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964; Keller, Szilagyi Jr, & Holland, 1976). This is especially true when the external organizational environment is unstable, such as in a crisis situation (Keller et al., 1976; Kim & Rhee, 2011).

---

[1] The quality of EOR has been established as the primary antecedent of employees attitudinal and behavioral outcomes in the internal communication research (e.g., Kang & Sung, 2017), as well as in crisis communication (e.g., Brown & White, 2011).

2.1.2. Employees' supportive behavioral intention

Another important employee outcome for effective internal crisis communication is employees' willingness to support their organization during and after an organizational crisis. Unlike external publics such as customers, employees have a contractual relationship with their organization, with certain expectations of mutual obligations and dependency (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). They have higher stakes in their relationship with their organization, such as job security, engagement, and loyalty (Aryee, Budhwar, & Chen, 2002; Mazzei et al., 2012). Employees may change their attitudes and behaviors toward their organization when they perceive the organization fails to meet its side of the obligations (Raja, Johns, & Ntalianis, 2004; Suazo, 2009; Zhao, Wayne, Glibkowski, & Bravo, 2007).

Conversely, when employees perceive their organization to be invested in their well-being, employees tend to demonstrate extra-role behaviors (Tsui, Pearce, Porter, & Tripoli, 1997). Studies have shown that the expression of the organization's concern could lead to high levels of employee job satisfaction and commitment, and could reduce employees' intent to quit (Nikandrou & Tsachouridi, 2015). Further, an organization's honest empathetic concern that goes beyond exchange considerations could lead to the development of social capital (Cameron et al., 2003; Cameron & Winn, 2012) and extra-role behaviors among its employees to support the organization (Balfour & Wechsler, 1996). Such development, in turn, can foster pro-social motives, such as employees' willingness to take on extra assignments, and increased job engagement to help the organization succeed (Grant, 2007).

In relationship management literature, there exist strong theoretical and empirical supports for the link between the quality of an organization's relationship with the public and positive public outcomes. Such outcomes include positive perceptions of organizational reputation, as well as publics' willingness to support the organization (e.g., Coombs & Holladay, 2001; Yang, 2007). In the internal context of organizational communication, employee-organization relationships (EOR) have been found to be key antecedents for employees' attitudinal and behavioral outcomes (e.g., Brown & White, 2011; Kang & Sung, 2017). In fact, the link between EOR quality and positive employee outcomes can be even stronger than the link with external publics: Whereas external stakeholders largely rely on second-hand information and media reports about the organization, an organization's internal reputation (held by its employees) is shaped by employees' direct and frequent interactions with the organization[2] (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Forman & Argenti, 2005). Further, the quality of interactions with their organization, as perceived by employees, can further affect their commitment and willingness to provide or withhold their support for their organization by affecting employee morale, engagement, and job turnout (Balmer & Gray, 1999).

2.2. Effects of the employee-organization relationship quality in effective internal crisis communication

In prior crisis communication research, researchers used *the halo effect*[3] framework in order to demonstrate the impact of the organization-public relationship (OPR) on crisis communication outcomes (e.g., Coombs, 2012; Coombs & Holladay, 2001, 2006; Kim, 2017; Sohn & Lariscy, 2012). Applying the halo effect, in past crisis communication research, researchers have examined how organizations' performance history prior to a crisis situation influences stakeholders' judgments related to the crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2001; Coombs, 1998, 2002; Kim, 2017; Ulmer, 2001). As a critical element of organizational performance history, a relational history positively affects publics' perceptions of a crisis as well as the organization in crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2001). For example, based on Stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), in the case of Malden Mills and its CEO Aaron Feuerstein's crisis communication, Ulmer (2001) demonstrated the positive impact of pre-crisis relationships with stakeholders on the effectiveness of post-crisis communication for the organization in crisis.

Past research on the halo effect in crisis communication has specified a halo effect in a crisis in terms of (1) shield effect and (2) benefit of the doubt (Coombs & Holladay, 2006; Coombs, 2012). Accordingly, a halo effect as shield, first, helps an organization in a crisis be protected from the negative information associated with the crisis, as stakeholders tend to focus more on positive information affected by favorable organizational history including favorable relational history (Coombs & Holladay, 2006; Coombs, 2012; Ulmer, 2001). In their empirical studies, Coombs and Holladay (2006) found that the halo effect as shield effect happened in crisis when organizations had very favorable prior relationships/reputations. In a similar vein, Sohn and Lariscy (2012) conceptualized – based on cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) – and empirically demonstrated *the buffering effect* of organizational performance history, related to competence, on the greater resilience of an organization in crisis. Additionally, a halo effect as benefit of the doubt occurs when the cause of a crisis is unknown to stakeholders. In this case, rather than making attributions of crisis responsibility to the organization in the crisis, stakeholders tend to give the benefit of the doubt to the organization with favorable organizational history (Coombs & Holladay, 2006), including favorable reputational history (Fombrun, 1996).

In the recent literature on crisis communication, researchers have applied the concept of organization-public relationships into crisis communication research. Brown and White (2011) examined how students' perception of student-university relationships affected the attribution of crisis responsibility to the university, across different crisis response strategies. They found that the perceived quality of student-university relationships significantly mitigated the university's responsibility for the crisis, regardless of

---

[2] Reputation scholars differentiated types of reputations formed, designing reputation based on first-hand, direct interactions as the primary (2000, Bromley, 1993) or experiential reputation (Grunig & Huang, 2000; Williams et al., 1993), and the secondary reputation as that developed via secondary and indirect contacts.

[3] Thorndike (1920) coined the term "the halo effect" to explain individual tendency to maintain a consistent set of beliefs and attitudes in specific, distinctive attributes (Leuthesser, Kohli, & Harich, 1995), according to the overall/global impression toward the object being rated (Beckwith & Lehmann, 1975).

crisis response strategies. Likewise, examining the halo effect of OPR in crisis through qualitative methods, Kim (2017) demonstrated that good organizational performance history motivated publics to attribute less crisis responsibility to the organization in a crisis by creating doubts in the minds of the publics about the alleged cause of the crisis and further attributing the crisis to a single incident.

With regard to the link between relationship quality and organizational reputation, Yang and his colleagues (Yang & Cha, 2015; Yang & Grunig, 2005; Yang, 2007) integrated the perspectives of stakeholder relationship management (; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000) with organizational reputation management (Carroll & McCombs, 2003; Fombrun, 1996). For example, they found that perceptions of the relationship quality positively influenced favorable reputations of organizations across different types of organizations (Yang & Grunig, 2005; Yang, 2007), especially when stakeholders had an experiential, substantial relationship history with organizations, instead of a second-hand, reputational relationship history (Yang & Cha, 2015). It is noteworthy that the nature of employee-organization relationships is essentially experiential relationships rather than reputational, suggesting a greater, closer link between EOR and organizational reputations held by employees. Also, Hong and Yang (2009) found that the perceived quality of stakeholder-organization relationships, such as relational satisfaction, strongly increased positive word-of-mouth intentions mediated by greater stakeholder-organization identification. Despite the increasing recognition of employees as the most important public in public relations practice (Broom & Sha, 2012), there has been minimal research that examines the impact of employee-organization relationships (EOR) on the outcomes of internal crisis communication. Therefore, the current study proposes the following research hypothesis on the basis of the empirical findings from the previous literature reviewed:

H1. Positive EOR will be positively associated with (H1a) positive internal reputation and (H1b) employee supportive behavioral intentions.

2.3. Crisis communication strategies for effective internal crisis communication

In the past few decades, crisis response strategies in terms of message and timing have drawn much attention from researchers and practitioners in crisis communication as guidelines for how crisis managers should use appropriate crisis response (message) strategies, and when they should self-disclose crisis information as early as possible (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2012; Claeys & Opgenhaffen, 2016; Coombs, 2015b; Zhou & Shin, 2017). While crisis communication studies have predominantly focused on the crisis communication strategies with external publics (customers), the importance of appropriate crisis message and timing strategies becomes more apparent for internal communication during a crisis (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015; Johansen, Johansen, & Weckesser, 2016). A crisis inherently yields stronger ambiguity and uncertainty for employees with higher stakes, compared to external publics (Ulmer et al., 2015). During the crisis, employees are likely to be eager to find out what is going on with their organization, and are also likely to have high expectations for adequate and timely information about the crisis from the management (Heide & Simonsson, 2014; Johansen et al., 2012). In the following section, crisis response strategies in terms of message and timing in relevance to internal communication during a crisis are reviewed.

2.3.1. Response message strategies: SCCT

Scholars have emphasized the role of crisis communication as a symbolic resource organization can rely on to help protect their reputations in time of crisis (Coombs, 1998, 2007b). Coombs (2015a, 2015b) elaborated on two types of crisis communication in terms of (1) managing information and (2) managing meanings. Accordingly, beyond managing information about a crisis (e.g., the collection and the dissemination of crisis-related information), what is critical in effective crisis communication is managing *meanings* of a crisis in the minds of publics. The situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) as a mainstream theory in crisis communication, posits that to best protect reputations of an organization in crisis, crisis managers need to manage meanings of the crisis by a high fit/match between crisis responsibility attributed to the organization and crisis response strategies (Claeys, Cauberghe, & Vyncke, 2010; Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Coombs, 2007a). Crisis response strategies refer to "what an organization says and does after a crisis to protect the organizational reputation" (Coombs & Holladay, 2002, p. 166) depending on different crisis *situations/ types* (Benson, 1988).

The SCCT suggests that, given the perceived responsibility of the crisis by different crisis situations/types (Coombs & Holladay, 1996), crisis response strategies can be selected on a continuum ranging from *defensive* (e.g., attack the accuser, denial, and scapegoat) to *accommodative* (e.g., compensation and apology) strategies (Coombs, 2007a; Coombs, 2015a; Coombs, 2015b). Previous studies have found strong empirical evidence of the impact of accommodative crisis response strategies reducing publics' blame on and negative impressions of the responsible company in an airline crisis (Lee, 2005), as well as increasing positive attitudes and purchasing intentions toward companies in the various crises ranging from a toxic spill into a river to sexual harassment claims (Lyon & Cameron, 2004).

The positive effects of accommodative crisis response strategies in comparison to defensive ones, on restoring or maintaining a favorable reputation are found in recent studies across different crisis situations such as a product tampering (Claeys et al., 2010), a car recall (Choi & Chung, 2013), and a food poisoning (Crijns, Claeys, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017) crises. Particularly, in a crisis involving an accusation of management misconduct, the denial and no response strategies were found to be significantly less effective than the positive (accommodative) response strategy (Coombs, Holladay, & Claeys, 2016). This study therefore proposes the following research hypothesis to test the effects of accommodative message strategy versus defensive message strategy for internal communication during a crisis:

H2. Accommodative strategy will be more positively associated with (H2a) positive internal positive reputation and (H2b) employee

supportive behavioral intentions than defensive strategy.

2.3.2. Response timing strategies: stealing thunder vs. Thunder

The timing of communication determining when an organization should release crisis information, i.e., "the release of information acknowledging that a crisis exists" (Coombs, 2015b, p. 144), is an important factor for effective crisis communication management (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2012; Claeys, Cauberghe, & Leysen, 2013; Lee, 2016). The timing of crisis-related information disclosure is considered a timing strategy that crisis managers could use to reduce the negative effects of a crisis or an incident that may develop into a full-blown crisis (Beldad, van Laar, & Hegner, 2018; Coombs, 2015b). According to Arpan and Pompper (2003), there are two timing strategies: *stealing thunder* and *thunder*. The *stealing thunder* strategy is referred to as a self-disclosure strategy or an ex-ante crisis timing strategy, in which an organization releases crisis information to the public(s) during a crisis but before other parties can, such as the government and media (Arpan & Pompper, 2003). The *thunder* strategy involves an organization waiting to release information until inquiries have arisen from the media and other parties or an ex-post crisis timing strategy (Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2005).

The positive effects of the *stealing thunder* strategy on reputation and supportive behaviors for the organization are well established compared to any positive effects of the *thunder* strategy. In a series of experimental studies, Claeys and her colleagues (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2012; Claeys et al., 2013) found that self-disclosing of a crisis more strongly mitigated the negative effects on post-crisis organizational reputation than responding to accusations of a third party. Additionally research by Claeys, Cauberghe, and Pandelaere (2016) also indicates the organizational self-disclosure strategy can minimize reputational damage by diverting publics' attention from negative publicity. Similar findings supporting the positive impacts of the proactive crisis disclosure on post-crisis organizational reputation have been reported in recent crisis cases, such as the Columbia Mall Shooting (Fowler, 2017) and international crisis issues (e.g., Fonterra's milk product recall and Nike's and Wal-Mart's overtime-working scandal) (Zhou & Shin, 2017).

Additionally, the positive effects of the stealing thunder strategy on post-crisis supportive behavioral intentions are found in the literature. Studies found that mere self-disclosure of negative information, compared to third-party disclosure, positively affected consumers' behavioral intentions such as future purchase intention of a health product (e.g., Fennis & Stroebe, 2014). Also, a proactive crisis communications strategy was found to successfully reduce consumers' intentions to spread negative information about the organization (negative word-of-mouth) (Einwiller & Johar, 2013). More recently, subsequent studies have confirmed the positive effects of stealing thunder on customers' supportive behavioral intentions (repeated purchase of product) toward a company across different crises. Two examples of crises in which this strategy positively affected purchasing habits included organizational misdeed crises, including one involving employee abuse (Lee, 2016) and a product harm crisis related to clothing with high levels of toxic chemicals (Beldad et al., 2018). Applying communication timing strategies to internal crisis communication, consequently, this study suggested the following hypothesis:

H3. Stealing thunder strategy will be more positively associated with (H2a) positive internal reputation and (H2b) employee supportive behavioral intentions than thunder strategy.

2.3.3. Moderating role of crisis communication strategies

The extant research has shown that the strong effects of positive relationships on crisis outcomes are consistent, regardless of crisis message strategies the organizations employ. Crisis communication studies have demonstrated the positive effects of the relationship on crisis outcomes (Brown & White, 2011), regardless of crisis message strategies (Ki & Brown, 2013). Park and Reber's (2011) study found that crisis response messages did not significantly moderate the positive effects of favorable relationships on students' supportive behavioral intention toward their university in a crisis. Moreover, recent EOR studies indicate that the EOR quality can be the most important determinant for employees' positive behavioral outcomes (Kim & Rhee, 2011), such as sharing positive organizational information and advocating for their company to external publics during a crisis (Mazzei et al., 2012). Nonetheless, such EOR studies did not consider the impact of crisis response messages on such employees' positive behavioral outcomes. Hence, this study asked the following research questions to retest the effects of the relationship factor on crisis outcomes, considering crisis message strategies in the internal context of the organization:

RQ1: How will message strategy moderate the effect of EOR on (RQ1a) positive internal reputation and (RQ1b) employee supportive behavioral intentions?

Previous research indicates publics' pre-existing experiences (relationships) with the organizations can affect the effectiveness of timing strategy. Arpan and Pompper (2003) indicated that although stealing thunder has an impact in crisis communication, previous experience with the organization would be a key predictor of ultimate evaluations of the organization. Similarly, Lee (2016) found that the stealing thunder positively changed the effects of pre-crisis brand attachment on post-crisis brand attitude. Beldad et al. (2018) also demonstrated that when stealing thunder was used by a company with a positive pre-crisis reputation, consumers' purchase intention was higher compared to a company with a negative pre-crisis reputation that used the same strategy. Crisis communication literature attributes this influence of prior relationship such as performance history on post-crisis outcomes as it reflects how well or poorly an organization has treated the publics in other contexts (Coombs, 2007b), acting as an intensifier of the crisis situation, directly and indirectly influencing crisis outcomes (Coombs & Holladay, 2001). Despite such the moderating role crisis communication timing strategy may have on the effect of EOR for positive crisis outcomes, such interaction effect, to date, has not been fully tested in the internal context. The following research question was asked to examine interaction effects of EOR and

timing strategy on crisis outcomes:

> RQ2: How will timing strategy moderate the effect of EOR on (RQ2a) positive internal reputation and (RQ2b) supportive behavioral
> intentions.

2.4. Mediating role of negative emotions in effective crisis communication

Emotions plays a significant role for crisis communication as emotions tend to run high during a crisis. According to Jin et al.'s (2007, 2012) Integrated Crisis Mapping (ICM), there are four dominant negative emotions—anger, anxiety, sadness, and fright—that are likely to be experienced in a crisis situation, depending on primary publics' coping strategies and organizational level of engagement. In an internal crisis communication context, employees' negative emotional responses are significantly relevant, since employees meet the criteria of primary publics: Publics who are "most affected by the crisis," "have shared common interest" with an organization, and "have long-term interests and influences on the organization's reputation" (Jin et al., 2007, p.86). In other words, since employees as primary publics are more likely to identify themselves with their organization than any other publics, their personal relevance to a crisis can lead them to experience relatively high levels of negative emotions, including insecurity, stress, fear, or anger (Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Mazzei et al., 2012; Wang & Wanjek, 2018). Applying ICM to the internal crisis communication context, employees, as the primary publics in a crisis, tend to experience 1) *anger* when facing a demanding offense from their organization; 2) *fright* when facing uncertain and existential threat; 3) *anxiety* when facing an immediate, concrete, and overwhelming danger; 4) *sadness* when suffering from tangible or intangible loss or both (Jin et al., 2007, 2012; Lazarus, 1991).

The negative emotional responses of publics make it possible to predict negative crisis outcomes, such as plummeting organizational reputation in a crisis (2012, Choi & Lin, 2009; Jin et al., 2007; Wang & Wanjek, 2018) and the generation of negative behavioral intentions (Coombs & Holladay, 2007; Coombs, 2007a). In fact, many studies to date about the mediation effect of emotions in crisis have been largely focused on figuring out the mediating role of emotions on the effect of crisis responsibility and on publics' perception or behavioral intention (Coombs & Holladay, 2007; Jin, Fraustino, & Liu, 2016; Johansen et al., 2016; Kim & Niederdeppe, 2013).

According to the SCCT, however, an organization's communication with publics regarding its crisis can influence publics' perception and evaluation of the crisis and of the organization via the mediation of negative emotions (Coombs, 2007a). These can include negative word of mouth and purchase intention (Coombs, 2007a). Other studies imply that negative emotions can mediate the effects of crisis response strategy on crisis outcomes. Specifically, Coombs and Holladay (2008) found the negative emotion (anger) was less likely to be evoked by accommodative response strategies (more personal and warmer response) in a chemical explosion crisis. Kim and Cameron's (2011) study indicates that publics' negative emotions (anger and sadness) can be elicited by different crisis messages, including varying corporate crisis news frames. More recently, Van der Meer and Verhoeven's (2014) experimental study suggests that emotions may be inferred from the crisis communication strategy rather than from the crisis itself. They argue that an accommodative strategy can carry more positive emotional components (e.g., sympathy) and a defensive strategy can be perceived to convey negative emotions (e.g., annoyance). Each affects an organization's reputation differently (Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014).

Considering the effects of negative emotions in crisis communication, therefore, this study proposes the following research questions to examine the mediation effects of negative emotions on the relationships between EOR/crisis communication strategies and both reputation and supportive behavioral intention toward an organization in crisis.

> RQ3: How will negative emotions mediate the effects of EOR and crisis communication strategies on (RQ3a) positive internal reputation
> and (RQ3b) supportive behavioral intentions?

3. Methods

This study conducted a 2 (response message strategy: accommodative or defensive) x 2 (timing strategy: stealing thunder or thunder) experimental design with the between-subjects groups randomly assigned. Employee organization relationships was a measured variable based on the participants' pre-existing relationships with their companies. Other independent variables such as response message strategy and timing strategy were manipulated. A crisis history was included as a control variable in the study.

3.1. Participants

The participants were recruited from an online research firm, Qualtrics. The firm maintains 1.8 million panel members in the United States and has been frequently and widely used for employment research, as researchers can request on-demand respondents based on their target demographics (Qualtrics, 2018). Qualtrics recruited full-time employees working in the automotive industry. The automotive industry has been one of the nation's top five crisis-prone industries for the past three years, according to the Institute for Crisis Management's (ICM) Annual Crisis Report (ICM Annual Crisis Report, 2018). The participants were paid five dollars to complete the questionnaire.

The total number of the sample was 640 ($N = 640$). The age of participants ranged from 19 to 80 years old, with an average age of 39.08 ($SD = 12.38$). Females constituted 50% ($n = 320$), and males made up 50% ($n = 320$). Of the 640 participants, 79.7% ($n = 510$) were White, 9.1% ($n = 58$) were African American, 6.6% ($n = 29$) were Hispanic/Latino, 3.0% ($n = 19$) were Asian or Asian

American, and 1.7% ($n = 11$) were other races (e.g., Native American). With regard to level of education, 28.7% of respondents ($n = 189$) had a high school degree or less, 41.9% ($n = 268$) had a two-year associate's degree or less, 20.5% (n = 131) had a bachelor's degree or less than four-year university level, and 8.1% ($n = 52$) had a post-graduate degree or less.

3.2. Stimulus development

To enhance the ecological validity of the experimental design, this study adapted an actual crisis (car recall) in the automotive industry to fictitious scenarios for stimulus development (Lyon & Cameron, 2004). Excerpts of press releases were created about the fictitious scenarios, describing car recall crises of participants' companies, caused by a safety issue. The press releases were based on a press release created for a recent actual recall issue (e.g., Toyota voluntary recalls in March 2018). Two faculty members, one with more than a decade of professional experience in corporate communication in the automotive industry and the other with almost 30 years of experience in public relations writing, reviewed and edited the scenarios to ensure validity of situation as well as appropriateness of writing style.

The fictitious scenarios were written differently in accordance with each condition (timing strategy: *stealing thunder* or *thunder* x message strategy: *accommodative* or *defensive*). Timing strategy conditions were manipulated by changing the source that revealed the crisis event. In the thunder condition, for instance, participants read an excerpt of a press release that a third party (Consumer Reports) discovered a safety issue and participants' companies responded to it by conducting safety recalls. In the stealing thunder condition, on the other hand, the press release stated that the participants' company voluntarily revealed the safety issue and conducted the recall. Crisis response strategies were based on the previous SCCT research (Coombs, 1998, 2007a, 2007b; Coombs et al., 2016)[4] ; message strategy was applied to two conditions (stealing thunder and thunder), and each story reflected taking responsibility (accommodative) for the crisis as caused by management failure, or blaming other circumstances to protect the organization (defensive). In this case, the defensive strategy stated that the crisis was accidently caused by a technology issue. Therefore, four different conditions were created as stimuli (See Appendix A).

3.3. Procedure

The research firm solicited participants using an online survey link that contained an informed consent form and a questionnaire from Qualtrics.com, a web-based tool for building questions. The firm selectively sent the link to its online panels who are full-time employees, and a qualifying question asking whether or not they are full-time employees was used to verify their employment. The first-round pretest ($N = 60$) was conducted to check for the randomization and other instrument issues[5] . There was no issue in the pretest. The main test was then conducted among 640 full-time employees ($N = 640$) occupying different positions in medium and large corporations in the automotive industry in the United States. Participants in the pretest and the main test were different employees, as repeated participation was blocked or not solicited.

Participants gave their consent to participate in the study after reading the purpose, procedures, and statement of privacy and benefits. They then provided answers for the questions about relationships (EOR) with their companies. The participants were then assigned to one of four experimental conditions, based on a randomization procedure designed by Qualtrics.com. After reading each stimulus, participants answered a question about whether their companies have had direct experience with an incident similar to the recall crisis just described. This question was used to measure crisis history. Participants then provided answers for a series of questions measuring dependent variables: negative emotions, reputation, and supportive behavioral intentions. On the last page, participants were debriefed that the crises were fictitious and had solely been created for the purposes of the study.

3.4. Measures

The question items were mostly adopted from previous research. All items used a 7-point bipolar Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7), or other labeling of response categories, such as "very unlikely" to "very likely" and "not at all" to "very much." All measures used in this study are provided in Table 1.

To measure employee organization relationships (EOR), this study adopted Hon and Grunig's (1999) and Grunig and Huang's (2000) measures, which originated from Huang's (1997) four-dimensions measure: trust (six items, $M = 4.89$, $SD = 1.71$, Cronbach's alpha (α) = 0.95), control mutuality (five items, $M = 4.65$, $SD = 1.80$, $\alpha = 0.96$), commitment (five items, $M = 4.94$, $SD = 1.81$, $\alpha = 0.96$), and satisfaction (five items, $M = 4.87$, $SD = 1.71$, $\alpha = 0.95$). After checking dimensionality, four dimensions were summed to a variable, EOR, because exploratory factor analysis (EFA) revealed one factor with all items retained through oblique

---

[4] Regarding the crisis response strategies, Coombs et al. (2016) suggested that defensive strategy (denial) should be used in cases that correlate to a lower level of crisis responsibility (e.g., technical-error product accidents or harms) because it works by separating the organization from responsibility for the crisis, while accommodative strategy (apology) works by accepting responsibility at a higher level of crisis responsibility (e.g., human-error product harm or organizational misdeeds).

[5] To check for instruments for accuracy and believability (content credibility) of the fictitious scenarios and clarity of the questions used in the study, we used a 7-point semantic differential scale, ranging from inaccurate, unbelievable, or unclear (1) to accurate, believable, or clear (7). Respondents in the pretest answered that the fictitious scenarios were accurate ($M = 5.35$, $SD = 1.61$) and believable ($M = 5.45$, $SD = 1.55$) and all questions were clear ($M = 6.43$, $SD = 0.87$).

Table 1

Composite reliability and construct validity of EORs, internal reputation, and supportive behavioral intention (N = 640).

Latent variables	Measurement items	β	R^2
Employee-Organization Relationships (EORs)	*Trust*		
	TR1: My company treats people like me fairly and justly.	0.90	0.81
	TR2: Whenever my company makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about people like me.	0.86	0.75
	TR3: My company can be relied on to keep its promises.	0.89	0.79
	TR4: I believe that my company takes the opinions of people like me into account when making decisions.	0.90	0.81
	TR5: I feel very confident about my company's skills.	0.85	0.72
	TR6: My company has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do.	0.79	0.63
	Control Mutuality		
	CM1: My company and people like me are attentive to what each other say.	0.85	0.72
	CM2: My company believes the opinions of people like me are legitimate.	0.90	0.81
	CM3: My company really listens to what people like me have to say.	0.92	0.85
	CM4: The management of my company gives people like me enough say in the decision-making process.	0.84	0.71
	CM5: I believe people like me have influence on the decision-makers of my company.	0.87	0.74
	Commitment		
	CO1: I feel that my company is trying to maintain a long-term commitment to people like me.	0.89	0.79
	CO2: I can see that my company wants to maintain a relationship with people like me.	0.90	0.81
	CO3: There is a long-lasting bond between my company and people like me.	0.92	0.84
	CO4: Compared to other companies, I value my relationship with my company more.	0.89	0.78
	CO5: I feel a sense of loyalty to my company	0.82	0.67
	Satisfaction		
	ST1: I am happy with my company.	0.88	0.78
	ST2: Both my company and people like me benefit from the relationship.	0.90	0.81
	ST3: Most people like me are happy in their interactions with my company.	0.90	0.80
	ST4: Generally speaking, I am pleased with the relationship my company has established with people like me.	0.91	0.83
	ST5: Most people enjoy dealing with my company.	0.84	0.70
	- Composite Reliability (CR): 0.99		
	- Average Variance Extracted (AVE): 0.77		
	- Average Shared Variance (ASV): 0.43		
Internal Reputation	IR1: My company is concerned with the well-being of its employees.	0.86	0.74
	IR2: My company is basically HONEST.	0.94	0.88
	IR3: I trust my company to tell the truth about this situation.	0.91	0.82
	IR4: Under most circumstances, I would be likely to believe what my company says.	0.89	0.80
	- Composite Reliability (CR): 0.95		
	- Average Variance Extracted (AVE): 0.81		
	- Average Shared Variance (ASV): 0.43		
Supportive Behavioral Intention	SBI1: If asked to do something to help the company, I would do this, even if it might involve extra responsibility.	0.75	0.56
	SBI2: If asked to do something to help the company, I would do this even if it might involve some risk.	0.89	0.79
	SBI3: If asked to do something to help the company, I would do this even if it might bring me some discomfort.	0.82	0.67
	SBI4: If a temporary pay-cut or benefit reduction from all employees is proposed to help the company, I would agree to it.	0.60	0.32
	SBI5: I would be inspired to carefully exercise my authority and power and sacrifice my privileges, if the situation in the company requires it.	0.63	0.40
	- Composite Reliability (CR): 0.85		
	- Average Variance Extracted (AVE): 0.55		
	- Average Shared Variance (ASV): 0.20		

Note. β: Standardized Loading Estimate, R^2: Explained Variance. Construct validity (standardized loading estimate > 0.50, convergent validity: AVE > 0.50, discriminant validity: AVE > ASV), and composite reliability (CR > 0.70) were successfully established in all measurement items (Hair et al., 2010) Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) model goodness-of-fit indices met all of the joint criteria by Hu and Bentler (1999) and Hair et al. (2010): χ^2 (366, N = 640) = 1084.04, p = 0.00, χ^2/df = 2.96, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.97, Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) = 0.97, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.06, and Standardized Root Mean Residual (SRMR) = 0.05.

rotation method PROMAX; Eigenvalue:16.29, Variance Explained (%): 94.15, and α = 0.98 (Netemeyer, Bearden, & Sharma, 2003).

As a control variable, crisis history[6] was measured by a question (e.g., In the last five years, has your current company had direct experience with a similar incident as the crisis just described?) on a 7-point scale, (1) NO to (7) YES, more than five times (M = 1.92, SD = 1.62).

---

[6] The SCCT suggests crisis history can function as an intensifier of a crisis situation, in terms of relationship history, when publics perceives the situation and evaluate organizational reputation (Coombs, 2012).

The negative emotions scales[7] were adopted from Coombs and Holladay (2007) and Jin et al. (2007) to measure anger, anxiety, and sadness. Each emotion was assessed with one item asking about feelings toward the organization (anger: $M = 3.37$, $SD = 1.82$, anxiety: $M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.79$, and sad: $M = 3.74$, $SD = 1.80$).

For internal reputation, the SCCT scales (Coombs & Holladay, 1996) were adopted and slightly modified to measure internal reputation through four items ($M = 5.11$, $SD = 1.69$, $\alpha = 0.95$).

Supportive employee behaviors were measured by Nikandrou and Tsachouridi's (2015) employee willingness to support the organization with four measures ($M = 4.63$, $SD = 1.37$, $\alpha = 0.85$).

4. Results

4.1. Manipulations checks

The manipulations for both the timing and message strategies were successful as intended. Regarding the timing strategy, the participants in the stealing thunder condition confirmed their company as information revealer (e.g., the recall was voluntarily announced by your company), and the mean scores of participants in the stealing thunder condition were significantly higher than those in the thunder condition, $t(638) = 6.95$, $p < 0.001$ ($M_{stealing\,thunder} = 5.45$, $M_{thunder} = 4.49$). In the thunder condition, the participants identified a third party (Consumer Reports) as the first source of information disclosure (e.g., the recall was discovered by Consumer Reports first, and your company then responded to it), $t(638) = -7.04$, $p < 0.001$ ($M_{stealing\,thunder} = 4.07$, $M_{thunder} = 5.10$).

The manipulation of message strategy appeared to be successful, as well. Participants who read a defensive message from their company were more likely to perceive their company was trying to blame the crisis on other circumstances outside of the organization's control, $t(638) = -6.11$, $p < 0.001$ ($M_{accommodative} = 3.46$, $M_{defensive} = 4.42$). Those who read an accommodative message were more likely to perceive that their company took full responsibility for the recall crisis, $t(638) = 7.67$, $p < 0.001$ ($M_{accommodative} = 5.70$, $M_{defensive} = 4.70$). Furthermore, this study checked and confirmed the appropriateness of the defensive and accommodative strategies according to different levels of crisis responsibility (Coombs, 2007a, 2007b; Coombs et al., 2016). A binary regression revealed that the message strategy accounted for a significant portion of variance in crisis responsibility[8], $R^2 = 0.01$, $F(1, 638) = 4.69$, $p = 0.03$. The accommodative condition ($\hat{Y}_{accommodative} = 4.08 + 0.25*1 = 4.33$) had higher crisis responsibility than the defensive condition did ($\hat{Y}_{defensive} = 4.08 + 0.25*0 = 4.08$), and the difference between the two conditions was statistically significant at $p = 0.03$.

4.2. Dimensionality checks

Regarding the variables measured by multi-items, this study conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using AMOS 23 to analyze dimensionality of multi-items underlying the single construct (EOR, internal reputation, and supportive behavioral intention) and finalize and confirm a theoretical factor structure (Netemeyer et al., 2003). The CFA model achieved the acceptable model fit, χ^2 (366, $N = 640$) = 1084.04, $p = 0.00$, $\chi^2/df = 2.96$, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.97, Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) = 0.97, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.06, and Standardized Root Mean Residual (SRMR) = 0.05 in terms of joint criteria from Hu and Bentler (1999) (i.e., CFI $\geq$ 0.95 and SRMR $\leq$ 0.80 or RMSEA $\leq$ 0.05 and SRMR $\leq$ 0.08) and Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2010) (i.e., $\chi^2/df \leq 3.00$, TLI $\geq$ 0.90, SRMR $\leq$ 0.08 with CFI $\geq$ 0.92, and RMSEA $\leq$ 0.07 with CFI $\geq$ 0.92). In addition, construct validity and composite reliability of all measurement items were checked in terms of Hair et al.'s (2010) golden rule for construct validity (standardized loading estimate > 0.50, convergent validity: average variance extracted (AVE) > 0.50, discriminant validity: AVE > average shared squared variance (ASV)) and for composite reliability (CR > 0.70)).

For construct validity, standardized loading estimate, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were assessed. All standardized loading estimates for latent variables were greater than 0.50, with statistical significance; AVE for each variable was greater than 0.50 (EOR: 0.77, internal reputation: 0.81, supportive behavioral intention: 0.55), thus achieving convergent validity; and AVE was greater than ASV for each variable (EOR: 0.43, internal reputation: 0.43, supportive behavioral intention: 0.20), thus achieving discriminant validity. Composite reliability was successfully established (CR > 0.70) in all measurement items, as well (EOR: 0.99, internal reputation: 0.95, supportive behavioral intention: 0.85) (Hair et al., 2010) (see Table 1).

4.3. Hypothesis testing

A series of ordinary least squares (OLS) multiple regression analyses (i.e., $\hat{Y} = a + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + \ldots + b_kX_k$) using STATA 13

---

[7] According to the ICM, anger, anxiety, and sadness are the negative emotions that primary publics experience in a situation where an organization perceives crisis as related to organizational goals (i.e., Quadrant 1: technological breakdown or a loss of reputation). This study focuses on those three negative emotions as discussed in the ICM, which can play a critical role in the crisis context of this study—technological crisis, in turn giving rise to a car recall (Jin et al., 2012).

[8] Crisis responsibility was measured by two questions ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 1.48$, $r = 0.40$), "the blame for the crisis lies with my company," and "the blame for the crisis lies in the circumstance, not my company." These were used for attribution of crisis responsibility in the SCCT research (Coombs, 1998).

were conducted to demonstrate the effects of independent variables on each dependent variable, controlling for other effects. Prior to running OLS multiple regression analyses, two categorical variables from experimental conditions, crisis message strategy (accommodative = 1, defensive = 0) and timing strategy (stealing thunder = 1, thunder = 0), were recoded as dichotomous variables to be analyzed and interpreted in the regression models. In addition, a continuous independent variable, employee organization relationships (EOR), was centered to obtain meaningful interpretation and eliminate nonessential multicollinearity because the regression models included interaction terms (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). After the centering procedure, two interaction terms were created and named as EOR*message strategy and EOR*timing strategy.

There was no violation of multicollinearity, as all independent variables met the criteria of VIF greater than 10 and tolerance smaller than 0.10. The Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg test revealed that there was heteroscedasticity only in a regression model of reputation as fitted values of the dependent variable, $\chi^2(1) = 17.30$, $p < 0.001$. Hence, the White heteroskedastic robust standard error was run as a remedial measure. This study reports the results in the regression model of internal reputation and independent variables. Other regression models of negative emotions and supportive behavioral intentions were not in violation of homoscedasticity.

For hypothesis and research question testing, all independent variables (EOR, message strategy, and timing strategy), including a control variable (crisis history), and two interaction terms (EOR*message strategy and EOR*timing strategy) were entered in the regression model of each dependent variable. The independent variables in the model accounted for a significant portion of the variance in reputation, $R^2 = 0.63$, $F(6, 633) = 168.97$, $p < 0.001$ and supportive behavior intentions, $R^2 = 0.63$, $F(2, 507) = 201.13$, $p < 0.001$ (See Table 1).

As expected in H1 proposing positive effects of EOR on crisis outcomes, EOR was strongly positive, with statistically significance for internal reputation (b = 0.85, t = 20.34) and supportive behavioral intention (b = 0.46, t = 9.09), controlling for the effects of other independent variables. Thus, H1 was supported.

However, the positive associations between accommodative strategy and crisis outcomes were not consistent with H2. When controlling for other effects, crisis message strategy was not statistically significant for internal reputation (b = 0.04, t = 0.53) or supportive behavioral intentions (b = 0.00, t = 0.05); therefore, H2 was not supported.

In testing H3, there was statistical significance only for stealing thunder' positive effect on reputation (b = 0.27, t = 3.20), but not on supportive behavioral intention (b = 0.02, t = 0.25), controlling for other effects. That is, H3 was partially supported.

Regarding RQ1, the interaction term of EOR*message strategy did not yield significant results in the crisis outcomes of internal reputation (b = -0.06, t = -1.16) and supportive behavioral intentions (b = -0.04, t = -0.68), controlling for the effects of other independent variables.

RQ2 proposed to test if timing strategy will moderate the effect of EOR on internal reputation and supportive behavioral intentions. The results showed that the interaction term of EOR*timing strategy (the stealing thunder) was negatively associated only with supportive behavioral intention (b = -0.11, t = -2.00), not internal reputation (b = -0.08, t = -1.16) (RQ2). As Fig. 1 shows, those who have positive EOR with their company are more likely to support their company when they receive crisis messages from a third party (the thunder strategy) (See Fig. 1). To estimate how two different timing strategies affect supportive behavioral intention, the predicted value of the thunder strategy ($\hat{Y}_{thunder}$) was compared with the predicted value of the stealing thunder strategy ($\hat{Y}_{stealing\_thunder}$) by applying coefficients of all independent variables to the multiple regression equation. As a result, the difference between the predicted values was 0.11 ($\hat{Y}_{thunder} = 4.57$ and $\hat{Y}_{stealing\_thunder} = 4.46$) and it was statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ (See Table 2).

RQ3 asked how negative emotions will mediate the effects of EOR and crisis message and timing strategies on crisis outcomes. To examine the mediating role of negative emotions, a path analysis using structural equation modeling was conducted through SPSS
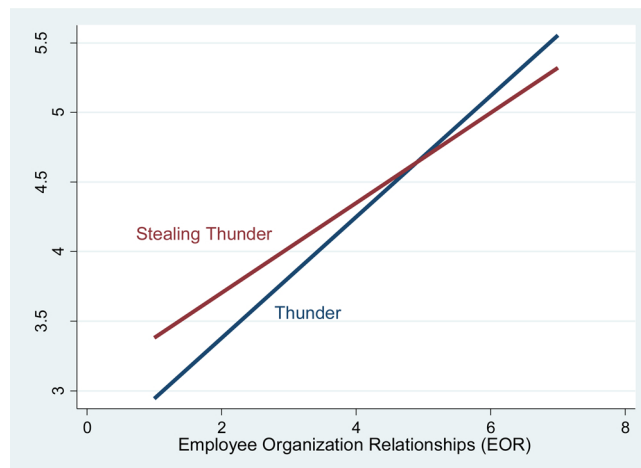

Fig. 1. Interaction effect for timing strategy (stealing thunder vs. thunder) X employee organization relationships (EORs) on employee supportive behavioral intention.

Table 2

OLS multiple regression analysis for the associations between independent variables and internal crisis outcomes, internal reputation and supportive behavioral intentions (N = 640).

Variables	Internal Reputation		Supportive Behavioral Intention	
	b	t	b	t
Constant	4.94	55.28***	4.58	44.77***
Employee Organization Relationships (EORs)	0.85	20.34***	0.46	9.09***
Crisis Message Strategy (Accommodative: 1, Defensive: 0)	0.04	0.53	0.02	0.25
Crisis Communication Timing (Stealing Thunder: 1, Thunder: 0)	0.27	3.20**	0.00	0.05
EORs*Message Strategy	−0.06	−1.16	−0.04	−0.68
EORs*Timing Strategy	−0.08	−1.39	−0.11	−2.00*
Crisis History	0.01	0.26	0.02	0.67
R^2	0.63		0.23	
F	168.97***		30.86***	

Note. ***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$. Results for internal reputation were based on White's heteroskedastic robust standard errors because the Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg test revealed that there were heteroskadesticity ($\chi^2(1) = 17.41$, $p = 0.00$). There was no violation of homoskadesticity for the results of supportive behavioral intention. Independent variables were not in a violation of multicollinearity (i.e., VIF of each variable < 10 and Tolerance (T) of each variable > 0.10).

Amos 23 (Hair et al., 2010). The initial path analysis included all the negative emotions (anger, anxiety, and sadness) measured in this study. However, sadness did not reach statistical significance, and it was removed. In addition, the path model was estimated through a bootstrapping technique ($N = 1000$) to validate mediation effects of the emotions on the associations between the exogenous (EOR and communication strategies) and endogenous (crisis outcomes) variables (Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010). The results in the models achieved an acceptable model fit: $\chi^2(9, N = 640) = 14.62$, $p = .10$, $\chi^2/df = 1.63$, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.99, Tucker Lewis index (TLI) = 0.98, standardized root mean residual (SRMR) = 0.03, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.03. These model fit indices met all of the joint criteria by Hair et al. (2010) and Hu and Bentler (1999), and confirmed that the path model was good enough to analyze estimated effects (See Fig. 2).

In the path model, two negative emotions – anger and anxiety – mediated the effects of EOR and message strategy only on internal reputation, but not on supportive behavioral intention. Specifically, there was a negative association between EOR and anger, $\beta = -0.17$, $p < .01$, 95% [-0.17, -0.24]. Subsequently, anger had a strong negative effect, of statistical significance, on internal reputation, $\beta = -0.16$, $p < .01$, 95% [-0.21, -0.10]. Anxiety was associated negatively with message strategy ($\beta = -0.33$, $p < .05$, 95% [-0.55, -0.08]) but positively influenced internal reputation ($\beta = -0.16$, $p < .01$, 95% [-0.21, -0.10]). However, these negative emotions did not mediate the effects of timing strategy on crisis outcomes.

Regarding the direct effects of exogenous variables on crisis outcomes, EOR had positive effects with statistical significance on internal reputation, $\beta = 0.75$, $p < .01$, 95% [0.70, 0.82], and supportive behavioral intention, $\beta = 0.26$, $p < .01$, 95% [0.15, 0.37]. Stealing thunder was also associated positively and directly only with internal reputation ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < .01$, 95% [0.10, 0.42]), but not with supportive behavioral intention. Internal reputation had a positive and direct effect on supportive behavioral intention, $\beta = 0.15$, $p < .01$, 95% [0.04, 0.25]. Nevertheless, accommodative strategy did not affect crisis outcomes directly.
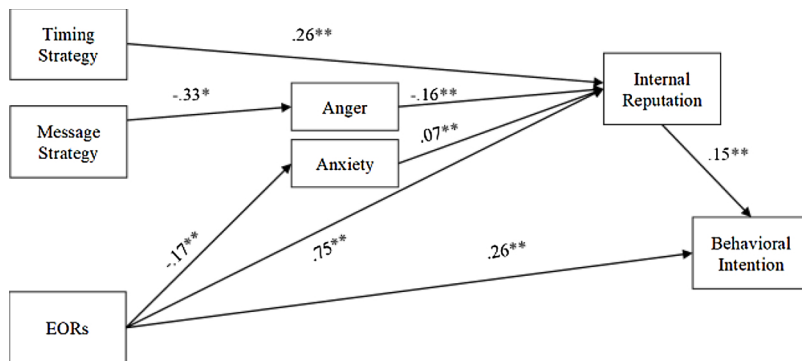
Fig. 2. Path diagram of mediation analysis through bootstrapping (N = 1000).
Timing strategy (stealing thunder: 1, thunder: 0) and message strategy (accommodative = 1, defensive = 0) were dummy coded. EORs: Employee organization relationships.
For the sake of brevity and clarity, only statistically significant paths are drawn, and the error terms were omitted in the figure.
Model fit indices: $\chi^2(9, N = 640) = 14.62$, p = .10, $\chi^2/df = 1.63$, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.99, Tucker Lewis index (TLI) = 0.98, standardized root mean residual (SRMR) = 0.03, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.03. ** $p < .01$, *$p < .05$.

5. Discussion

This study explored effective crisis communication in organizations' internal context, in an effort to fill the existing research gap and enhance the theoretical development of crisis communication. Specifically, this study examined how the effects of employee-organization relationships (EOR) can be moderated by crisis communication strategies and mediated by negative emotions about internal reputation and employees' supportive behaviors.

In line with previous research, the present study found strong positive effects of EOR on internal reputation and supportive behavioral intentions, when controlling for the effects of other factors, such as crisis communication strategies and crisis history. This result supports that in the context of internal crisis communication, cultivating and maintaining positive relationships with employees is more important than any crisis communication strategy. In other words, in a crisis situation, employees who have positive EOR not only trust that their organization would tell the truth about the situation, but also are willing to help their organization respond to the crisis, regardless of how and where they were informed of the crisis by their organization.

Furthermore, the finding indicates that building positive EOR is critical for effective internal crisis communication in managing internal reputation and garnering supports from its employees when the organization has multiple similar crises. Situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) posits that both prior relationship history and crisis history can intensify reputational threats (Coombs, 2007b). However, the finding of this study indicates that, regardless of crisis history, the positive EOR can exert stronger direct effects on internal reputation and employees' supportive behavioral intentions. It implies that employees would evaluate their organization positively (buffering the crisis) and be willing to support their organization during a crisis and despite a history of similar crises, when they perceive their organization has been treating employees well in other contexts (positive EOR).

Further, the current study found support for previous research by showing that for employees who have lower EOR quality, the stealing thunder strategy (self-disclosure by the company) was more effective than the thunder strategy in generating supportive behaviors toward the companies. On the other hand, contrary to previous findings, the current study also found that when employees with positive EOR receive crisis information from third parties before they are informed by their organization (*thunder*), they are more likely to engage in supportive behaviors during and after the crisis than if they learn about the crisis directly from their company. Although previous studies indicate the thunder strategy in general generates more negative outcomes for an organization than the stealing thunder strategy, this rather surprising result contradicting the previous studies' findings can be explained by the fact that employees may perceive their organization's crisis as a serious situation involving more negative impacts when they see the information from a third party. In this sense, employees feel their organization may need more help and support than in other situations and, in turn, they would decide to support their organization because the employees feel their organization has taken good care of them (i.e., positive EOR). This phenomenon is best understood as one of beneficial consequences brought on by advantageous and fair transactions that indicate strong mutual obligations between the organization and its employees as in strong social exchange relationships*, which* lead to positive employee behaviors (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Another interesting finding of the study revealed that the stealing thunder strategy yielded a positive effect on internal reputation, but not on supportive behavioral intention. As previous research suggested (Claeys et al., 2013), the finding indicates that self-disclosing and admitting the negative information in a crisis situation can cushion the reputational threat for an organization. In legal studies, self-disclosing a defendant's weakness can result in favorable jury verdicts, higher credibility ratings for the defendant, greater sympathy for the defendant, and weaker perceptions of the defendant's guilt in the courtrooms (Dolnik, Case, & Williams, 2003). In the same vein, when an organization reveals a crisis directly to its employees, the employees may assign less blame to their organization for the crisis and, in turn, evaluate the organization and situation positively. Thus, this study extends the positive effects of stealing thunder, previously examined only in the external dimensions, to the organizations' internal context by emphasizing the importance of the fastest, most proactive approach to employee communication for effective internal crisis communication.

This study further corroborated the direct effects of EOR and timing strategy on crisis outcomes by demonstrating that both EOR and timing strategy were positively associated with internal reputation. In addition to the direct effects, this study demonstrated the mediating role of anger and anxiety for the effects of EOR and the accommodative message strategy on internal reputation. The negative effect of the accommodative strategy on internal reputation was mediated by anger, while the negative effect was transferred by anxiety to a positive effect on internal reputation. The mediation effects of anger on the association between message strategy and internal reputation demonstrate that employees are likely to be less angry when they receive accommodative (apology) messages from their organization for the crisis but that anger can lead employees to negatively evaluate their organization. However, the mediation analysis also revealed that anger did not affect employees' support for their organization, even when the employees poorly evaluate their organization (low internal reputation). As SCCT research has found, this demonstrates that employees' feelings of anger could be reduced if their organization expressed concern for victims through compensation and/or issued a full apology (Coombs, 2007a; Coombs & Holladay, 2006). In this way, a company could avoid negative behavioral outcomes (e.g., negative word of mouth) among employees.

Anxiety also played a mediating role between EOR and internal reputation in this study. The finding of this study shows that better EOR induces lower anxiety and lower anxiety then leads to more positive internal reputation. Anxiety is the core relational theme of facing an immediate, concrete, and overwhelming danger (Lazarus, 1991). In a crisis situation, anxiety could be the default emotion of the publics that may feel overwhelmed by the crisis, integrated crisis mapping (ICM) suggests (Jin et al., 2012). In this sense, the mediation effects of anxiety in this study indicate that the quality of relationship could help employees avoid feeling overwhelmed by a crisis, thereby influencing employees to evaluate their organization more positively through the crisis. In other words, the employees with positive EOR would feel confident in their organization's ability to deal with the crisis well, leading to less anxiety and more positive internal reputation than the employees with lower EOR.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Implications

Crisis communication researchers suggest synthesizing more than two theories that could be integrated to yield a more robust theory of crisis communication (e.g., Coombs, 2013). Since there has been a lack of interest in theoretical study of the internal context of crisis communication, this study attempts to integrate the key concepts and theories (relationship factor, SCCT, stealing thunder, and ICM) widely applied in the existing crisis communication research, and apply them to an internal context. By doing so, this study not only suggests a fundamental direction on how theoretical development can be achieved, but also fills the research gap in the crisis communication theories by examining the internal publics, employees, as the primary public for effective internal crisis communication. More specifically, some contradicting and new findings in this study, compared to the extant studies, should contribute to the existing understanding regarding during a crisis how and when organizations should communicate with its employees to minimize damages to internal reputation and employees' supportive behaviors.

Specifically, this study found that relationship factors override crisis history, and thus can have greater influence in achieving crisis communication outcomes. This implies that crisis history may not intensify the reputational threat if the organization has built and maintained positive relationships with the publics, which is a new finding in SCCT. Also, the relationship factors have not been considered in previous *stealing thunder* studies, although they have strong and positive effects on crisis outcomes. Since this study found the effectiveness of stealing thunder would be changed by existing relationships, relationship history or quality should be taken into consideration by researchers who wish to study the effects of the stealing thunder strategy for crisis communication purposes.

This study also provides meaningful insight how integrated crisis mapping (ICM) can be extended to internal crisis communication. In the Quadrant 1 crisis types (e.g., crises related reputation), according to ICM, publics engage more in conative coping strategy than cognitive, and "the conative coping strategy is driven by action tendency, the feeling that the publics can, and must, do something about the situation" (Jin et al., 2012, p. 273). However, this study indicates that employees' conative coping, as the internal publics, would not lead to behavioral outcomes because their emotions only affected internal reputation. This contradictory finding indicates that there is much more to be explored regarding the roles of emotions for internal crisis communication studies.

As a practical implication, this study can provide more detailed guidelines for crisis managers to achieve effective crisis communication. One of the gaps between research and practice in crisis communication is that practitioners want to know how theory and research can be adequately and actively translated from a research setting to practical guidelines that can be understood and shared more easily (Claeys & Opgenhaffen, 2016). By applying the existing concepts and theories examined across different studies separately, this study provides an "assembled product" converted from the different theoretical backgrounds to increase its usefulness to crisis communication managers (Claeys & Opgenhaffen, 2016, p. 4).

Regarding the finding that positive effects of thunder on supportive behaviors from employee with positive EOR, this study also suggests that public relations practitioners should make more efforts into cultivating and maintaining positive relationships between organizational management and employees for effective internal crisis communication. Previous relationship research has indicated that publics who have positive relationships with their organization prior to an organizational crisis would be more likely to continue to positively evaluate the relationship during and after the crisis (e.g., Ki & Brown, 2013; Park & Reber, 2011). Supporting the previous research's suggestions, this study provides more specific practical implications that employees who have a favorable relationship with their company can generate positive impacts, especially supporting and helping the company, in a crisis even though they did not receive adequate and timely information about the crisis from the management (*thunder*).

6.2. Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study has several limitations that should be addressed for future research. First, this study relied on only one crisis type, car safety recall crisis, in one industry, and nothing is still known about the extent to which communication strategies, message strategy and timing strategy, impact internal reputation and employees' supportive behavioral intentions by crisis types (Beldad et al., 2018). In future research, the associations between communication strategies and crisis outcomes should be replicated or retested across different crisis types and industries.

Second, Zhou and Shin (2017) suggest a framework that guides how communication strategies, such as message and timing can be used differently across different cultural dimensions. By considering contextual variables in future research, testing and comparing with other crises involving organizations would provide a more fruitful finding for crisis communication's theoretical development. Relatedly, qualitative research methods, including in-depth interviews and focus groups, can be performed in future studies to explore employees' multicultural backgrounds (Ravazzani, 2016).

Lastly, this study included only positive relationship outcomes – such as control mutuality, commitment, trust, and satisfaction – for employee-organization relationships. To fully understand the effect of relationship factors, however, negative relationship features—dissatisfaction, distrust, control dominance, and dissolution—should be explored (Moon & Rhee, 2013). Comparing the effects of the positive EOR with of the negative EOR on crisis outcomes is suggested as a topic for future research.

Appendix A. Conditions by crisis response message and timing strategies

Condition A: Organizational Message (Accommodative & Stealing Thunder)

Today your company voluntarily announced that it is conducting a safety recall in the United States on 2730 Model Year 2018 XX vehicles. Your company decided to release the information about the safety issue because the company felt it was important to share the information with consumers promptly although other organizations did not discover and report it yet.

The involved vehicle's engine may be equipped with pistons from a particular production period that were produced with a diameter larger than the specification. In certain conditions, this may cause the vehicle to run rough, create an abnormal sound, emit smoke from the exhaust, and illuminate warning lights and messages. In some cases, a reduction of power may occur and the engine could stop running. A vehicle's engine which stops while driving at higher speeds can increase the risk of a fatal crash. The seriousness of the recall was backed up by National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), which issued its own consumer advisory.

The CEO in your company said in a statement that "the recall of XX vehicles may have been caused by our management failure. We apologize for this security issue and any inconvenience for our valuable customers. We will take responsibility for this issue."

For all involved vehicles, your company dealers will check the production date code of the pistons in the engine. If involved pistons are found, the engine will be replaced with a new one at no cost to customers. All known owners will receive a notification via first class mail by the end of June.

Condition B: Organizational Message (Defensive & Stealing Thunder)

Today your company voluntarily announced that it is conducting a safety recall in the United States on 2730 Model Year 2018 XX vehicles. Your company decided to release the information about the safety issue because the company felt it was important to share the available information with consumers promptly although other organizations did not discover and report it yet.

The involved vehicle's engine may be equipped with pistons from a particular production period that were produced with a diameter larger than the specification. In certain conditions, this may cause the vehicle to run rough, create an abnormal sound, emit smoke from the exhaust, and illuminate warning lights and messages. In some cases, a reduction of power may occur and the engine could stop running. A vehicle's engine which stops while driving at higher speeds can increase the risk of a fatal crash. The seriousness of the recall was backed up by National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), which issued its own consumer advisory.

The CEO in your company said in a statement that "it would take extraordinary circumstances for the problem to occur. The recall of XX vehicles may have been accidently caused by technology or equipment failure. Unfortunately, the situation was out of our hands and happened due to the breakdown of the technical system."

For all involved vehicles, our dealers will check the production date code of the pistons in the engine. All known owners will receive a notification via first class mail by the end of June.

Condition C: Third Party (Consumer Reports) Message (Accommodative & Thunder)

Today Consumer Reports, an independent and nonprofit member organization, discovered that XX vehicle manufactured by your company has a safety issue on its engine. Your company just responded to the report. As a result, your company decided to conduct a safety recall in the United States on 2730 Model Year 2018 XX vehicles.

The involved vehicle's engine may be equipped with pistons from a particular production period that were produced with a diameter larger than the specification. In certain conditions, this may cause the vehicle to run rough, create an abnormal sound, emit smoke from the exhaust, and illuminate warning lights and messages. In some cases, a reduction of power may occur and the engine could stop running. A vehicle's engine which stops while driving at higher speeds can increase the risk of a fatal crash. The seriousness of the recall was backed up by National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), which issued its own consumer advisory.

The CEO in your company said in a statement that "the recall of XX vehicles may have been caused by our management failure. We apologize for this security issue and any inconvenience for our valuable customers. We will take responsibility for this issue."

For all involved vehicles, your company dealers will check the production date code of the pistons in the engine. If involved pistons are found, the engine will be replaced with a new one at no cost to customers. All known owners will receive a notification via first class mail by the end of June.

Condition D: Third Party (Consumer Reports) Message (Defensive & Thunder)

Today Consumer Reports, an independent and nonprofit member organization, discovered that XX vehicle manufactured by your company has a safety issue on its engine. Your company just responded to the report. As a result, your company decided to conduct a safety recall in the United States on 2730 Model Year 2018 XX vehicles.

The involved vehicle's engine may be equipped with pistons from a particular production period that were produced with a diameter larger than the specification. In certain conditions, this may cause the vehicle to run rough, create an abnormal sound, emit smoke from the exhaust, and illuminate warning lights and messages. In some cases, a reduction of power may occur and the engine

could stop running. A vehicle's engine which stops while driving at higher speeds can increase the risk of a fatal crash. The seriousness of the recall was backed up by National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), which issued its own consumer advisory.

The CEO in your company said in a statement that "it would take extraordinary circumstances for the problem to occur. The recall of XX vehicles may have been accidently caused by technology or equipment failure. Unfortunately, the situation was out of our hands and happened due to the breakdown of the technical system."

For all involved vehicles, our dealers will check the production date code of the pistons in the engine. All known owners will receive a notification via first class mail by the end of June.

References

Arpan, L. M., & Pompper, D. (2003). Stormy weather: "stealing thunder" as a crisis communication strategy to improve communication flow between organizations and journalists. *Public Relations Review, 29*(3), 291–308. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0363-8111(03)00043-2.

Arpan, L. M., & Roskos-Ewoldsen, D. R. (2005). Stealing thunder: Analysis of the effects of proactive disclosure of crisis information. *Public Relations Review, 31*(3), 425–433. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2005.05.003.

Aryee, S., Budhwar, P. S., & Chen, Z. X. (2002). Trust as a mediator of the relationship between organizational justice and work outcomes: Test of a social exchange model. *Journal of Organizational Behavior: The International Journal of Industrial, Occupational and Organizational Psychology and Behavior, 23*(3), 267–285. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.138.

Backhaus, K., & Tikoo, S. (2004). Conceptualizing and researching employer branding. *Career Development International, 9*(5), 501–517. https://doi.org/10.1108/13620430410550754.

Balfour, D. L., & Wechsler, B. (1996). Organizational commitment: Antecedents and outcomes in public organizations. *Public Productivity & Management Review, 19*(3), 256–277. https://doi.org/10.2307/3380574.

Balmer, J. M., & Gray, E. R. (1999). Corporate identity and corporate communications: Creating a competitive advantage. *Corporate Communications an International Journal, 4*(4), 171–177. https://doi.org/10.1108/EUM0000000007299.

Beckwith, N. E., & Lehmann, D. R. (1975). The importance of halo effects in multi-attribute attitude models. *Journal of Marketing Research, 12*(3), 265–275. https://doi.org/10.2307/3151224.

Beldad, A. D., van Laar, E., & Hegner, S. M. (2018). Should the shady steal thunder? The effects of crisis communication timing, pre-crisis reputation valence, and crisis type on post-crisis organizational trust and purchase intention. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management, 26*, 150–163. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.12172.

Benson, J. A. (1988). Crisis revisited: An analysis of strategies used by Tylenol in the second tampering episode. *Communication Studies, 39*(1), 49–66. https://doi.org/10.1080/10510978809363234.

Bhatnagar, J. (2007). Talent management strategy of employee engagement in Indian ITES employees: Key to retention. *Employee Relations, 29*(6), 640–663. https://doi.org/10.1108/01425450710826122.

Bromley, D. S. (1993). *Reputation, image and impression management.* Oxford, England: John Wiley & Sonshttps://doi.org/10.1002/mar.4220120207.

Bromley, D. S. (2000). Psychological aspects of corporate identity, image and reputation. *Corporate Reputation Review, 3*(3), 240–252. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.crr.1540117.

Broom, G. M., & Sha, B.-L. (2012). *Cutlip & Center's effective public relations* (11th ed.). Upper Saddle River: NJ: Prentice Hall.

Brown, K. A., & White, C. L. (2011). Organization-public relationships and crisis response strategies: Impact on attribution of responsibility. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 23*(1), 75–92. https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2010.504792.

Cameron, K., & Winn, B. (2012). Virtuousness in organizations. In K. S. Cameron, & G. M. Spreitzer (Eds.). *The oxford handbook of positive organizational scholarship* (pp. 231–243). New York, NY: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199734610.013.0018.

Cameron, K. S. (2003). Organizational virtuousness and performance. In K. S. Cameron, J. E. Dutton, & R. E. Quinn (Eds.). *Positive organizational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline* (pp. 48–65). San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc.

Carroll, C. E., & McCombs, M. E. (2003). Agenda-setting effects of business news on the public's images and opinions about major corporations. *Corporate Reputation Review, 6*(1), 36–46. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.crr.1540188.

Choi, J., & Chung, W. (2013). Analysis of the interactive relationship between apology and product involvement in crisis communication: An experimental study on the Toyota recall crisis. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication, 27*(1), 3–31. https://doi.org/10.1177/1050651912458923.

Choi, Y., & Lin, Y. H. (2009). Consumer responses to Mattel product recalls posted on online bulletin boards: Exploring two types of emotion. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 21*(2), 198–207. https://doi.org/10.1080/10627260802557506.

Claeys, A.-S., & Cauberghe, V. (2012). Crisis response and crisis timing strategies, two sides and the same coin. *Public Relations Review, 38*(1), 83–88. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.09.001.

Claeys, A.-S., & Opgenhaffen, M. (2016). Why practitioners do (not) apply crisis communication theory in practice. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 28*(5-6), 232–247. https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2016.1261703.

Claeys, A.-S., Cauberghe, V., & Leysen, J. (2013). Implications of stealing thunder for the impact of expressing emotions in organizational crisis communication. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 41*(3), 293–308. https://doi.org/10.1080/00909882.2013.806991.

Claeys, A.-S., Cauberghe, V., & Pandelaere, M. (2016). Is old news no news? The impact of self-disclosure by organizations in crisis. *Journal of Business Research, 69*, 3963–3970. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.06.012.

Claeys, A.-S., Cauberghe, V., & Vyncke, P. (2010). Restoring reputations in times of crisis: An experimental study of the situational crisis communication theory and the moderating effects of locus of control. *Public Relations Review, 36*(3), 256–262. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2010.05.004.

Cohen, J., Cohen, P. C., West, S. G., & Aiken, L. S. (2003). *Applied multiple regression/ correlation analysis for the behavioral sciences.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inchttps://doi.org/10.4324/9780203774441.

Coombs, W. T. (1998). An analytic framework for crisis situations: Better responses from a better understanding of the situation. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 10*(3), 177–191. https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532754xjprr1003_02.

Coombs, T. W. (2012). *Ongoing crisis communication: Planning, managing, and responding* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Coombs, T. W. (2013). Crisis communication: A developing field. In R. L. Heath (Ed.). *The sage handbook of public relations* (pp. 477–488). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.1108/09504121111145302.

Coombs, W. T. (2007a). Attribution theory as a guide for post-crisis communication research. *Public Relations Review, 33*(2), 135–139. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2006.11.016.

Coombs, W. T. (2015a). *Ongoing crisis communication: Planning, managing, and responding* (4th. ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE publications, Inc.

Coombs, W. T. (2007b). Protecting organization reputations during a crisis: The development and application of situational crisis communication theory. *Corporate Reputation Review, 10*(3), 163–176. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.crr.1550049.

Coombs, W. T. (2015b). The value of communication during a crisis: Insights from strategic communication research. *Business Horizons, 58*, 141–148. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2014.10.003.

Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (1996). Communication and attributions in a crisis: An experimental study in crisis communication. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 8*(4), 279–295. https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532754xjprr0804_04.

Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2001). An extended examination of the crisis situations: A fusion of the relational management and symbolic approaches. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 13*(4), 312–340. https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532754XJPRR1304_03.

Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2002). Helping crisis managers protect reputational assets: Initial tests of the situational crisis communication theory. *Management Communication Quarterly, 16*(2), 165–186. https://doi.org/10.1177/089331802237233.

Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2006). Unpacking the halo effect: Reputation and crisis management. *Journal of Communication Management, 10*(2), 123–137. https://doi.org/10.1108/13632540610664698.

Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2007). The negative communication dynamic: Exploring the impact of stakeholder affect on behavioral intentions. *Journal of Communication Management, 11*(4), 300–312. https://doi.org/10.1108/13632540710843913.

Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2008). Comparing apology to equivalent crisis response strategies: Clarifying apology's role and value in crisis communication. *Public Relations Review, 34*(3), 252–257. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2008.04.001.

Coombs, W. T., Holladay, S. J., & Claeys, A.-S. (2016). Debunking the myth of denial's effectiveness in crisis communication: Context matters. *Journal of Communication Management, 20*(4), 381–395. https://doi.org/10.1108/JCOM-06-2016-0042.

Crijns, H., Claeys, A.-S., Cauberghe, V., & Hudders, L. (2017). Who says what during crises? A study about the interplay between gender similarity with the spokesperson and crisis response strategy. *Journal of Business Research, 79*, 143–151. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2017.06.010.

Cropanzano, R., & Mitchell, M. S. (2005). Social exchange theory: An interdisciplinary review. *Journal of Management, 31*(6), 874–900. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206305279602.

Davies, G., Chun, R., da Silva, R. V., & Roper, S. (2003). *Corporate reputation and competitiveness.* New York, NY: Routledgehttps://doi.org/10.4324/9780203218112.

Dolnik, L., Case, T. I., & Williams, K. D. (2003). Stealing thunder as a courtroom tactic revisited: Processes and boundaries. *Law and Human Behavior, 27*, 265–285. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1023431823661.

Einwiller, S. A., & Johar, G. V. (2013). Countering accusations with inoculation: The moderating role of consumer-company identification. *Public Relations Review, 39*(3), 198–206. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2013.03.002.

Fearn-Banks, K. (2017). *Crisis communications: A casebook approach* (5th ed.). New York, NY: Routledgehttps://doi.org/10.4324/9781315684857.

Fediuk, T. A., Coombs, W. T., & Botero, I. C. (2012). Exploring crisis from a receiver perspective: Understanding stakeholder reactions during crisis events. In W. T. Coombs, & S. J. Holladay (Eds.). *Handbook of crisis communication* (pp. 635–656). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444314885.ch31.

Fennis, B. M., & Stroebe, E. E. (2014). Softening the blow: Company self-disclosure of negative information lessens damaging effects on consumer judgment and decision-making. *Journal of Business Ethics, 120*(1), 109–120. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-013-1647-9.

Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Fombrun, C. J. (1996). *Reputation: Realizing value from the corporate image.* Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Fombrun, C. J., & van Riel, C. B. M. (2004). *Fame & fortune: How successful companies build winning reputations.* New York: NY: Prentice-Hall Financial Times.

Fombrun, C. J., Gardberg, N. A., & Sever, J. M. (2000). The reputation quotient SM: A multi-stakeholder measure of corporate reputation. *Journal of Brand Management, 7*(4), 241–255. https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2000.10.

Forman, J., & Argenti, P. A. (2005). How corporate communication influences strategy implementation, reputation and the corporate brand: An exploratory qualitative study. *Corporate Reputation Review, 8*(3), 245–264. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.crr.1540253.

Fowler, B. M. (2017). Stealing thunder and filling the silence: Twitter as a primary channel of police crisis communication. *Public Relations Review, 43*(4), 718–728. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2017.04.007.

Frandsen, F., & Johansen, W. (2011). The study of internal crisis communication: Towards an integrative framework. *Corprate Communications an International Journal, 16*(4), 347–365. https://doi.org/10.1108/13563281111186977.

Frandsen, F., & Johansen, W. (2016). *Organizational crisis communication.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Freeman, R. E. (1984). *Strategic management: A stakeholder approach.* Marshfield, MA: Pitman Publishing.

Gotsi, M., & Wilson, A. M. (2001). Corporate reputation: Seeking a definition. *Corporate Communications an International Journal, 6*(1), 24–30. https://doi.org/10.1108/13563280110381189.

Grant, A. M. (2007). Relational job design and the motivation to make a prosocial difference. *The Academy of Management Review, 32*(2), 393–417. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2007.24351328.

Grunig, J. E., & Huang, Y. H. (2000). From organizational effectiveness to relationship indicators: Antecedents of relationships, public relations strategies, and relationship outcomes. In J. A. Ledingham, & S. D. Bruning (Eds.). *Public relations as relationship management: A relational approach to the study and practice of public relations* (pp. 23–53). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J., & Anderson, R. E. (2010). *Multivariate data analysis* (7th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Heide, M., & Simonsson, C. (2014). Developing internal crisis communication: New roles and practices of communication professionals. *Corporate Communications an International Journal, 19*(2), 128–146. https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-09-2012-0063.

Hon, L. C., & Grunig, J. E. (1999). *Guidelines for measuring relationship in public relations.* Gainesville, FL: The Institute for Public Relations, Commission on PR Measurement and Evaluation.

Hong, S., & Yang, S.-U. (2009). Effects of reputation, relational satisfaction, and customer-company identification on positive word-of-mouth intentions. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 21*(4), 381–403. https://doi.org/10.1080/10627260902966433.

Hu, L., & Bentler, P. M. (1999). Cutoff criteria for fit indexes in covariance structure analysis: Conventional criteria versus new alternatives. *Structural Equation Modeling A Multidisciplinary Journal, 6*(1), 1–55. https://doi.org/10.1080/10705519909540118.

Huang, Y.-H. C. (1997). *Public relations strategies, relational outcomes, and conflict management strategies. Unpublished doctoral dissertation.* College Park: University of Maryland.

ICM Annual Crisis Report. (2018). Retrieved from https://crisisconsultant.com/icm-annual-crisis-report/.

Jin, Y., Fraustino, J. D., & Liu, B. F. (2016). The scared, the outraged, and the anxious: How crisis emotions, involvement, and demographics predict publics' conative coping. *International Journal of Strategic Communication, 10*(4), 289–308. https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2016.1160401.

Jin, Y., Pang, A., & Cameron, G. T. (2007). *Integrated crisis mapping: Toward a publics-based, emotion-driven conceptualization in crisis communication, vol. 7,* Sphera Publica81–95.

Jin, Y., Pang, A., & Cameron, G. T. (2012). Toward a publics-driven, emotion-based conceptualization in crisis communication: Unearthing dominant emotions in multi-staged testing of the integrated crisis mapping (ICM) model. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 24*(3), 266–298. https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2012.676747.

Johansen, B. F., Johansen, W., & Weckesser, N. M. (2016). Emotional stakeholders as "crisis communicators" in social media: The case of the Telenor customer complaints crisis. *Corporate Communications an International Journal, 21*(3), 289–308. https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-05-2015-0026.

Johansen, W., Aggerholm, H. K., & Frandsen, F. (2012). Entering new territory: A study of internal crisis management and crisis communication in organizations. *Public Relations Review, 38*(2), 270–279. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.11.008.

Kahn, R. L., Wolfe, D. M., Quinn, R. P., Snoek, J. D., & Rosenthal, R. A. (1964). *Organisational stress: Studies in role conflict and ambiguity.* New York, NY: Wiley.

Kang, M., & Sung, M. (2017). How symmetrical employee communication leads to employee engagement and positive employee communication behaviors: The mediation of employee-organization relationships. *Journal of Communication Management, 21*(1), 82–102. https://doi.org/10.1108/JCOM-04-2016-0026.

Keller, R. T., Szilagyi Jr, A. D., & Holland, W. E. (1976). Boundary-spanning activity and employee reactions: An empirical study. *Human Relations, 29*(7), 699–710. https://doi.org/10.1177/001872677602900707.

Ki, E.-J., & Brown, K. A. (2013). The effects of crisis response strategies on relationship quality outcomes. *International Journal of Business Communication, 50*(4), 403–420. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021943613497056.

Kim, J. (2017). Elaborating the halo effect of SCCT: How and why performance history affects crisis responsibility and organizational reputation. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 29*(6), 277–294. https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2017.1405812.

Kim, Y. (2018). Enhancing employee communication behaviors for sensemakign and sensegiving in crisis situations: Strategic management approach for effective crisis communication. *Journal of Communication Management, 22*(4), 451–475. https://doi.org/10.1108/JCOM-03-2018-0025.

Kim, H. J., & Cameron, G. T. (2011). Emotions matter in crisis: The role of anger and sadness in the publics' response to crisis news framing and corporate crisis response. *Communication Research, 38*(6), 826–855. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650210385813.

Kim, H. K., & Niederdeppe, J. (2013). The role of emotional response during an N1H1 influenza pandemic on a college campus. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 25*(1), 30–50. https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2013.739100.

Kim, J.-N., & Rhee, Y. (2011). Strategic thinking about employee communication behavior (ECB) in public relations: Testing the models of megaphoning and scouting effects in Korea. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 23*(3), 243–268. https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2011.582204.

Kim, S., Avery, E. J., & Lariscy, R. W. (2011). Reputation repair at the expense of providing instructing and adjusting information following crises. *International Journal of Strategic Communication, 5*(3), 183–199. https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2011.566903.

Koehler, I., & Raithel, S. (2018). Internal, external, and media stakeholders' evaluations during transgressions. *Corporate Communications an International Journal, 23*(4), 512–527. https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-10-2017-0096.

Lazarus, R. S. (1991). *Emotion and adaption.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Ledingham, J. A., & Bruning, S. D. (2000). *Public relations as relationship management: A relational approach to the study and practice of public relations.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaumhttp://doi.org/10.4324/9781315719559.

Lee, B. K. (2005). Hong Kong consumers' evaluation in an airline crash: A path model analysis. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 17*(4), 363–391. https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532754xjprr1704_3.

Lee, S. Y. (2016). Weathering the crisis: Effects of stealing thunder in crisis communication. *Public Relations Review, 42*, 336–344. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2016.02.005.

Leuthesser, L., Kohli, C. S., & Harich, K. R. (1995). Brand equity: The halo effect measure. *European Journal of Marketing, 29*(4), 57–66. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090569510086657.

Lyon, L. J., & Cameron, G. T. (2004). A relational approach examining the interplay of prior reputation and immediate response to a crisis. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 16*(3), 213–241. https://doi.org/10.1080/1532-754X.2004.11925128.

Mael, F., & Ashforth, B. E. (1992). Alumni and their alma mater: A partial test of the reformulated model of organizational identification. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 13*(2), 103–123. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.4030130202.

Mazzei, A., & Ravazzani, S. (2011). Manager-employee communication during a crisis: The missing link. *Corporate Communications an International Journal, 16*(3), 243–254. https://doi.org/10.1108/13563281111156899.

Mazzei, A., & Ravazzani, S. (2015). Internal crisis communication strategies to protect trust relationships: A study of Italian companies. *International Journal of Business Communication, 52*(3), 319–337. https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488414525447.

Mazzei, A., Kim, J.-N., & Dell'Oro, C. (2012). Strategic value of employee relationships and communicative actions: Overcoming corporate crisis with quality internal crisis communication. *International Journal of Strategic Communication, 6*(1), 31–44. https://doi.org/10.1080/153118X.2011.634869.

Men, L. R. (2014). Internal reputation management: The impact of authentic leadership and transparent communication. *Corporate Reputation Review, 17*(4), 254–272. https://doi.org/10.1057/crr.2014.14.

Moon, B. B., & Rhee, Y. (2013). Exploring negative dimensions of organization-public relationships (NOPR) in public relations. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 90*(4), 691–714. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699013503161.

Nahapiet, J., & Ghoshal, S. (2000). Social capital, intellectual capital, and the organizational advantage. *The Academy of Management Review, 23*(2), 242–266. https://doi.org/10.2307/259373.

Netemeyer, R. G., Bearden, W. O., & Sharma, S. (2003). *Scaling procedures: Issues and applications.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication, Inchttp://doi.org/10.4135/9781412985772.

Nikandrou, I., & Tsachouridi, I. (2015). Towards a better understanding of the "buffering effects" of organizational virtuousness' perceptions on employee outcomes. *Management Decision, 53*(8), 1823–1842. https://doi.org/10.1108/MD-06-2015-0251.

Park, H., & Reber, B. H. (2011). The organization-public relationship and crisis communication: The effect of the organization-public relationship on publics' perceptions of crisis and attitudes toward the organization. *International Journal of Strategic Communication, 5*(4), 240–260. https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2011.596870.

Qualtrics. (2018). Retrieved from https://www.qualtrics.com/online-sample/.

Raja, U., Johns, G., & Ntalianis, F. (2004). The impact of personality on psychological contracts. *The Academy of Management Journal, 47*(3), 350–367. https://doi.org/10.2307/20159586.

Ravazzani, S. (2016). Understanding approaches to managing diversity in the workplace: An empirical investigation in Italy. Equality. *Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal, 35*(2), 154–168. https://doi.org/10.1108/EDI-08-2014-0062.

Sharma, N., & Kamalanabhan, T. J. (2012). Internal corporate communication and its impact on internal branding: Perception of Indian public sector employees. *Corporate Communications an International Journal, 17*(3), 300–322. https://doi.org/10.1108/13563281211253548.

Sohn, Y. J., & Lariscy, R. W. (2012). A "buffer" or "boomerang?"- the role of corporate reputation in bad times. *Communication Research, 42*(2), 237–259. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650212466891.

Strandberg, J. M., & Vigsø, O. (2016). Internal crisis communication: An employee perspective on narrative, culture, and sensemaking. *Corporate Communications an International Journal, 21*(1), 89–102. https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-11-2014-0083.

Suazo, M. M. (2009). The mediating role of psychological contract violation on the relations between psychological contract breach and work-related attitudes and behaviors. *Journal of Managerial Psychology, 24*(2), 136–160. https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940910928856.

Sung, M., & Yang, S. U. (2009). Student–University relationships and reputation: A study of the links between key factors fostering students' supportive behavioral intentions towards their university. *Higher Education, 57*(6), 787–811. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-008-9176-7.

Thorndike, E. L. (1920). A constant error in psychological ratings. *The Journal of Applied Psychology, 4*(1), 25–29. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0071663.

Tsui, A., Pearce, J., Porter, L., & Tripoli, A. (1997). Alternative Approaches to the Employee-Organization Relationship: Does Investment in Employees Pay off? *The Academy of Management Journal, 40*(5), 1089–1121. https://doi.org/10.2307/256928.

Ulmer, R. R. (2001). Effective crisis management through established stakeholder relationships: Malden Mills as a case study. *Management Communication Quarterly, 14*(4), 590–615. https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318901144003.

Ulmer, R. R., Sellnow, T. L., & Seeger, M. W. (2015). *Effective crisis communication: Moving from crisis to opportunity* (3rd ed.). Thousand, CA: Sage.

Van der Meer, T. G. L. A., & Verhoeven, J. W. M. (2014). Emotional crisis communication. *Public Relations Review, 40*(3), 526–536. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2014.03.004.

Wang, Y., & Wanjek, L. (2018). How to fix a lie? The formation of Volkswagen's post-crisis reputation among the German public. *Corporate Reputation Review, 21*(2), 84–100. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41299-018-0045-8.

Welch, M., & Jackson, P. R. (2007). Rethinking internal communication: A stakeholder approach. *Corporate Communications an International Journal, 12*(2), 177–198. https://doi.org/10.1108/13563280710744847.

Williams, K. D., Burgeois, M. J., & Croyle, R. T. (1993). The effects of stealing thunder in criminal and civil trials. *Law and Human Behaviour, 17*(6), 597–609. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01044684.

Yang, S.-U. (2007). An integrated model for organization-public relational outcomes, organizational reputation, and their antecedents. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 19*(2), 91–121. https://doi.org/10.1080/10627260701290612.

Yang, S.-U., & Cha, H. (2015). A framework linking organization-public relationships and organizational reputations in public relations management. In E.-J. Ki, J.-N. Kim, & J. A. Ledingham (Eds.). *Public relations as relationship management: A relational approach to the study and practice of public relations* (pp. 114–129). New York, NY: Routledge.

Yang, S.-U., & Grunig, J. E. (2005). Decomposing organisational reputation: The effects of organization-public relationship outcomes on cognitive representations of organisations and evaluations of organisational performance. *Journal of Communication Management, 9*(4), 305–325. https://doi.org/10.1108/13632540510621623.

Zhao, X., Lynch, J. G., & Chen, Q. (2010). Reconsidering Baron and Kenny: Myths and truths about mediation analysis. *The Journal of Consumer Research, 37*(2), 197–206. https://doi.org/10.1086/651257.

Zhao, H., Wayne, S. J., Glibkowski, B. C., & Bravo, J. (2007). The impact of psychological contract breach on work-related outcomes: A meta-analysis. *Personnel Psychology, 60*(3), 647–680. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2007.00087.x.

Zhou, L., & Shin, J. (2017). Does stealing thunder always work? A content analysis of crisis communication practice under different cultural settings. *Public Relations Review, 43*(5), 1036–1047. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2017.08.004.