Here’s the Story:
An Exploration of Narratives and the Attribution of Crisis Responsibility

THESIS

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By
Ashley Nicole Hofer, B.A.
Graduate Program in Communication

The Ohio State University
2014

Thesis Committee:
Osei Appiah, Advisor
Emily Moyer-Gusé
Abstract

The study of crisis communication has developed significantly over the past two decades, especially with the increased testing of the field’s two prominent theories: Image Repair Theory (Benoit, 1997) and Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Coombs, 1995; Coombs & Holladay, 2002). However, despite an increased understanding of crises, the complexities surrounding organizational responses, and the real or perceived threat to organizations, there are still many gaps in the literature. One avenue for growth is the study of narratives, as there is initial evidence that narratives can be effective tools for organizations to use in times of crisis (e.g., van Laer & de Ruyter, 2010). This study explored how the level of crisis responsibility attributed to the organization influenced the effectiveness of narrative responses. Using an experimental design featuring SCCT’s three crisis types and high vs. low narrative responses, this study found evidence of significant differences in narrative effectiveness dependent on empathy with the organization. High narrative messages were more effective in situations with high empathy, while low narrative messages were more effective in situations with low empathy. These findings confirm the importance of crisis type in predicting the effects of a crisis on the public’s views of the organization. Recommendations for future studies of narratives and crisis communication are provided, as are additional conclusions about crisis communication.
Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank God for His blessings and for granting me the resolve to complete this Master’s thesis. Thank you also to my advisor, Dr. Osei Appiah, for his continual guidance and reassurance, and to my committee member, Dr. Emily Moyer-Gusé, for her encouragement and added expertise. I also owe my utmost gratitude to my mom and dad for their constant love and support, despite the distance. Finally, I would like to extend my warmest thanks to my fellow graduate students; you truly made the journey brighter.
Vita

May 2008 .................................................Osseo-Fairchild High School

2011 ......................................................B.A. Mass Communication, UW-Eau Claire

2012 to present .......................................Graduate Teaching Associate, School of

Communication, The Ohio State University

Publications


likeability: Enduring and emerging predictors. Journal of Marketing

Communications, 19(1), 58-80.


Bowl ads linked to firm value enhancement. Journal of Marketing Development

and Competitiveness, 5(2), 29-43.

Fields of Study

Major Field: Communication
Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. ii

Acknowledgments ........................................................................................................................... iii

Vita ........................................................................................................................................................ iv

List of Tables .......................................................................................................................................... viii

List of Figures .......................................................................................................................................... ix

Chapter 1: Introduction ..................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 2: Literature Review .............................................................................................................. 5

Situational Crisis Communication Theory ......................................................................................... 5

Attribution of Crisis Responsibility ...................................................................................................... 5

Narrative Persuasion .............................................................................................................................. 9

Crisis Communication and Narratives ................................................................................................. 14

Chapter 3: Hypotheses & Research Question .................................................................................... 17

Chapter 4: Methodology ..................................................................................................................... 21

Crisis Situations ................................................................................................................................... 21

Stimulus Materials ............................................................................................................................... 22
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Protection Measures</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Results</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation and Identification</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterarguing</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Manipulative Intent</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy with the Ill</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6: Discussion</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 7: Limitations and Directions for Future Research</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 8: Conclusion</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Stimuli</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: Measures</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

Table 1. Coombs (2007b) Situational Crisis Communication Theory .......................... 6
Table 2. Participant Demographics ................................................................................. 25
Table 3. Attributions of Crisis Responsibility by Crisis Type ........................................... 37
Table 4. Reported Transportation and Identification by Gender and High-Low
Organizational Empathy .................................................................................................... 40
Table 5. Transportation and Identification by Narrative Level ......................................... 43
Table 6. Narrative and Empathy Comparison for Green Refresh ..................................... 44
Table 7. Comparison of Organizational Protection Measures for Different Levels of
Transportation and Identification ......................................................................................... 47
Table 8. Counterarguing and Perceived Manipulative Intent by Transportation and
Identification ....................................................................................................................... 50
Table 9. Counterarguing and Perceived Manipulative Intent by Crisis Type and Empathy
................................................................................................................................................ 50
List of Figures

Figure 1. Model depicting the predicted interaction between attributions of crisis responsibility and narrative persuasion on organizational protection measures .............. 20

Figure 2. The effect of crisis type on evaluations of organizational empathy for each product type ........................................................................................................... 39

Figure 3. Interaction between crisis type and transportation on ClearSoap account acceptance ........................................................................................................ 49

Figure 4. Mean evaluations of empathy with the ill among women reporting high or low organizational empathy ........................................................................... 55
Chapter 1: Introduction

Year after year, crisis situations create headlines around the world. In 2010, BP made headlines with the oil spill that devastated the Gulf of Mexico (Holmes & Sudhaman, 2011), while in 2011 nuclear energy company Tepco’s Fukushima plant in Japan was rocked by an earthquake and tsunami (Sudhaman & Homes, 2012). More recently, Target suffered a security breach at the end of 2013 when hackers accessed the personal and financial information of up to 110 million people (Harris & Perlroth, 2014). To protect themselves from lasting damage, organizations must respond appropriately to crisis situations. As such, both communication practitioners and scholars have taken interest in the crisis communication practices that surround today’s crises. However, there are several shortcomings in the current study of crisis communication that future researchers should address.

On the academic side, much of the crisis communication research has been practically oriented instead of theoretically oriented (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011). Crisis communication research has emphasized description over prescription, specifically through the use of case studies (An & Chang, 2011; Avery, Lariscy, Kim, & Hocke, 2010). This has contributed to an underrepresentation of experimental methodology in the field (An & Chang, 2011). In comparison, the theoretically oriented side of crisis communication is significantly less developed. Crisis communication – and its related
field of public relations – has, until recently, been limited in its theoretical development (An & Chang, 2011; Botan & Taylor, 2004). Though theoretical approaches to crisis communication have increased dramatically in recent years, many studies’ hypotheses and research questions are not rooted in theory (An & Chang, 2011). This leaves the strategically focused studies with only a limited foundation, and hurts the theoretical and prescriptive expansion of the field. As such, additional theoretically oriented research could advance the field by providing recommendations and best practice suggestions for communicators. Many scholars have thus called for an increased focus on prescriptive approaches in crisis communication (Avery et al., 2010; Benoit, 2013; Coombs & Schmidt, 2000; Dardis & Haigh, 2009).

Scholars have also advocated for the study of crisis communication in new contexts. Meta-analyses have suggested that scholars often focus their studies on preventable crises (Kim, Avery, & Lariscy, 2009) and apply their ideas in political and transportation crisis contexts (Avery et al., 2010). Thus, greater diversity in application, paired with the exploration of new concepts related to crisis communication, would be beneficial to advancing the field. This would enhance understanding of different crisis situations and aid in the development of better prescriptive suggestions.

While the theoretical side of crisis communication is in need of further development, the practical side could also benefit from additional research. In practice, there is always room for improvement in crisis communication. While there are examples of excellent crisis communication practice – such as Johnson & Johnson’s response during the 1982 Tylenol and cyanide crisis – there are also numerous examples of even
high-profile organizations failing to appropriately manage and respond to crises (Adubato, 2008). These include the Exxon Valdez oil spill of 1989 and FEMA’s response to Hurricane Katrina. Perplexing to some scholars is the disconnect between what communication theories and research would suggest for crisis response and how communication practitioners actually craft strategic messages during crisis events. Kim, Avery, and Lariscy (2009) demonstrated that organizations often deny responsibility during crises, but that communication scholars generally deem denial as one of the least effective approaches. While adherence to theoretical recommendations could help many crisis communicators, others argue that the best practices in crisis communication should continually adapt and evolve (Heath, 2006; Seeger, 2006). Ultimately, the goal of crisis communication is to minimize the damage to an organization and its reputation. Research to identify new approaches and methods to help communicators achieve this goal is crucial.

One avenue for growth is the study of narratives in crisis communication. As will be explained in more detail, many scholars believe crises are inherently related to narratives (Heath, 2006). The field of narrative persuasion is also undergoing considerable expansion, as scholars are exploring when it is effective, when it is ineffective, and are continually applying its study to new contexts. A select few studies have explored the intersection of crisis communication and narrative persuasion (e.g., Van Laer & de Ruyter, 2010; Yang, Kang, & Johnson, 2010). However, these studies did not explicitly use crisis communication theoretical frameworks to drive the focus of the...
studies. Using ideas and methods rooted firmly in crisis communication theory would help solidify this connection and continue the expansion of the two research areas.

This study sets out to address some of these shortcomings of the study of crisis communication. First, this study continues the theoretical and experimental expansion of crisis communication research. Driven by the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Coombs, 1995; Coombs & Holladay, 2002), this study experimentally explored different crisis communication responses in three types of crisis situations. Second, this study adds to the understanding of both the crisis communication and narrative persuasion disciplines by exploring the intersection of the two fields. By exploring both high and low narrative crisis communication responses, this study explored crisis communication in an under-studied context, expanding the boundaries of the field. Additionally, it adds knowledge regarding when narratives are and are not effective. Finally, the study continues the prescriptive expansion of the crisis communication field. By providing recommendations for best practices in crisis communication, the findings from this study could aid practitioners, who are always in search of the best way to craft an effective crisis response message. Together, this study addresses the needs of both scholars and practitioners, making it a valuable endeavor.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Situational Crisis Communication Theory

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) is one of two dominant theories in the study of crisis communication (An & Chang, 2011; Avery et al., 2010). Developed by Coombs (1995), the theory is based on attribution theory (Coombs, 2007a; Coombs & Holladay, 2002). SCCT posits that the level of crisis responsibility, and thus the threat to organizational reputation, should drive how organizations respond to crises. Coombs (2007b) defined three primary types of responses – denial, diminish, and rebuild – and one secondary response type, bolstering. Coombs provided 12 guidelines to help communicators choose an appropriate response. The suggestions were based on the type of crisis, an organization’s history of similar crises, and the organization’s prior reputation with the audience. These guidelines can be found in full in Table 1.

Attribution of Crisis Responsibility

According to Coombs’ (2007a) application of Wiener’s (1986) attribution theory, people attempt to assign responsibility for crisis events. In other words, they attempt to find who or what is to blame for the situation. Thus, the degree of responsibility attributed to the organization by various publics is what creates the risk for that
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Subdimension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Initial Strategies</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjust Information</td>
<td>1. Corrective action</td>
<td>1. What is being done to protect from future crises.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Express concern for victim</td>
<td>2. Expected by stakeholders, but not admission of guilt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary Strategies</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deny</td>
<td>3. Attack the accuser</td>
<td>3. Confronting the person or group claiming something is wrong with the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Denial</td>
<td>4. Assert that there is no crisis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Scapegoat</td>
<td>5. Blaming the person or group outside the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diminish</td>
<td>6. Excuse</td>
<td>6. Minimizing responsibility by denying intent to do harm and/or claiming inability to control the events that triggered the crisis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Justification</td>
<td>7. Minimizing the perceived damage caused by the crisis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Apology</td>
<td>9. Indicating the organization takes full responsibility and asks for forgiveness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secondary Strategies</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolstering</td>
<td>10. Reminder</td>
<td>10. Telling stakeholders about past and current good words of the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. Ingratiation</td>
<td>11. Praising stakeholders and/or reminding them of past and current good works by the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. Victimage</td>
<td>12. Reminding stakeholders that the organization is a victim too.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Coombs (2007b) Situational Crisis Communication Theory
organization. Low attribution of crisis responsibility means the audience assigns little blame for the crisis to the organization, which in turn creates little reputational risk. Conversely, high attribution of crisis responsibility means the audience places high levels of blame on the organization for the crisis. This creates significant reputational threat. SCCT posits that people’s attributions of an organization’s crisis responsibility are influenced by crisis type, crisis history, and performance history (Coombs, 2007b).

Especially important to attributing crisis responsibility is the type of crisis event, as this drives publics’ initial assessments (Coombs, 2007a). SCCT classifies a crisis situation as one of three types of crises: victim, accidental, or intentional (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Coombs & Holladay (2002) originally identified 13 types of unique crisis situations, but further testing collapsed the list into three overarching types of crises. This made it possible to recommend a response based on a category of crises, instead of making a separate suggestion for each specific situation. Because not all crises are created equal, each is associated with its own level of crisis responsibility attribution. In turn, the level of this attribution determines how severely the organization’s reputation is threatened.

The victim crisis type encompasses situations in which the organization is also a victim. Coombs & Holladay (2002) posit that an organization can be considered victimized in situations like a natural disaster, a rumor, external product tampering, or workplace violence. Because the cause of the situation is outside the control of the organization, there are only weak attributions of crisis responsibility to the organization. This translates into little threat against organizational reputation. However, not all crises
are outside the organization’s oversight, so attributions of crisis responsibility grow when the actions of the organization lead to the crisis situation. When the organization’s damaging actions are unintentional, the event can be classified as accidental (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Accidental events include stakeholder accusations of misconduct, industrial accidents caused by technical error, and product recalls caused by technical or equipment error. Because the actions of the company were unintentional, most people will attribute only a little crisis responsibility to the organization, and thus reputational threat is only moderate. Conversely, if the organization’s actions were intentional, there is high attribution of responsibility. These situations – classified as preventable crises – include accidents or product harm resulting from human error, deception of stakeholders, law violations, and injuries occurring due to risky management practices. Because proper conduct could have avoided the crisis, the preventable cluster results in the greatest threat to the organization’s reputation.

Coombs and other scholars have investigated the implications of the different crisis types. Intentional crises can lead to increased anger from the audience, which in turn negatively affects reputation (Utz, Schultz, & Glocka, 2013). Claeys, Cauberghe, and Vyncke (2010) found evidence to support the claim that people will perceive an organization’s reputation as worse when the crisis is more severe. An and Gower (2009) also found that news coverage of crises varies by crisis type. The researchers identified five types of news frames, including attribution of responsibility and morality. According to the study, the attribution of responsibility frame focused on who or what is responsible for the event, while the morality frame focused on the problem or event’s relation to
ethics. In the study, journalists used both frames most often with the preventable crises. Thus, the crises with the highest reputational threat (Coombs & Holladay, 2002) were most likely to be framed in terms of who was to blame and the event’s relation to morals. Both blame and poor morals can lead to negative impressions of the organization (An & Gower, 2009). Thus, there is evidence that suggests the type of crisis – and thus attribution of crisis responsibility – can significantly affect audience perceptions. It also supports the continued exploration of crisis type to fully understand its impact and further test the ideas of the SCCT.

**Narrative Persuasion**

One such avenue for growth in exploration of crisis type rests in narratives. Stories have long been a vital part of society. Scholars have even argued that our lives revolve around stories, which help us make sense of worldly happenings (Schank & Abelson, 1995). People tell stories to teach, entertain, and advance culture (Snowden, 1999). As such, persuasion scholars have explored how these stories can change knowledge, attitudes, and behavior.

Scholars have explored the effectiveness of narratives in persuading audiences, and have identified mechanisms that enact this process. One model, the extended elaboration likelihood model, argues that absorption, also referred to as transportation, and identification with characters is what drives attitudinal and behavioral effects in narrative persuasion (Slater & Rouner, 2002). Oliver, Dillard, Bae, and Tamul (2012) argued that these ideas all fall under the concept of narrative engagement, which the authors related to “absorption” and “immersion.” Through this engagement, audience
members focus on the story and its characters instead of rationally considering the persuasive ideas. This limits the audience members’ abilities to develop their own counterarguments to the persuasive message, hence encouraging them to adopt the ideas put forth in the story.

Transportation

One of the most studied mechanisms of narrative persuasion is transportation. Green and Brock (2000) conceptualized transportation as, “a convergent process, where all mental systems and capacities become focused on events occurring in the narrative” (p. 701). Through transportation into the world of the narrative, Green and Brock (2000) suggest the audience is less aware of the “real world.” With limited access to outside ideas and knowledge, the audience must rely on the version of events put forth in the story. Importantly, transportation is persuasive because it makes story experiences feel real, can foster connections with characters in the story, and inhibits the development of counterarguments (Carpenter & Green, 2012; Green & Brock, 2000; Green & Donahue, 2009). Through these processes, transportation into a story can help audiences overcome resistance to messages (e.g., Kreuter et al., 2007) and increase support of ideas expressed in the story (e.g., Green & Brock, 2000).

Importantly, emotions play a large role in transportation. People who are transported into a story are more highly involved, think more vividly, and react emotionally to the story (Green & Brock, 2000). As defined by Nisbett and Ross (1980), vividness is, “emotionally interesting, concrete and imagery-provoking, and proximate in a sensory, temporal, or spatial way” (p. 45). A person’s emotional state can also
determine whether a person is transported. Studies have suggested that matching a person’s emotional state and the story’s emotional tone increases transportation (Green, Chatham, & Sestir, 2012). Additionally, people in low-arousal emotional states, such as contentment, are more likely to be transported. Scholars have suggested this occurs because people in high-arousal emotional states may be distracted by these feelings and closed off to the narrative. As emotions – particularly negative ones – play large roles in crises (Jin, 2010), it is important to consider the implications of emotions on transportation.

Identification

In addition to transportation, identification is another oft-studied mechanism of narrative persuasion. Moyer-Gusé (2008) conceptualized identification as, “an emotional and cognitive process whereby a viewer imagines himself or herself as a particular character” (p. 410). According to Cohen (2001), identification with a character involves not only absorption, but the sharing of thoughts, feelings, and motivations with that character. By identifying with a character, counterarguing is again reduced because the processes are incompatible. Scholars argue that it is difficult to develop these negative arguments while viewing a story through the eyes of a particular character.

Experimental testing of identification in narratives has supported these findings. For instance, in entertainment education, identification with characters in an episode about teen pregnancy reduced counterarguing (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010). In health communication, identification with characters in a narrative predicted attitudes toward cervical cancer screening (Murphy et al., 2013). Identification with characters in a
controversial movie affected attitudes toward religion (Igartua & Barrios, 2012).

Identification with an organization has also been shown to predict positive word-of-mouth intentions (Yang, Kang, & Johnson, 2010).

**Contexts**

Within the study of narrative persuasion, there has been debate regarding the contexts in which it is effective. There has been concern that it cannot be successful in overtly persuasive contexts, such as advertising, because the reader or viewer knows the persuasive intent of the message. However, the conceptualization of narrative put forth by Kreuter and colleagues (2007) suggests otherwise. The researchers defined a narrative as, “a representation of connected events and characters that has an identifiable structure, is bounded in space and time, and contains implicit or explicit messages about the topic being addressed” (Krueter et al., 2007, p. 222). As defined, the persuasive messages can be overt or subtle. The focus is instead placed on the characteristics of the message, most notably with plot and characters. In addition, transportation is not limited to fiction; it can occur with nonfiction and factual narratives as well (Appel & Maleckar, 2012; Green & Brock, 2000; Green & Donahue, 2009). Studies have also shown that the intensity of a person’s emotions do not change by the factual-fictional classification of a story (Green, Chatham, & Sestir, 2012).

Aware of this challenge, scholars have explored narrative persuasion in many different contexts. In entertainment education, transportation into narratives has been shown to reduce counterarguing (e.g., Moyer-Guse & Nabi, 2010). Narratives have also been studied in health communication (e.g., Hinyard & Kreuter, 2007). For instance,
Murphy, Frank, Chatterjee, and Baezconde-Garbanati (2013) found that transportation into a narrative-style message advocating HPV testing significantly increased knowledge and marginally increased viewers’ intent to get tested. Thus, the narratives – through the processes of transportation and identification – inspired positive changes in the audience members, much like crisis communicators aim to do through their messages.

In more explicitly persuasive contexts, scholars have also found evidence for the benefits of using narratives. In branding, narratives can result in more positive attitudes toward the brand (Escalas, 2004b; Lundqvist, Liljander, Gummerus, and van Riel, 2013) and can convince people to pay more for the product (Lundqvist et al., 2013). Narratives in advertisements can also influence attitude toward the ad (Lien & Chen, 2013), create greater self-brand connections (Escalas, 2004b), and foster positive behavioral intentions (Escalas, 2004b). This suggests that narrative persuasion can be successful even when the reader or viewer is aware of the persuasive intent, and supports the study of narratives in other persuasive contexts. As described by Yang, Kang, & Johnson (2010), crisis communication messages also contain persuasive tones because of the organizations’ goals. Like other overtly persuasive contexts such as advertising, narratives have the potential to reduce counterarguing and ultimately enhance reception of the message in crisis communication.

*High vs. Low Narrative*

Numerous scholars have studied the effectiveness of high narrative messages compared to low or nonnarrative messages. Whereas high narrative messages contain characters and a time-bound plot, low narrative messages focus on logical evidence to
support claims (Kreuter et al., 2007). Nonnarrative messages, which may also be referred to as argumentative or informational messages, do not contain this chronological ordering of events (Lien & Chen, 2013). Studies have shown that high narrative messages can be more effective than low narrative messages in achieving communicators’ goals. For instance, Chang (2008) studied narratives in a mental health context. The study found that narrative advertisements – which added story details to a day-in-the-life style ad – were more successful than nonnarrative ads in drawing in viewers, creating greater sympathy toward those suffering from depression, and increasing perceived efficacy of viewers. In a news setting, Oliver and colleagues (2012) found that narrative-style articles foster empathy and compassion, which led to more positive overall evaluations of stigmatized groups.

_Crisis Communication and Narratives_

Despite the aforementioned research comparing high and low narrative messages, limited research has specifically examined the effect of narratives in organizational crisis situations. In an experiment centered on blog posts surrounding the medically problematic birth of a child, van Laer and de Ruyter (2010) demonstrated that people use different processing mechanisms for narrative and analytical information. Specifically, using a 2 (narrative vs. analytical response) x 2 (apology vs. denial) design, they found that narrative approaches worked better for apologies, while analytical approaches were more effective for denials. The authors attributed this to the type of processing that occurred. They argued that apologies are associated with some admission of guilt, while denials are associated with the absence of guilt. Because narratives do not inspire
analytical processing, the authors concluded apologies matched the restorative and empathy-inducing properties of stories. Thus, the narrative apologies were more effective despite apologies’ potential association with guilt. Conversely, nonnarrative responses led audiences to use analytical processing. Because a denial is associated with an absence of guilt, critical analyses of the nonnarrative denial led to more favorable conclusions about the organization than did factual, nonnarrative apologies.

Another study explored organizations’ use of different forms of narratives during crisis. Yang, Kang, and Johnson (2010) found evidence to suggest that narratives can be effective in crisis communication. Using blogs, the study created six messages related to the recall and potential contamination of an ice cream product. The results suggested participants’ engagement in the crisis narrative as a whole increased perceived interactivity and reduced negative emotions.

Despite the limited study at the intersection of these fields, there is reason to believe crisis communication and narratives naturally fit well together. Scholars have suggested the emotional rules in news articles are similar to those of fiction and myths, thus making a connection between news and narratives (Nell, 1988). As Nell (2002) wrote, “even the worst of news brings a message of hope and progress,” (p. 30). Heath (2006) took the argument a step further and suggested that all crisis response is essentially narrative. He compared the progression of the crisis to the plot of a story, with the end goal being the “happily ever after” state (p. 247). To do this, organizations attempt to both control the story (Heath, 1997) and work with others to develop it (Heath, 2006).
In addition, the very definition of crisis communication, as put forth by Frandsen and Johansen (2007), shares many characteristics of a narrative. They defined crisis communication as the communication occurring, “before, during, and after an event, a situation or a course of events that is seen as a crisis by an organization and/or one or more of its stakeholders. Crisis communication also includes various actors, contexts, and discourses (manifested in specific genres and specific texts) related to each other.” This definition suggests a crisis is an event or series of events (plot) and has various actors (characters), deepening the link to narrative.

With such a strong connection between crises and narratives, a crisis communication message may never be fully void of a narrative; instead, it is important to think of it as a continuum, with some messages emphasizing the story (high narrative) and some messages focusing on the logic and arguments (low narrative). This sets the stage for the study of narratives in crisis communication.
The existing literature creates many questions about the use of narratives in crisis communication. While Van Laer and de Ruyter (2010) effectively demonstrated the narrative and informational processing differences based on different types of crisis responses, their study only considered one type of crisis situation. SCCT provides the framework for analyzing different types of crises: victim, accidental, and preventable. Based on previous literature, it is evident that the effectiveness of crisis responses can vary based on the crisis type (Coombs, 2007b). For instance, SCCT only recommends using the diminish response with forms of victim- and accident-type crises. SCCT also suggests that using an appropriate response for the crisis type will reduce reputational threat, but an inappropriate response will not. Coombs suggests this is likely to occur because of the different levels of reputational threat, as preventable crises carry the most threat and victim crises carry the least. This indicates that another variable – attribution of crisis responsibility – could moderate the effectiveness of the narrative-based responses to crisis situations.

Van Laer and de Ruyter (2010) also found that narrative apologies work better than analytical or nonnarrative apologies, particularly in influencing perceived integrity. For instance, in their 2010 study related to a medically problematic childbirth, both responses clearly used the phrase “I apologize” in the message. The analytical message
framed the apology with statistics about problematic childbirths in bulleted format. In contrast, the narrative apology chronologically described the doctor’s actions and emotions during the childbirth. While this study made valuable gains and demonstrated differences between narrative and analytical apologies, it did not take into account different levels of crisis responsibility. Using just one scenario – a doctor apologizing for a difficult delivery – limited the testing of narrative apologies’ persuasive powers. Given the evidence for another variable at work, this study proposes that attribution of crisis responsibility will moderate the effectiveness of these apologies.

Scholars have suggested that crises are emotional events and can bring out negative emotions, such as anger and sadness (Jin, 2010). Correspondingly, research on narratives has suggested people can be transported into stories that deal with negative emotions, like anger, and can help people manage their moods (Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004; Green & Donahue, 2009). Green, Brock, and Kaufman (2004) also suggested that situations that “encourage empathy or openness” could increase transportation. As defined by Batson (2001), empathy is, “an other-oriented emotional response congruent with another’s perceived welfare.” Thus, this study predicts that crisis situations that could elicit empathy – such as when the organization is the victim and there are low attributions of crisis responsibility – will increase transportation and identification. This, in turn, would enhance the effectiveness of a high narrative crisis response in protecting the organization.

Conversely, there are also situations in which transportation and identification are less likely. If empathy for an organization is low – such as when the organization could
have prevented a crisis and there are high attributions of crisis responsibility – transportation and identification could be less likely. Indeed, Murphy and colleagues (2013) found that heightened levels of emotion decreased a narrative message’s effectiveness. As anger is related to higher levels of attention and retribution (Nabi, 2002), it follows that increased anger from greater reputational threat could decrease the effectiveness of a high narrative message.

Given this evidence, this study makes the following predictions, as also depicted in Figure 1.

H1: Lower (higher) attributions of crisis responsibility will elicit high (low) levels of empathy for the organization from the audience.

H2: Higher (lower) levels of empathy for the organization will increase transportation into the message.

H3: Higher (lower) levels of empathy for the organization will increase (decrease) identification with the CEO in the message.

H4: High (low) narrative messages will be most effective in crises with low (high) attributions of crisis responsibility.

RQ: How will high/low narrative messages compare in crises with moderate attributions of crisis responsibility?
Figure 1. Model depicting the predicted interaction between attributions of crisis responsibility and narrative persuasion on organizational protection measures.
Chapter 4: Methodology

To test the hypotheses, this study explored respondents’ attitudes and behavioral intentions after reading press releases from two fictional organizations in crisis. This study used a 3 x 2 experimental design, with attribution of crisis responsibility (high, moderate, minimal) and response type (high and low narrative) accounting for the experimental variables. To keep the main crisis event constant across conditions, the crises were both product recalls that resulted in illnesses. Additionally, in order to ensure the results were not unduly influenced by the industry of the recalled product, the experiment was conducted for two types of products: a salad kit and a liquid hand soap product.

Crisis Situations

Product recalls were chosen for crisis situations to maintain consistency in the experimental conditions. According to Coombs (2007b), a product recall can fall into each of the three crisis cluster types. For instance, the victim condition described a product recall as a result of tampering from an outside agent, while the accidental condition featured a product recall stemming from a technological error. The preventable condition described organizational human error that results in the recall. According to SCCT principles, these three variations of product recalls would be associated with three different attributions of crisis responsibility, thus fitting the needs of this experiment (Coombs & Holladay, 2002).
Importantly, the crises used for the experiment were described as the second such product recall for the fictional organizations in all conditions. This made the SCCT recommended response tactic the same for each of the six conditions, further adding consistency to the study. As described by SCCT’s recommendations (2007b), the rebuild approach is appropriate for all crisis types if the organization in question has a history of similar crises. Without this prior history, the rebuild strategy would not have been the most effective for all crisis types. Within the rebuild strategy, the apology response was selected for all press releases. Van Laer & de Ruyter (2010) also used apology as one of their manipulated response types. Thus, the use of an apology created consistency between conditions and allowed for possible comparison to previous research.

The two types of crises chosen for the study were a salad kit recall and a liquid hand soap recall. A salad kit was chosen for the food product recall because salad is a commonly recalled item. For instance, during the first two weeks of November 2013, the Food & Drug Administration released information on 20 recalls or recall expansions (FoodSafety.gov, 2013). Seven of those updates were for salad items. This makes a message about a salad recall a believable event. Liquid hand soap was chosen as the second product type. It was chosen because it is a common household item with which people are familiar. Additionally, a recall of hand soap occurred in Canada in 2012 (UPI, 2012); this also makes the recall of hand soap in this experiment a believable situation.

Stimulus Materials

Six news releases for each product type were created, with each featuring one of the three types of crises and one of the two response types; thus, a total of 12 press
releases were created (see Appendix A). A press release format was chosen because people look to traditional media to educate themselves about crises (Austin, Fisher, Liu, & Jin, 2012). Public relations practitioners craft press releases with the goal of not only transmitting information, but also helping journalists write articles that reflect organizational viewpoints. The Public Relations Society of America considers an organization’s act of sending a press release as giving journalists permission to publish the press release’s content (Corbett, 2012). Given tight timelines or highly complex topics, news organizations may publish press releases verbatim or make only minor adjustments to the document (Fitts, 2014; Smith, 2011). Companies may also post their press releases on their corporate websites or online press centers (e.g., apple.com/pr; media.gm.com; pressroom.toyota.com). Thus, the readers of press releases are not only members of the media, but often include members of the general public.

Organizational responses can also take many formats, allowing for the high and low narrative manipulations. Recent examples of statements demonstrate the variation possible. For instance, at the start of 2014 the Canadian government modified the format of its press releases, making them shorter, including links, and commonly incorporating bullet points (Wilson, 2014). Bullet points are often recommended by public relations professionals to make the press release easier to scan (PRWeb, 2011). On the other end of the spectrum, organizations may choose to release longer, story-like statements. For instance, after its December 2013 security breach, Target released an open letter from its CEO, Gregg Steinhafel (Steinhafel, 2014). The letter demonstrated personal engagement from the CEO, and directly addressed customers. These real-life examples and
recommendations by professionals justify the use of both text-emphasis writings and bullet points in the stimuli for this experiment.

Each press release was accompanied by a brief introductory paragraph to provide context of the crisis situation. This introduction notably included the organization’s history of product recalls. Again, this served as justification for the use of the rebuild strategy for each of the conditions (Coombs, 2007b). Additionally, the introduction emphasized the type of crisis, strongly referencing the cause of the crisis to strengthen the attribution of crisis responsibility manipulation.

Fictitious organizational names were used for the experiment, which is in line with the previous research on crisis communication and narratives (Yang, Kang, & Johnson, 2010). Green Refresh was chosen for the salad kit recall, and ClearSoap was chosen for the hand soap recall. The use of fictional organizations allowed for a single measurement of organizational reputation because the respondents had no prior experience with, or knowledge of, the organizations. Thus, the measured attitudes and behavioral intentions related to the organization were formed as a result of exposure to the stimuli.

Though the details in the press release varied slightly for the attribution of crisis responsibility and high-low narrative manipulations, as many features as possible were kept constant across all conditions. The headline, lead, and quotes were kept constant in all press releases. The only variations in wording were due to the manipulations. The length of the messages was also similar at approximately one page, which is in line with previous research (Lee & Leets, 2002; Oliver et al., 2002).
Participants

One hundred twenty-five undergraduate participants were recruited through both the Ohio State Communication Research Experience Program (C-REP) and through advertisements in two communication courses. By participating in this study, students recruited from C-REP partially fulfilled course requirements for research participation while students from non-C-REP communication courses earned extra credit. The majority of participants were female (66.4%, n = 83) and had reached at least their fourth year of college education (55.2%, n = 69). The participants were predominantly white/Caucasian (76.0%, n = 95) and had an average age of 21.6 years (SD = 4.45).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Percent (n = 125)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>33.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>66.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Rank</th>
<th>Percent (n = 125)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First-year</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-year</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third-year</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth-year+</td>
<td>55.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Percent (n = 125)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian-Pacific Islander</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>76.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Participant Demographics
Procedure

The experiment was conducted in School of Communication laboratory facilities for increased control of environmental conditions. Upon arriving at the lab, participants were directed to a single-user computer station. After signing an informed consent document, they were randomly assigned by Qualtrics software to read two of the 12 of the press releases created for this experiment. Each participant read one high narrative and one low narrative message. Each press release featured a different product type. The order of the press releases was randomly determined to prevent order effects. For instance, a participant might have first read a high narrative, victim crisis type message from Green Refresh and then read a low narrative, accidental crisis type message from ClearSoap. Another respondent may have first read a low narrative, preventable crisis message from ClearSoap followed by a high narrative, victim crisis type message from Green Refresh. The study was designed so no participant read two press releases of the same narrative level or the same product type.

The questionnaire was designed so participants read a press release, answered questions about that crisis situation, and then read the second press release and answered questions about that crisis situation. After reading the statements and completing the measures for both crisis situations, participants were debriefed about the nature of the study, thanked for their time, and dismissed from the lab.

Measures

To measure the effectiveness of the messages, the primary dependent variables of this study were evaluations of organizational reputation, attitude toward the organization,
purchase intent, and account acceptance. Collectively, these four measures are referred to as organizational protection measures. Other key measures included attribution of crisis responsibility, narrative format, empathy with the organization, empathy with the people who became ill from the product, transportation, identification, counterarguing, and perceived manipulative intent. The complete listing of items is included in Appendix B.

**Attribution of Crisis Responsibility**

Attribution of crisis responsibility can be operationalized by crisis type. As explained, SCCT asserts there are three different types of crises organizations can face and that each is associated with a unique level of crisis responsibility (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). The victim crisis cluster is associated with minimal attributions of crisis responsibility, and this attribution increases in the accidental cluster. Preventable crises are associated with the highest level of crisis responsibility. Thus, this study modified the details of the crisis to reflect either a victim, accidental, or preventable situation to manipulate the attribution of crisis responsibility.

The Organizational Crisis Responsibility scale (Brown & Ki, 2013) was used to check the effective manipulation of the crisis type conditions. Three unique dimensions operationalize attribution of crisis responsibility: intentionality, accountability, and locality (Brown & Ki, 2013). Intentionality refers to the purposefulness of the crisis, while locality refers to whether the crisis was an internal or external situation. Accountability is a combination of preventability of the crisis and the level of fault that can be attributed to the organization. Through extensive testing, Brown & Ki (2013) developed a 12-item scale to measure attribution of crisis responsibility. Example items
included, “The cause of the crisis was an intentional act by someone in the organization,” “The crisis was preventable by the organization,” and “The crisis was caused by a problem inside the organization.” The scale is justified for use in this experiment by its connection with attribution theory. Brown & Ki (2013) asserted that the ideas of intentionality, accountability, and locality correspond with Weiner’s (1986) concepts of controllability, stability, and locus. As Coombs’ (1995) SCCT is based on attribution theory, this scale is an appropriate measure for testing outcomes based on SCCT (Brown & Ki, 2013). The items are set on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” In Brown & Ki’s (2013) development, the final scale produced extremely high internal reliability ($\alpha = .95$). In this analysis, the items also achieved high reliability for both the Green Refresh (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .95$) and ClearSoap conditions (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .92$).

**Narrative Format**

The response type conditions were operationalized based on the definition of a story. A high narrative message can be operationalized as a message that contains a clear, time-bound plot and characters (Kreuter et al., 2007; Lee & Leets, 2002). Contrastingly, a low narrative message can be operationalized as, “messages that do not link actions or events together in a meaningful way or forms of presentation and argument that do not include plots or character identification” (Lee & Leets, 2002, p. 933). To achieve this, the low narrative condition will feature bullet points and clear, analytic arguments to disrupt flow (Lu, 2013). The items for this measure are, “The message shows personal engagement with characters,” “The message demonstrates feeling/thinking,” and “The
message has a well-defined beginning, middle, and ending of the story.” Together, these three items achieved sufficient reliability for both Green Refresh (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .75$) and ClearSoap (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .82$).

**Empathy**

When empathy is induced, measures of emotions related to empathy should be higher than when it is not (Batson, et al., 1997). To measure this affective empathy, participants’ self-reported agreement or disagreement with seven items adapted from the Davis (1983) Interpersonal Reactivity Index. Though the scale covers four dimensions of dispositional empathy, this study only used the items reflecting the empathetic concern subset. As conceptualized by Davis, empathetic concern addresses “other-oriented feelings of sympathy and concern for unfortunate others” (1983). This distinguishes empathy from identification because it goes beyond merely seeing a situation from another person’s perspective. The items were further adapted to fit situational empathy instead of dispositional empathy. For instance, “I am often quite touched by things that I see happen” was adapted to “I am quite touched by what has happened to [Green Refresh/ClearSoap].” This helped capture the participants’ empathetic responses to the crisis situation instead of the empathetic nature of his or her disposition. Furthermore, this study measured both participants’ empathy toward the organization and their empathy toward the people who became ill from the contaminated product. The items were set to a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” The seven items achieved high inter-item reliability for both the Green Refresh (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .79$) and ClearSoap (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .79$) question sets for empathy with
the organization. Similar reliabilities were achieved for the Green Refresh (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .82$) and ClearSoap (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .82$) items for empathy with the ill.

*Transportation*

The degree to which a reader is transported into the story has been shown to be a significant predictor of the effectiveness of narrative persuasion (e.g., Green & Brock, 2000). Green & Brock (2000) developed a 15-item transportation scale. The first 11 items are general items, while the last four are specific to the narrative. For this study, three adapted items were used to assess reading an organizational statement, which is in line with previous research on narratives in a persuasive context (Escalas, 2004a; Escalas, 2007). The three items were “While I was reading the organization’s statement, I could easily picture the crisis events in it taking place,” “I could picture myself in the scene of the crisis events described in the statement,” and “I was mentally involved in the statement while reading it.” Items were evaluated on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” The items achieved high internal reliability for both the Green Refresh (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .89$) and ClearSoap (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .89$) question sets.

*Identification*

Identification is another mechanism of narrative persuasion that has been shown effective (e.g., Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010; Slater-Rouner, 2002). Cohen (2001) developed a character identification scale that has been used with success in numerous studies. In this study, participants may have identified with the CEO of the organization, who was mentioned multiple times in each press release and served as a representative of
the organization. This study used eight items from Cohen’s original scale that were adapted to reflect reading an organizational statement. The items included, “I think I have a good understanding of [Lange/Hawn],” “I tend to understand the reasons why [Lange/Hawn] did what he did,” and “While reading the statement I could feel the emotions [Lange/Hawn] portrayed.” The items were measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” The items achieved high internal reliability for both Green Refresh (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .92$) and ClearSoap (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .88$) items.

**Organizational Reputation**

Organizational or corporate reputation has been defined differently by various scholars, and has often been confused with the related terms of corporate image and corporate identity (Stacks, Dodd, & Rita Men, 2013). Coombs (2013) emphasized valence and defined corporate reputation as, “how positively or negatively stakeholders perceive an organization,” adding that reputations are “evaluative and developed through direct and indirect experience with an organization” (p. 271). Stacks and Watson (2007) emphasized history, and put forth the definition of, “the historical relationship between organizations and publics” (p. 69). Despite definitional discrepancies, there is evidence that corporate reputation can significantly affect an organization. A positive corporate reputation can increase customers’ trust in, and identification with, an organization (Keh & Xie, 2009), and can lead to consumer satisfaction and loyalty (Helm, Eggert, & Garnefeld, 2010). Organizational reputation has been shown to influence people’s behavioral intentions (Mews & Boenigk, 2013) and even positively affect companies’
market performance (Lee & Roh, 2012) and brand equity (Lai, Chiu, Yang, & Pai, 2010). Thus, when organizational reputation is at risk during a crisis, communicators strive to use the response that will minimize damage.

In this study, organizational reputation was measured with Coombs and Holladay’s (2002) organizational reputation scale. Based on McCroskey’s ethos scale, it is operationalized by trust and includes five statements set to a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Coombs’ and Holladay’s original use of the scale, along with several other works, consistently produced high reliability results (Cronbach’s α > .80). Because the organizations used in this study’s stimulus were fictional, the starting reputation should have been neutral. Thus, the post-test measure of organizational reputation represented the change as a result of reading the statement. The items included, “The organization is concerned with the well-being of its publics” and “Under most circumstances, I would be likely to believe what the organization says.” The items achieved high inter-item reliability for both the Green Refresh (Cronbach’s α = .91) and ClearSoap (Cronbach’s α = .88) question sets.

**Attitude Toward the Organization**

Previous research has underscored the importance of attitudes toward companies and brands. Specific to crises, effective crisis communication can increase positive attitudes toward an organization (Yang, Kang, & Johnson, 2010). This study measured attitude toward the organization using a seven-point semantic differential scale developed by Boulding & Kirmani (1993) and adapted by Yang, Kang, & Johnson (2010). Items included “Reputable/Not Reputable,” “Responsible/Irresponsible,” and
“Trustworthy/Untrustworthy.” These items achieved high inter-item reliability for both the Green Refresh (Cronbach’s η = .93) and ClearSoap (Cronbach’s η = .90) items.

**Purchase Intent**

As defined by Spears & Singh (2004) purchase intent can be defined as, “an individual’s conscious plan to make an effort to purchase a brand” (p. 56). While purchase intent has been measured in a variety of ways – including through a five-item semantic differential scale, such as that used by Spears & Singh (2004) – it is important to consider the reader’s need or desire for that type of product. In this study, purchase intent was measured through a single, seven-point Likert-type item set from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” It asked participants to rate their intent to buy the manipulated brand, if they were looking to buy a product of that type.

**Account Acceptance**

In a crisis situation, it is important to determine how the audience feels about the organization’s response. According to Coombs & Holladay (2008), account acceptance “refers to how respondents feel about the crisis response offered by the organization” (p. 253). Yang, Kang, & Johnson (2010) found that higher levels of account acceptance helped reduce negative emotions associated with the crisis. This study used a five-item semantic differential scale to assess account acceptance. The scale was based off of Blumstein et al. (1974) and was used by Yang, Kang, & Johnson (2010). The items were, “Favorable/Unfavorable,” “Acceptable/Unacceptable,” “Adequate/Inadequate,” Believable/Unbelievable,” and “Sincere/Insincere.” Together, these five items achieved
high inter-item reliability for both the Green Refresh (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .94$) and ClearSoap (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .94$) items.

**Counterarguing**

Measuring to what extent participants develop counterarguments with the ideas in the organizational statements is important for exploring the effectiveness of the statement. Counterarguing has been measured numerous ways in the literature, and this study used close-ended items set to a seven-point Likert-type scale. The four-item list, adapted from Nabi, Moyer-Gusé, and Byrne (2001), measured whether participants developed counterarguments when reading the statement, but did not explore what type of counterarguments. The items included “I found myself actively disagreeing with the organization.” However, reliability analysis indicated that eliminating the third item – “I was looking for flaws in the organization’s arguments” greatly improved inter-item reliability. While the other three items discuss general agreement or disagreement with the organization, this item implied actively looking for problems with the organization’s message. Given the participants read the statements in a School of Communication lab and knew the statements were created by School of Communication personnel, it is possible participants would not consider seeking out errors because of the authority associated with the experiment. Thus, the decision was made to eliminate this item from the counterarguing index. For Green Refresh items, removing the third items from the analysis improved reliability from Cronbach’s $\alpha = .76$ to Cronbach’s $\alpha = .85$. The ClearSoap items’ reliability improved from Cronbach’s $\alpha = .64$ to Cronbach’s $\alpha = .77$. 
Perceived Manipulative Intent

There is evidence that suggests that when readers or viewers realize the persuasive intent of a narrative message, they begin to process it analytically (Wentzel, Tomczak, & Herman, 2010). This may negate the persuasive benefits gained by using narratives in place of analytical messages. Thus, it was important to understand how perceived manipulative intent varied by experimental condition and to see if there were differences in perceived manipulative intent between high and low narrative messages.

Campbell (1995) created a six-item measure of perceived manipulative intent that was used for this study. Items included, “The organization tried to manipulate the audience in ways that I don’t like,” I think that this message is unfair,” and “I was annoyed by this message because the organization seemed to be trying to inappropriately manage or control the audience.” These six items achieved high inter-item reliability for the both the Green Refresh (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .93$) and ClearSoap (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .92$) question sets.
Chapter 5: Results

Manipulation Checks

For narrative format, the different stimuli were subjected to a pre-test and differences between the high and low narrative conditions were detected. Additionally, a paired sample t-tests showed significant differences between how participants rated the narrative format of the high narrative ($M = 4.80, SD = 1.09$) and low narrative ($M = 4.42, SD = 1.18$) messages they read ($t(124) = -2.61, p = .010$). This indicates participants saw sufficient differences in narrative structure between the two press releases they read, and rated the high narrative message as having greater narrative format. This provides the necessary support for effective manipulation of narrative condition.

For attribution of crisis responsibility, a 3 x 2 ANOVA investigated the effects of the three crisis types and the two narrative levels on attributions of crisis responsibility. For Green Refresh, there was a significant main effect for crisis type, $F(2, 119) = 83.27, p < .001$. Pairwise comparison follow-up analyses indicated significant differences between the victim and both the accidental, $p < .001$, and preventable, $p < .001$, crises. Additionally, there was a significant difference between the accidental and preventable crises, $p < .001$. The same pattern was found for ClearSoap, as the ANOVA indicated a significant main effect for crisis type, $F(2, 119) = 23.89, p < .001$. Pairwise comparison follow-up analyses to the main effect for crisis type indicated significant differences
between the victim crisis and both the accidental, \( p = .003 \), and preventable, \( p < .001 \), as well as between the accidental and preventable crises, \( p = .001 \). As shown in Table 3, these results indicate that the victim crises were associated with minimum attributions of crisis responsibility, the accidental crises were associated with moderate responsibility, and the preventable crises were associated with high attributions of crisis responsibility. This finding is in line with previous SCCT research (Coombs & Holladay, 2002), and supports the use of crisis type as a manipulation of attribution of crisis responsibility.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crisis Type</th>
<th>Green Refresh</th>
<th>ClearSoap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accidental</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preventable</td>
<td>5.45</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Attributions of Crisis Responsibility by Crisis Type

Hypothesis Testing

Analyses were conducted to test the four hypotheses that guided this study. In total, support was found for \( H_1 \), while partial support was found for \( H_2, H_3, \) and \( H_4 \).

Organizational Empathy

A 3 x 2 ANOVA investigated the effects of the three crisis type conditions and the two levels of narrative on empathy for the organization. \( H_1 \) predicted that lower attributions of crisis responsibility would elicit higher levels of empathy for the organization. Conversely, it also predicted that higher attributions of crisis responsibility would produce lower levels of empathy for the organization.
**Green Refresh**

The ANOVA indicated a significant main effect for crisis type, $F(2, 119) = 4.43$, $p = .014$. In follow-up analysis, pairwise comparisons for the main effect indicated significant differences in organizational empathy between the preventable crisis and both the victim crisis, $p = .025$, and accidental crisis, $p = .043$. As shown in Figure 2, result suggests that after reading the Green Refresh message, participants felt significantly less empathy for the organization when reading about a preventable crisis ($M = 3.49$, $SD = .88$) than when reading about either a victim ($M = 3.99$, $SD = .98$) or accidental ($M = 3.95$, $SD = .71$) crisis. This result provides support for H$_1$.

**ClearSoap**

Similar to the salad recall, the ANOVA for ClearSoap indicated a significant main effect for crisis type, $F(2, 119) = 10.07$, $p < .001$. In follow-up analysis, pairwise comparisons of the crisis types indicated significant differences in organizational empathy between the preventable crisis and the victim crisis, $p = .025$. This indicates that after reading the ClearSoap press release, participants felt significantly less empathy for the organization when reading about a preventable crisis ($M = 3.16$, $SD = .79$) than when reading about a victim crisis ($M = 3.96$, $SD = .75$). This also supported H$_1$. There was
also a moderately significant difference between the victim and accidental crisis, \( p = .064 \), and between the accidental and preventable crises, \( p = .068 \). This indicated a moderate empathy for the accidental crisis type \((M = 3.56, SD = .87)\).

**Transportation**

\( H_2 \) predicted that the differences in organizational empathy would affect transportation into the message. Specifically, it suggested that lower levels of organizational empathy would decrease transportation, while higher levels of empathy would increase it. A median split was used to categorize participants as either high or low organizational empathy. Participants at exactly the median were excluded from analysis for both Green Refresh (Med. = 3.86) and ClearSoap (Med = 3.57). A 2 x 2 x 2 ANOVA
between gender, empathy, and narrative level was conducted to investigate the predictions.

*Green Refresh*

The ANOVA indicated an interaction between gender and empathy on transportation into the narrative, $F(1, 109) = 12.13, p = .001$. Further analysis of the interaction indicated a significant simple main effect of empathy differences among women, $F(1, 113) = 6.40, p = .013$. Women with high empathy ($M = 5.51, SD = .86$) reported greater transportation than women with low empathy ($M = 4.83, SD = 1.31$). This provided partial support for H$_2$, as high empathy produced greater transportation, but only among women.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High Empathy</td>
<td>Low Empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Green Refresh</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>5.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification</td>
<td>4.96</td>
<td>4.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ClearSoap</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification</td>
<td>4.90</td>
<td>4.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Reported Transportation and Identification by Gender and High-Low Organizational Empathy

*ClearSoap*

The ANOVA indicated only a moderately significant main effect for empathy, $F(1, 108) = 3.91, p = .051$. Participants with high empathy ($M = 5.37, SD = 1.08$)
reported greater transportation into the message than did participants with low empathy ($M = 4.88, SD = 1.32$). This provided support for $H_2$.

For transportation, is also important to note the ANOVA for the Green Refresh indicated a significant main effect for narrative level, $F(1, 109) = 14.67, p < .001$. This suggests high narrative messages ($M = 5.52, SD = 1.06$) fostered greater transportation than low narrative messages ($M = 4.89, SD = 1.24$). This will play a role in later analyses.

Identification

$H_3$ predicted that differences in organizational empathy would affect identification with the organization’s CEO. Specifically, the third hypothesis predicted that lower levels of organizational empathy would decrease identification with the organization’s CEO, while higher levels of empathy would increase identification. The median split empathy variable was used for the analysis of identification. A 2 x 2 x 2 ANOVA between gender, empathy, and narrative level was conducted to investigate these predictions.

Green Refresh

The ANOVA indicated a significant interaction between gender and empathy, $F(1, 109) = 4.61, p = .034$, as well as a significant main effect for empathy, $F(1, 109) = 20.73, p < .001$. Further analysis of the interaction indicated a significant simple main effect for empathy in women, $F(1, 113) = 29.56, p < .001$. As shown in Table 4, the result indicates that women with high empathy ($M = 5.10, SD = .78$) reported greater identification with the Green Refresh CEO than women with low empathy ($M = 3.87, SD = 1.03$). This finding provides partial support for $H_3$, as greater empathy led to greater identification with the Green Refresh CEO, but only in women.
A similar but insignificant effect was found with men, \( F(1, 113) = 3.71, p = .057 \). However, a 2 x 3 x 2 ANOVA determined there was a significant three-way interaction between gender, empathy, and crisis type, \( F(2, 105) = 3.14, p = .048 \). The interaction between empathy and crisis type was examined separately for both genders. For men, the interaction between empathy and crisis type was still significant, \( F(2, 35) = 4.89, p < .013 \). Exploring this interaction further, a significant simple main effect emerged for empathy in victim crises, \( F(1, 35) = 10.83, p = .002 \). This indicates that when reading about victim crises, men with high empathy (\( M = 5.54, SD = .60 \)) reported greater identification than did men with low empathy (\( M = 3.81, SD = .74 \)). This also provides support for H3, as greater empathy also led to greater identification in men, but only when they read about victim crises.

**ClearSoap**

The ANOVA indicated a significant main effect for empathy, \( F(1, 108) = 19.91, p < .001 \). The main effect for empathy indicates that high empathy participants (\( M = 4.73, SD = .93 \)) reported greater identification with the ClearSoap CEO than did low empathy participants (\( M = 3.99, SD = .88 \)). This provides support for H3 in that high empathy leads to greater identification.

Again, though not explicitly part of H3, it is important to note a significant main effect for narrative level on identification also occurred for both Green Refresh, \( F(1, 109) = 6.13, p = .015 \), and ClearSoap, \( F(1, 108) = 5.95, p = .016 \). The findings suggest that high narrative press releases produced greater identification with the CEO than low narrative press releases, as shown in Table 5.
Organizational Protection Measures

To assess the effectiveness of the different messages in protecting the organizations from the crises, four measures were used: attitude toward the organization, account acceptance, organizational reputation, and purchase intent. H₄ predicted that high narrative messages would be most effective in crises with low attributions of crisis responsibility. It also predicted that low narrative messages would be most effective in crises with high attribution of crisis responsibility. Additionally, RQ₁ asked how high and low narrative messages would compare in crises with moderate attributions of crisis responsibility. The four organization protection measures will be used to assess the predicted effectiveness described in the hypothesis.

Narrative

Multiple 2 x 2 x 2 ANOVAs of narrative, gender, and empathy were used to test the effects of narrative on the organizational protection measures. Significance was found only for the Green Refresh condition.
Attitude toward the Organization

For attitude toward the organization, the ANOVA indicated a significant main effect for empathy, \( F(1, 109) = 7.89, p = .006 \) and a significant interaction between empathy and narrative, \( F(1, 109) = 11.44, p = .001 \). Further analysis indicated significant simple main effects for level of narrative in both the high empathy condition, \( F(1, 113) = 5.23, p = .024 \), and the low empathy condition, \( F(1, 113) = 4.39, p = .038 \). As shown in Table 6, this indicates that with high organizational empathy, participants in the high narrative condition (\( M = 2.53, SD = 1.15 \)) reported more favorable attitudes toward the organization than participants in the low narrative condition (\( M = 3.32, SD = 1.35 \)). Conversely, among participants with low organizational empathy, people who read the high narrative message (\( M = 4.17, SD = 1.42 \)) evaluated attitude toward the organization more negatively than people who read the low narrative message (\( M = 3.42, SD = 1.40 \)).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High Narrative</th>
<th>Low Narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Empathy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude toward the Organization*</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Account Acceptance*</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Reputation</td>
<td>5.37</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase Intent</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Empathy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude toward the Organization*</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Account Acceptance*</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>1.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Reputation</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>1.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase Intent</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>1.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Lower score represents more favorable response*

Table 6. Narrative and Empathy Comparison for Green Refresh
Account Acceptance

The three-way ANOVA indicated a significant main effect for empathy, $F(1, 109) = 6.33, p = .013$, as well as a significant interaction between empathy and narrative level, $F(1, 109) = 3.95, p = .049$. Further analysis of this interaction indicated a significant simple main effect for empathy within the high narrative condition, $F(1, 113) = 14.62, p < .001$. However, there were no significant effects between the high and low narrative conditions, which was the focus of the hypothesis.

Organizational Reputation

The ANOVA indicated a significant main effect for empathy, $F(1, 110) = 7.88, p = .006$, and a significant two-way interaction between narrative level and empathy, $F(1, 110) = 7.40, p = .008$. Additional analysis of the interaction indicated a moderately significant simple main effect for narrative in low empathy, $F(1, 114) = 3.60, p = .060$. As shown in Table 6, this indicates that for low empathy participants, reading the high narrative ($M = 4.06, SD = 1.69$) resulted in lower ratings of organizational reputation than reading the low narrative ($M = 4.69, SD = 1.14$).

Purchase Intent

The ANOVA uncovered a significant main effect for empathy level, $F(1, 110) = 6.88, p = .010$, as well as a significant interaction between narrative level and empathy level, $F(1, 110) = 11.90, p = .001$. Further analysis of the interaction indicated significant simple main effects between both the narrative levels with low empathy participants, $F(1, 114) = 4.05, p = .047$, and the narrative levels with high empathy participants, $F(1, 114) = 6.43, p = .013$. This result suggests that among low empathy participants, people
reported greater purchase intent after reading the low narrative message ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.56$) than the high narrative ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 1.43$). Conversely, high empathy participants reported greater purchase intent after reading the high narrative ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 1.36$) than the low narrative ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 1.65$) press release.

Because it was previously determined in $H_1$ that attributions of crisis responsibility were associated with different levels of organizational empathy, these findings indicate partial support for $H_4$. The high narrative condition was significantly more effective in high empathy conditions for purchase intent and organizational attitude. Additionally, the low narrative condition was more effective in low empathy conditions for attitude toward the organization, purchase intent, and organizational reputation. However, these findings were only significant for the salad recall.

**Additional Results**

*Transportation and Identification*

While partial support was found for $H_4$ through interaction of narrative level with empathy, the model also predicted that organizational protection could occur through the degree of transportation into the message and identification with the organizational CEO. The model suggested high transportation and identification would lead to more favorable organization protection measures, specifically when crisis responsibility was low. Median splits categorized participants as either highly or lowly identified, and as either highly or lowly transported. Participants at exactly the median were excluded from analysis for both Green Refresh transportation (Mdn. = 5.33) and identification (Mdn. = 4.63), as well as ClearSoap
transportation (Mdn. = 5.33) and identification (Mdn. = 4.25). Multiple 3 x 2 x 2 ANOVAs between crisis type, empathy, and identification or transportation were used to test this idea.

For Green Refresh, the ANOVA indicated significant main effects for identification on attitude toward the organization, $F(1, 98) = 20.40, p < .001$, account acceptance, $F(1, 98) = 23.59, p < .001$, organizational reputation, $F(1, 99) = 25.33, p < .001$, and purchase intent, $F(1, 99) = 7.53, p = .007$. As shown in Table 7, higher identification led to more favorable organization protection results for all four variables. In a similar fashion, the ANOVA indicated significant main effects for transportation on organizational reputation, $F(1, 99) = 4.94, p = .029$, and purchase intent, $F(1, 99) = 4.68, p = .033$. It also indicated moderately significant main effects for attitude toward the organization, $F(1, 98) = 3.35, p = .070$, and account acceptance, $F(1, 98) = 3.38, p = .069$.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Transportation</th>
<th>Identification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Refresh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude toward the</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization*</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>3.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Account Acceptance*</td>
<td>4.99</td>
<td>4.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Reputation</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>2.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ClearSoap</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude toward the</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>3.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization*</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>3.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Account Acceptance*</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>4.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Reputation</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>3.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase Intent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Lower score represents more favorable response*

Table 7. Comparison of Organizational Protection Measures for Different Levels of Transportation and Identification
These results were almost completely replicated for ClearSoap. The ANOVA for identification, empathy, and crisis type found significant main effects for identification on: attitude toward the organization, $F(1, 91) = 14.82, p < .001$, account acceptance, $F(1, 90) = 18.91, p < .001$, organizational reputation, $F(1, 92) = 14.37, p < .001$, and purchase intent, $F(1, 92) = 10.00, p = .002$. Higher identification led to greater organizational protection. For transportation, significant main effects were found for attitude toward the organization, $F(1, 84) = 7.43, p = .008$, organizational reputation, $F(1, 85) = 4.19, p = .044$, and purchase intent, $F(1, 85) = 4.78, p = .032$. Higher transportation resulted in more favorable ratings for these organizational protection measures. A significant main effect was found for account acceptance as well, $F(1, 84) = 12.88, p = .001$, but it was qualified by a significant interaction with crisis type, $F(2, 84) = 4.12, p = .020$. Follow-up analysis indicated a significant simple main effect for transportation in accidental crises, $F(1, 99) = 20.49, p < .001$ and a moderately significant simple main effect for transportation in preventable crises, $F(1, 99) = 3.83, p = .053$. Specifically, as shown in Figure 3, highly transported participants reported more favorable evaluations of account acceptance than did lowly transported participants for both accidental and preventable crises. There was also a significant simple main effect for crisis type within lowly transported participants, $F(2, 99) = 6.57, p = .002$, as well as for crisis type within highly transported participants, $F(2, 99) = 3.83, p = .025$. Follow-up pairwise comparisons indicated that for lowly transported people there was a significant difference in account acceptance for victim crises and both accidental, $F(1, 99) = 8.00, p = .006$, and preventable, $F(1, 99) = 11.85, p = .001$, crises. For highly transported people, there was a
significant difference in account acceptance between accidental and preventable crises, $F(1, 99) = 7.31, p = .008$.

![Graph showing the interaction between crisis type and transportation on ClearSoap account acceptance](image)

Figure 3. Interaction between crisis type and transportation on ClearSoap account acceptance

**Counterarguing**

*Green Refresh*

A one-way ANOVA indicated a significant main effect for identification, $F(1, 116) = 33.32, p < .001$. As shown in Table 8, participants who reported greater identification reported less counterarguing. A 3 x 2 ANOVA between empathy and crisis type indicated two significant main effects for crisis type, $F(2, 112) = 10.17, p < .001$,
and empathy, $F(1, 112) = 20.03, p < .001$, as shown in Table 9. Specifically, preventable crises resulted in more counterarguing than either accidental or victim crises, while low empathy participants reported more counterarguing than high empathy participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Transportation</th>
<th>Identification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Refresh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterarguing</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>3.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Manipulative Intent</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>3.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ClearSoap</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterarguing</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>3.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Manipulative Intent</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>3.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8. Counterarguing and Perceived Manipulative Intent by Transportation and Identification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Crisis Type</th>
<th>Empathy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>Acc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Refresh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterarguing</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Manipulative Intent</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>2.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ClearSoap</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterarguing</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>3.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Manipulative Intent</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>2.98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9. Counterarguing and Perceived Manipulative Intent by Crisis Type and Empathy
ClearSoap

A one-way ANOVA indicated a significant main effect for transportation on counterarguing, $F(1, 104) = 13.41, p < .001$. Specifically, low transportation was associated with greater counterarguing. A second one-way ANOVA indicated a significant main effect for identification on counterarguing, $F(1, 111) = 45.20, p < .001$. As shown in Table 8, this result indicates highly identified participants reported less counterarguing than lowly identified participants. Additionally, a 3 x 2 ANOVA between crisis type and empathy indicated significant main effects for crisis type, $F(2, 110) = 3.68, p = .028$, and empathy, $F(1, 110) = 4.07, p = .046$. However, these main effects were qualified by a significant interaction between the two variables, $F(2, 110) = 4.85, p = .010$. Further analysis of the interaction indicated a significant simple main effect for crisis type in low empathy conditions, $F(2, 110) = 8.42, p < .001$. Pairwise comparisons indicated preventable crises led to significantly more counterarguing than either victim or accidental crises, as shown in Table 9. There was also a significant simple main effect for empathy in preventable crises, $F(1, 110) = 11.64, p = .001$. This suggests that after reading about preventable crises, low empathy participants reported greater counterarguing than high empathy participants.

Perceived Manipulative Intent

Green Refresh

A one-way ANOVA indicated a significant main effect for identification on perceived manipulative intent, $F(1, 116) = 35.61, p < .001$. As shown in Table 8, people who indicated higher identification reported less perceived manipulative intent. A 3 x 2
ANOVA for crisis type and empathy indicated significant main effects for crisis type, $F(2, 112) = 6.50, p = .002$, and empathy, $F(1, 112) = 5.13, p = .026$. Specifically, preventable crises created the greatest highest perceived manipulative intent, while low empathy participants also reported more perceived manipulative intent than high empathy participants.

*ClearSoap*

A one-way ANOVA indicated a significant main effect for transportation on perceived manipulative intent, $F(1, 104) = 4.30, p = .041$. Specifically, participants reported less perceived manipulative intent when highly transported, as shown in Table 8. A second one-way ANOVA indicated a significant main effect for identification, $F(1, 111) = 19.64, p < .001$. This result indicated highly identified participants reported less perceived manipulative intent than lowly identified participants.

Additionally, a $3 \times 2$ ANOVA between crisis type and empathy indicated a significant main effect for crisis type, $F(2, 110) = 4.06, p = .020$; however, this was qualified by a significant interaction between the variables, $F(2, 110) = 3.70, p = .028$. Follow-up analysis of the interaction indicated significant simple main effects for empathy in preventable crises, $F(1, 110) = 7.23, p = .008$. This suggests that for preventable crises, low empathy participants reported greater perceived manipulative intent than high empathy participants. Additionally, there was a significant simple main effect for crisis type in low empathy participants, $F(2, 110) = 8.12, p = .001$. Specifically, readers reported greater perceived manipulative intent after reading about preventable crises than for either accidental or victim crises.
**Empathy with the Ill**

*Green Refresh*

A 2 x 2 ANOVA for gender and narrative level indicated a significant interaction between the two variables, \(F(1, 121) = 4.31, p = .040\). Additional analysis indicated a moderately significant simple main effect for narrative level in men, \(F(1, 121) = 3.68, p = .057\). Men reported greater empathy with the ill after reading the high narrative message \((M = 5.37, SD = .96)\) than the low narrative message \((M = 4.86, SD = .79)\). There was also a moderately significant simple main effect for gender in the high narrative condition, \(F(1, 121) = 3.23, p = .075\). This indicates that in the high narrative condition, there was a significant difference in empathy for the ill ratings between men \((M = 5.37)\) and women \((M = 4.96, SD = .92)\).

Additionally, a 3 x 2 ANOVA for crisis type and organizational empathy indicated a significant interaction between the variables, \(F(2, 106) = 3.07, p = .050\). Follow-up analysis indicated a significant simple main effect between crisis types for low empathy participants, \(F(2, 112) = 6.69, p = .002\). Pairwise comparison of crisis type in the low empathy condition indicated a significant difference in empathy for the ill between preventable crises and both victim, \(F(1, 112) = 11.71, p = .001\, and\, accidental, \(F(1, 112) = 6.77, p = .011\), crises. Specifically, in low empathy participants, preventable crises \((M = 5.59, SD = .79)\) resulted in significantly greater empathy for the ill than did victim \((M = 4.64, SD = .97)\) or accidental \((M = 4.88, SD = 1.02)\) crises. There were also moderately significant simple main effects for empathy in victim crises, \(F(1, 112) = 3.26, p = .074\, and\, empathy in preventable crises, \(F(1, 112) = 3.43, p = .067\). These results
suggest that in victim crises, high empathy participants ($M = 5.14, SD = .66$) reported greater empathy toward the ill than did low empathy participants ($M = 4.64, SD = .97$). Conversely, in preventable crises, high empathy participants ($M = 5.07, SD = .83$) reported lower empathy toward the ill than did low empathy participants ($M = 5.59, SD = .79$).

*ClearSoap*

A 3 x 2 x 2 ANOVA for crisis type, organizational empathy, and gender indicated a significant three-way interaction, $F(2, 104) = 4.75, p = .011$. Further analysis explored the interaction of crisis type and empathy level for both men and women. While there were no significant effects for men, a significant interaction between empathy and crisis type, $F(2, 69) = 5.69, p = .005$, emerged for women. There was also a significant main effect for empathy, $F(1, 69) = 7.89, p = .006$. Further exploration of the interaction indicated a significant simple main effect for empathy in victim crises, $F(1, 69) = 4.26, p = .043$, and another for empathy in accidental crises, $F(1, 69) = 17.27, p < .001$. As shown in Figure 4, the results indicate that in both victim and accidental crises, women with high empathy for ClearSoap reported greater empathy with the ill than women with low empathy for ClearSoap.

There was also a significant simple main effect for crisis type within low empathy conditions, $F(2, 69) = 6.65, p = .002$. Pairwise comparison of crisis type in low empathy women indicated significant differences between preventable crises and both victim, $F(1, 69) = 5.57, p = .021$, and accidental, $F(1, 69) = 11.93, p = .001$. This result indicates that when reading about preventable crises ($M = 5.19, SD = .76$), low empathy women report
significantly greater empathy for the ill than when reading about victim ($M = 4.94, SD = .91$) or accidental ($M = 4.95, SD = 1.04$) crises.

Figure 4. Mean evaluations of empathy with the ill among women reporting high or low organizational empathy
Chapter 6: Discussion

This study set out to experimentally test the use of narrative persuasion in crisis communication. Support or partial support was found for all hypotheses, providing insight into a multi-step process that can lead to crisis communication message effectiveness. As predicted, data suggested that the process begins with attributions of crisis responsibility, which determines the level of empathy with the organization (H_1). This organizational empathy – though sometimes dependent on participant gender – partially determines message transportation (H_2) and identification (H_3). Ultimately, this can influence the effectiveness of narratives on the organizational protection measures (H_4). These findings contribute to the prescriptive advancement of the crisis communication field, and provide valuable knowledge about narrative persuasion’s effectiveness in organizational crisis responses.

The most significant finding of this study was that high narrative messages have the potential to outperform low narrative messages in crisis communication, as predicted. However, this effect was found only among people with high empathy for the organization. Conversely, people with low empathy for the organization reported more favorable views of the organization and the message after reading the low narrative message. It is important to note that organizational empathy was influenced by attribution of crisis responsibility; as predicted in the first hypothesis and fully supported in the data,
situations with low attributions of responsibility resulted in higher empathy than crises with high attributions of crisis responsibility. For instance, the public was more likely to be empathetic with an organization when it was also a victim of the crisis; they were likely to be less empathetic with an organization when action by the company could have prevented the crisis. Thus, though empathy plays the direct role in determining the effectiveness of the narrative message, the effect is fueled by crisis type and the audience’s attributions of crisis responsibility.

The effectiveness of high narrative messages in situations with high organizational empathy speaks to the emotion involved in crises. Crises are surrounded by emotion, particularly negative affect like anger and sadness (Jin, 2010; McDonald & Cokley, 2013). Often, people may experience multiple emotions for the same crisis event (McDonald & Cokley, 2013). For instance, in the case of a product recall, people might be saddened if the recall led to injuries or deaths. They may be outraged with a company for creating a faulty product or putting people at risk. They may be worried about the safety of the products they use. Thus, no matter the crisis situation, there is likely to be emotion involved. Referring back to Batson’s (2001) definition, empathy is “an other-oriented emotional response congruent with another’s perceived welfare.” McDonald & Cokley (2013) noted that audience members could direct crisis-related emotions at two different groups: those to blame for the crisis and the people or organizations affected by the crisis. Thus, people who were highly empathetic to the organizations expressed concerned emotions for them. The finding that high narrative messages were more successful in this segment of the audience could be explained by this emotional reaction.
It is possible that when organizational empathy is high, people are more receptive to the organization’s message and are interested in learning what the organization had to say. Conversely, when empathy is low, people may be unwilling to give the same consideration to the organization’s message. Thus, the public’s emotional and empathetic response to the organization plays a vital role in determining message effectiveness.

Curiously, the effect between empathy and narrative was only found in the Green Refresh salad recall data, hence only partial support for $H_4$. For ClearSoap and the hand soap recall, there were no significant differences in the effectiveness of high and low narrative messages. There are a few possible explanations for this discrepancy. First, it is possible that product category affected the narratives in some way. As explained in the rationale for choosing the products, salad kits and salad-related products are often recalled (FoodSafety.gov, 2013); this means they may receive more frequent media attention and seem more realistic. While hand soap has also been the subject of recall – the ClearSoap crisis was based on a real hand soap recall in Canada – it may seem odd to readers that soap, which is supposed to clean hands, could be contaminated. This potential disbelief may have jarred the readers from becoming immersed with the messages and motivated analytical processing, vanquishing the advantages of narrative messages. Alternatively, it is possible the manipulations of narrative were not disparate enough to produce significant effects for ClearSoap. Pretesting and manipulation checks were used to ensure sufficient differences between the high and low narrative messages. However, it is possible that the effects may have appeared if the difference between the two conditions was more extreme.
In addition to influencing the success of high and low narrative messages, empathy also affected people’s transportation into the message and identification with the CEO, providing some support for H2 and H3. Indeed, previous research evidenced that empathy could increase transportation into a message (Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004). The significant influence of empathy on transportation in this study replicated this finding, and extended it to identification with a character in the message as well. As transportation and identification are two important mechanisms of narrative persuasion, this again underscores the value of organizational empathy, and thus attributions of crisis responsibility, in understanding appropriate crisis responses.

However, only partial support for the second and third hypotheses existed because of other variables influencing the empathy and transportation/identification relationship. Transportation and identification were largely influenced by this empathy, narrative level, and crisis type. However, specific to empathy, gender also had some affect on the extent to which a person was transported or identified. For the Green Refresh crisis only, highly empathetic participants reported greater transportation and identification than lowly empathetic participants, but only among women. There are a few possible explanations for this gender effect. First, it is possible that the significant difference in transportation and identification reported between high and low empathy participants occurred for women because they have stronger emotional reactions than men (Derntl, et al., 2010; Rueckert, 2011). Though it is a common stereotype that women are more emotional than men, there is research – based in both self-report and physiological studies – that supports the finding. Given the previously discussed evidence linking emotion, empathy, and
narrative mechanisms, female participants’ potentially stronger emotional responses may have magnified the difference in transportation and identification for the different empathy groups. Alternatively, it is possible the gender of the character in the press release was influential. The main character in each message was male; thus, perhaps greater empathy with the organization and its situation was required for women to be highly transported into the story or identify with the CEO. In comparison, there was only one condition – victim crises – in which empathy differences for men affected reported transportation and identification scores. Perhaps having low empathy with the organization did not deter men as significantly because they already had a connection to the character. However, adding to the complexity of the situation, this effect was found for the Green Refresh crisis only. Another alternative explanation might lie in a product category effect, as discussed previously.

Beyond the variables contributing to their induction, the study provided interesting findings of transportation and identification’s roles in message effectiveness. The findings suggested that if the audience became transported into the message or identified with the spokesperson, the message was better received and was more successful in protecting the organization from the crisis. This finding occurred across all crisis types, as the highly transported and identified people reported, across the board, more positive evaluations of the organization and its message. Additionally, greater identification and transportation typically resulted in less counterarguing and lower evaluations of perceived manipulative intent. This provides support for transportation and identification in aiding the narrative processing of messages and leading to persuasion.
Counterarguing can interfere with immersion into the narrative because it prompts rational consideration of arguments (Oliver, Dillard, Bae, & Tamul, 2012). Similarly, realization of an organization’s persuasive attempts can put audience members on alert, promoting analytical processing of the message (Wentzel, Tomczak, & Herman, 2010). This study supported previous findings that transportation and identification limit counterarguing and perceived manipulative intent (e.g., Green & Brock, 2000), thus weakening barriers to narrative processing and, ultimately, persuasion.

Theoretically, these findings of this study pertaining to attributions of crisis responsibility were in line with Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Coombs, 1995; Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Coombs, 2007b). Three variations of product recalls were used in this study to match Coombs & Holladay’s (2002) three crisis types: victim, accidental, and preventable. As predicted in H1, each crisis was associated with a different level of crisis responsibility, with the victim crisis having the least and the preventable crisis having the most. Furthermore, the results underscored the significance of attribution of crisis responsibility in addressing crisis situations. As predicted, attributions of crisis responsibility significantly affected how much empathy readers had with the organization in crisis. Specifically, the more blame the organizations attributed to the organization, the less empathy they felt for the organization. Conversely, lower attributions of crisis responsibility led to more empathy with the organization. This core finding served as the first building block in the model for understanding narratives in crisis communication, and ultimately had implications for how successful messages were in protecting organizations in crisis.
This study also continued the needed experimental growth of the crisis communication. Scholars have described crisis communication as emphasizing description and case studies (An & Chang, 2011; Avery et al., 2010). This study continued the development of the field in the direction of prescription of appropriate crisis communication actions. In this case, the findings of the study recommend the use of high narrative in situations when the public is likely to be empathetic with the organization. The results also recommend the use low narrative messages when the public is unlikely to be empathetic. Thus, the findings prescribe that communicators must pay attention to both attributions of crisis responsibility, as well as the empathetic state of its audiences in making crisis communication decisions.

The findings of this study also build on the existing literature surrounding narrative persuasion. Theories surrounding narrative persuasion, like the extended elaboration likelihood model (Slater & Rouner, 2002) suggest that the mechanisms of transportation and identification foster positive outcomes in narrative messages. This study demonstrated this by showing that transportation and identification, as well as high narrative messages in high empathy situations, produced favorable evaluations of organizational reputation, attitude toward the organization, account acceptance, and purchase intent. Importantly, the findings also showed when narrative did not work. The high narrative message was not as effective in situations of low empathy. This adds to the knowledge of the limitations of narrative persuasion. Along the same vein, scholars have raised questions about the effectiveness of narratives in explicitly persuasive messages. However, in line with previous studies on advertising (e.g., Escalas, 2004; Lien & Chen,
This study also cemented the relationship between crisis communication and narrative. Previously, only two known studies had experimentally tested crisis communication and narrative persuasion (Van Laer & de Ruyter, 2010; Yang, Kang, & Johnson, 2010). Thus, this study continued the experimental and theory-driven exploration of this intersection. Scholars have discussed how crisis communication is inherently narrative and involves plots and characters (Frandsen & Johansen, 2007; Heath, 2006). Additionally, research suggests that press releases overall can be considered narratives. Gilpin (2008) explained that a news release could be considered “an episodic autobiographical narrative genre, by which the organization seeks to establish and negotiate its identity with regard to a generalized external audience.” As demonstrated in this study, even “low” narrative messages contain some story elements and may still foster narrative persuasion mechanisms like transportation and identification.

Practically, the findings of this study could have significant implications for crisis communicators. This study demonstrated that narratives have a place in crisis communication. Indeed, though the high and low narrative messages alone did not produce main effects on the organizational protection measures, there was an effect when interacting with empathy. As such, crisis communicators need to be aware of how the organization’s different stakeholders feel about the crisis situation and how much blame they place with the organization. The chosen communication method – either high
narrative or low narrative – should reflect this assessment. They can opt for high
narrative, more story-like messages when the public is empathetic with the organization. However, they should stick to factual and straightforward communication when the public lacks empathy.

Also, communicators should strive to foster reader immersion with the messages. Greater transportation into the message and higher identification led to more favorable impressions of the organizations, regardless of the type of crisis. Thus, even in situations with high attribution of crisis responsibility, increased transportation and identification can lead to more favorable evaluations of the organization and the message. Thus, crisis communicators should take care to craft messages that induce these persuasion techniques. Importantly, this could involve selecting an appropriate organizational representative with whom stakeholders can identify.

Additionally, this study verified two key aspects of crises to which communicators should pay attention. First, consumers generally want to avoid products that are tied to recalls, no matter who is at fault. While there were significant differences in purchase intent between the victim, accidental, and preventable crises, the average purchase intent across conditions and product type was 3.38, falling into the “somewhat disagree” range. This means that most readers were disinclined to purchase the product. While this finding may not be entirely surprising, it should send a clear message to communicators that crises create an uphill battle for organizations, especially when the readers are unfamiliar with the organization. Second, people are generally highly empathetic with the true victims of the crisis. In this case, the readers expressed empathy
with the people who fell ill from the contaminated products, averaging 5.06 or “somewhat agree.” Thus, practitioners need to be aware that no matter who was at fault, the public is likely to be empathetic toward people who were injured or suffered as a result of a crisis. Communicators cannot brush aside the concerns of this group.
Chapter 7: Limitations and Directions for Future Research

One of the biggest limitations of this study was the narrative format scale that was used for the high-low narrative manipulation check. Though differences between the high and low narrative conditions were found within each user, the overall means of the “low” conditions were still fairly high. The greatest difference was found between ClearSoap narratives conditions; though significantly different, the “high” narrative ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 1.07$) was less than half a point greater than the “low” narrative ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 1.31$). It is possible that the measure, which was created for this study, did not adequately capture the actual differences despite pretesting. Alternatively, it is possible the two levels of narrative message were both fairly high narratives. As explained, all crisis communication has some element of narrative (Frandsen & Johansen, 2007; Heath, 2006). This could have led to the elevated levels of narrative format ratings. Future studies would benefit from strengthening the differences between the high and low narrative conditions. Maximizing the differences between conditions would produce clearer differences and help detect additional significant results. Additionally, researchers might benefit from developing a different scale to check the manipulation of the narrative conditions.

Another limitation of this study was the use of a convenience sample in the form of undergraduate respondents. This study used undergraduates at a large Midwestern
university primarily because of accessibility and for the ability to control for environmental factors in a laboratory setting. Though this control strengthened the internal validity of the study, future studies on narratives and crises could study different populations to explore effects on different types of respondents to increase external validity. Crisis communicators must deliver their messages to a variety of publics, including consumers, investors, employees, and members of the media. Exploring the perceptions of these different stakeholders would lead to a more thorough understanding of the phenomenon, and could provide additional insights for communicators.

This study was also limited by its use of fictional organizations and fictional crisis situations. Though based on real events, the organizations, characters, and specific crisis situations were created for the purpose of this study. While the fictional nature of the crises benefited the study by creating a neutral initial evaluation, it also limited the study through this neutrality. When crises strike real organizations, people with varying levels of familiarity may hear the messages. Organizational communications may reach loyal customers, occasional buyers, or people who only have limited brand awareness. These varying levels of familiarity and pre-crisis attitudes may affect the way crisis communication messages are received. Future studies could explore the effectiveness of narrative messages with real organizations with which respondents may have experience. This would provide a more realistic test of the effectiveness – or ineffectiveness – of narratives in crisis response messages.

Future researchers should more thoroughly explore the effect of narratives in the accidental crisis type. Between both Green Refresh and ClearSoap conditions, the effects
of the accidental crisis type varied, providing mixed findings for RQ₁ in this study. The accidental crisis type unexpectedly outperformed the victim crisis type on certain measures, including account acceptance for highly transported audiences (see Figure 4). The accidental crisis is difficult to gauge considering its association with moderate attribution of responsibility. Generally, researchers strive to maximize the differences between experimental conditions in order to produce significant differences. Thus, having a midpoint condition can complicate matters. Future research should conduct more tests of the accidental crisis type to clarify some of the findings of narratives in crisis communication.

Finally, this study uncovered some mixed results between the Green Refresh and ClearSoap crises. This difference was especially evident in the study’s main finding about narrative and empathy influencing message effectiveness, as the results were only significant for Green Refresh. As discussed, it is possible the differences were a result of a crisis scenario with which people were unfamiliar. However, it is important that future researchers determine whether product category effects exist for narratives in crisis communication and, if so, how they operate. Uncovering additional product category differences would allow for even stronger prescription of crisis communication recommendations for practitioners.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

This study explored how high and low narrative crisis responses affected respondents’ evaluations of organizations in three different types of crisis: victim, accidental, and preventable. As a result, this study found support for a multi-step process that leads from attributions of crisis responsibility to enhanced protection of the organization through appropriate crisis communication. Significantly, for the food-product crisis, high narrative messages were more effective for participants with high empathy for the organization, while low narrative messages proved better for participants low in empathy. This study provides more insight into the understudied intersection of crisis communication and narrative persuasion, and provides additional experimental support for ideas of situational crisis communication theory (Coombs, 2007b) and narrative persuasion (e.g., Slater & Rouner, 2002). As noted by previous scholars (e.g., Heath, 2006) and confirmed by this study, crisis communication is inherently tied to narrative. The intersection of this field is full of potential. As such, this study could serve as a launching point for future studies to continue the expansion of these two important communication subfields.
References


Green, M. C., & Donahue, J. K. (2009). Simulated worlds: Transportation into narratives. In K. Markman, W. M. Klein, & J. A. Suhr (Eds.), Handbook of imagination and mental simulation (pp. 241-256).


74


Appendix A: Stimuli

Green Refresh Salad Kit

Crisis Descriptions

Victim

Produce distributor Green Refresh has announced a mass recall of its salad kits. In the past week, more than 50 cases of severe food poisoning related to E. coli have been reported. All patients reported eating Green Refresh’s salad kit before the onset of the illness.

An investigation has revealed that the contamination occurred due to a grocery retailer failing to properly store the salad kits. The original Green Refresh product was not contaminated, making Green Refresh a victim of the retailer’s actions. This is the second mass recall of Green Refresh salad kits in the past two years.

Accidental

Produce distributor Green Refresh has announced a mass recall of its salad kits. In the past week, more than 50 cases of severe food poisoning related to E. coli have been reported. All patients reported eating Green Refresh’s salad kit before the onset of the illness.

An investigation has revealed that the contamination occurred due to a technical error with Green Refresh’s produce-washing equipment. The equipment failure was accidental, as Green Refresh’s equipment had passed all recent inspections. This is the second mass recall of Green Refresh salad kits in the past two years.

Preventable

Produce distributor Green Refresh has announced a mass recall of its salad kits. In the past week, more than 50 cases of severe food poisoning related to E. coli have been reported. All patients reported eating Green Refresh’s salad kit before the onset of the illness.

An investigation has revealed that the contamination occurred due to Green Refresh’s failure to meet the Food and Drug Administration’s washing guidelines for
produce products. Inspectors had repeatedly warned Green Refresh to make changes in order to prevent bacterial growth. Green Refresh did not take action to prevent this outbreak. This is the second mass recall of Green Refresh’s salad kits in the past two years.

Basic Press Release Template

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Green Refresh apologizes for mass recall of salad kits

Green Refresh has apologized for a widespread recall of its salad kits after over 50 reported cases of illness.

“The Green Refresh team is deeply upset by the recall,” CEO William Hawn said. “We apologize to every person who has been affected by this situation.”

[Statement body: manipulated by condition, but contains same core details]

“Green Refresh cares about its customers,” Hawn said. “We want each and every person to have confidence in our product. We will continue our efforts to ensure all Green Refresh products meet – and exceed – the highest quality standards.”

-end-

Statement Bodies

High Narrative

The past week has been a journey for Green Refresh. Green Refresh first learned of a potential problem with the salad kits just after 9 a.m. Monday morning, and it was immediately brought to CEO Hawn’s attention. At that time, 10 people had been treated for illness related to E. coli, and all reported eating Green Refresh salad in the days leading to the illnesses. With the distressing news, Hawn jumped to action and called for an investigation within Green Refresh to determine any connection or cause.

The next day, the number of reported cases had doubled, and three patients were in critical condition. Hawn requested hourly updates, and monitored the situation closely throughout the day. Tuesday evening, the investigation team reported that initial evidence suggested [CRISIS TYPE MANIPULATION]. Hawn instructed the team to continue its efforts to pinpoint the exact cause and determine the magnitude of the problem. With the reported illnesses still climbing, he created a taskforce to explore options for fixing the problem.

79
On Wednesday afternoon, Hawn and Green Refresh leaders met with the investigation team and heard the confirmation: the illness outbreak was caused by [CRISIS TYPE MANIPULATION].

Hawn and Green Refresh leaders carefully compiled a list of all affected products. With the evidence in hand, Hawn called for an immediate recall of all salad kits affected by the [CRISIS TYPE MANIPULATION]. This included kits with expiration dates between January 8 and January 15, and distributed in three different states.

Today, five days after the illnesses were first reported, all affected Green Refresh kits have been removed from store shelves. For safety, Hawn personally urges people to check any kits they have recently purchased; if you find a matching product, do not consume it. Green Refresh has also setup a hotline to answer any questions consumers may have about the recall.

Low Narrative

Green Refresh has taken every possible action in order to protect its customers. It conducted a multi-step investigation and determined the cause of the contamination was [CRISIS TYPE MANIPULATION].

Several important facts are known about the situation:

- Just over 50 cases have been reported as of today.
- The recall affects Green Refresh salad kits with expiration dates between January 8 and January 15.
- Hawn ordered a recall of all Green Refresh products affected by [CRISIS TYPE MANIPULATION]
- Hawn originally ordered the investigation to determine the cause of the outbreak and any connection to Green Refresh
- Green Refresh learned about a possible outbreak Monday morning. Ten people had been treated for illness related to E. coli at that time.

Green Refresh acted quickly after learning about the situation, and all affected Green Refresh salad kits have been removed from store shelves. Because customer safety is the highest priority, Green Refresh and Hawn urge customers to check any salad kits they own; if you find a matching product, do not consume it. Green Refresh has setup a hotline to answer any questions consumers may have about the recall to provide the best customer service possible.

Crisis Type Manipulations

Victim Narrative

... all sick individuals had purchased their salad kits from Splendid Foods stores. Initial evidence pointed toward Splendid Foods’ storage and refrigeration of the salad kits as the cause of the outbreak. …
... Splendid Foods’ improper storage practices of the salad kits. After Green Refresh delivered the kits to the regional Splendid Foods distribution facility, Splendid did not immediately refrigerate the products. The U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends bagged salad kits be stored at temperatures of 40 degrees Fahrenheit or lower to prevent bacteria growth, and Splendid Foods did not meet this standard.

... Splendid Foods’ dangerous storage.

*Victim Nonnarrative*

... grocery store chain Splendid Foods improperly refrigerating the salad kits. After Green Refresh delivered the kits to the regional Splendid Foods distribution facility, Splendid did not immediately refrigerate the products. The U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends bagged salad kits be stored at temperatures of 40 degrees Fahrenheit or lower to prevent bacteria growth, and Splendid Foods did not meet this standard.

... Splendid Foods’ improper storage and refrigeration of the salad kits.

*Accidental Narrative*

...there was an error in Green Refresh’s produce-washing machinery that led to bacteria growth.

... a mechanical failure in Green Refresh’s produce-washing equipment. The electronic device used to monitor the level of antimicrobials in the wash water malfunctioned. This resulted in conditions that increased the number of bacteria on the produce.

...mechanical failure.

*Accidental Nonnarrative*

...a mechanical error in Green Refresh’s produce-washing equipment. The electronic device used to monitor the level of antimicrobials in the wash water malfunctioned. This resulted in conditions that increased the number of bacteria on the produce.

...mechanical failure.
Preventable Narrative

...that Green Refresh was not meeting produce-washing regulations set by the Food and Drug Administration, which could have led to the bacteria growth. ...

...failure to meet FDA guidelines for washing produce. In efforts to save time and money, a now-former Green Refresh supervisor had instructed workers to only do a single wash of the lettuce. The FDA recommends washing produce multiple times to eliminate microbial bacteria.

...failure to follow washing protocol.

Preventable Nonnarrative

...failure to meet FDA guidelines for washing produce. In efforts to save time and money, a now-former Green Refresh supervisor had instructed workers to only do a single wash of the lettuce. The FDA recommends washing produce multiple times to eliminate microbial bacteria.

...failure to follow washing protocol.

ClearSoap Liquid Hand Soap

Crisis Descriptions

Victim

ClearSoap has announced a recall of its liquid hand soap. Tests revealed a bacterial contamination in several lots of the ClearSoap product distributed in the Midwest. The bacteria, Pseudomonas aeruginosa, can cause localized skin and eye infections in healthy individuals and severe problems in people with weakened immune systems. At least 25 people have been hospitalized in connection with the ClearSoap contamination.

Testing indicated that contamination occurred when an external bottling company used unsanitary containers. Though the original ClearSoap product was safe, the bacteria in the bottles contaminated it, making ClearSoap a victim of the other company’s actions. This is the second recall of ClearSoap products in recent years.
Accidental

ClearSoap has announced a recall of its liquid hand soap. Tests revealed a bacterial contamination in several lots of the ClearSoap product distributed in the Midwest. The bacteria, Pseudomonas aeruginosa, can cause localized skin and eye infections in healthy individuals and severe problems in people with weakened immune systems. At least 25 people have been hospitalized in connection with the ClearSoap contamination.

Testing has indicated that contamination occurred due to a mechanical error with ClearSoap’s bottle sanitizing system. ClearSoap equipment is evaluated regularly and passed all recent government inspections, making this an accidental occurrence. This is the second recall of ClearSoap products in recent years.

Preventable

ClearSoap has announced a recall of its liquid hand soap. Tests revealed a bacterial contamination in several lots of the ClearSoap product distributed in the Midwest. The bacteria, Pseudomonas aeruginosa, can cause localized skin and eye infections in healthy individuals and severe problems in people with weakened immune systems. At least 25 people have been hospitalized in connection with the ClearSoap contamination.

Testing has indicated that contamination occurred due to unsanitary conditions at the ClearSoap manufacturing center. Federal investigators had previously warned ClearSoap about its hazardous conditions. ClearSoap did not make the recommended changes, making this a preventable situation. This is the second recall of ClearSoap products in recent years.

Basic Press Release Template

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ClearSoap announces recall of hand soap, issues apology

ClearSoap has issued an apology for the recall of its line of liquid hand soap after bacterial contamination has led to at least 25 hospitalizations.

“ClearSoap apologizes to all of our customers and to everyone affected by this recall,” Ronald Lange, ClearSoap CEO, said.

[Statement body: manipulated by condition, but contains same core details]
“ClearSoap will work to make sure its soap continues to be safe and effective for people everywhere,” Lange said. “We want to continually earn our customers’ trust and confidence in the ClearSoap brand.”

-end-

Statement Bodies

Narrative

The past week has been a journey for ClearSoap. ClearSoap first learned of a potential problem with the hand soap just after 3 p.m. Wednesday afternoon, and it was immediately brought to CEO Lange’s attention. At that time, a random test of the ClearSoap product had revealed increased microbial activity in two batches of the soap. With the distressing news, Lange jumped to action and called for an investigation within ClearSoap to determine the cause.

The next day, ClearSoap learned that at least 25 people were hospitalized with bacterial infections, and all had used ClearSoap in their homes. Lange requested hourly updates, and monitored the situation closely throughout the day. Thursday afternoon, the investigation team reported that initial evidence suggested [CRISIS TYPE MANIPULATION]. Lange instructed the team to continue its efforts to pinpoint the exact cause and determine the magnitude of the problem. With the reported illnesses still climbing, he created a taskforce to explore options for fixing the problem.

On Friday evening, Lange and ClearSoap leaders met with the investigation team and heard the confirmation: the increased microbial activity was caused by [CRISIS TYPE MANIPULATION]. Lange and ClearSoap leaders carefully compiled a list of all affected products. With the evidence in hand, Lange called for an immediate recall of all hand soap products affected by the [CRISIS TYPE MANIPULATION]. This included bottles with batch numbers beginning with C51 and C52.

Today, six days after the illnesses were first reported, all affected ClearSoap products have been removed from store shelves. For safety, Lange personally recommends people stop using all products with the matching batch numbers. Clean Soap will replace all affected bottles with a new product.

Nonnarrative

ClearSoap has taken every possible action in order to protect its customers. It conducted a multi-step investigation and determined the cause of the contamination was [CRISIS TYPE MANIPULATION].

Several important facts are known about the situation:
• At least 25 have been hospitalized for bacterial infection linked to the ClearSoap product.
The recall affects ClearSoap products with stamped with a batch number beginning with C51 or C52.

Lange ordered a recall of all ClearSoap products affected by [CRISIS TYPE MANIPULATION]

Lange originally ordered the investigation after random testing revealed increased levels of microbial activity in the product.

Lange learned about a possible contamination Wednesday afternoon.

ClearSoap acted quickly after learning about the situation, and all affected ClearSoap products have been removed from store shelves. Because customer safety is the highest priority, ClearSoap and Lange recommend customers stop using all products with the matching batch numbers. ClearSoap will replace all affected bottles with a new product.

Crisis Type Manipulations

Victim Narrative

… a problem with sanitation at an external bottling company.

… an external bottling company’s use of unsanitary containers. After the ClearSoap product was delivered to the bottling company, the soap was poured into unclean bottles for distribution. This led to the growth of the bacteria even though the original ClearSoap product was safe.

… other company’s unsanitary bottling.

Victim Nonnarrative

… an external bottling company’s use of unsanitary bottles. The other company poured the ClearSoap product into unclean containers for distribution. Because the bottles were unclean, the bacteria were able to grow even though the original ClearSoap product was safe.

… the other company’s unsanitary bottling.

Accidental Narrative

… a mechanical error in ClearSoap’s bottle sanitation system.

… a mechanical error in the sanitation machinery in the ClearSoap facility. A temperature gauge on the machine that sanitizes the bottles malfunctioned, and the containers used to bottle the ClearSoap product were not properly sanitized. This led to the bacterial growth.
…mechanical error.

*Accidental Nonnarrative*

… a mechanical error in the sanitation machinery in the ClearSoap facility. A temperature gauge on the machine that sanitizes bottles malfunctioned. Because the containers used to bottle the ClearSoap product were not properly sanitized, the bacteria were able to grow and contaminate the ClearSoap product.

…the mechanical error

*Victim Narrative*

…potentially unsanitary conditions at the ClearSoap facilities.

… failure of ClearSoap workers to properly sanitize the production and bottling facilities. The unsanitary state of the facility led to the bacterial growth, which ultimately found its way into the bottles and the ClearSoap product.

…sanitary oversight.

*Victim Nonnarrative*

…unsanitary conditions at the ClearSoap facilities. ClearSoap workers did not properly sanitize the production and bottling areas. Because of this, the bacteria were able to grow and contaminate the ClearSoap product.

...the sanitary oversight
Appendix B: Measures

The following items were included in the questionnaire for each of the two organizations in the press releases.

*Crisis Responsibility Scale*
(Brown & Ki, 2013)
1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree

1. The cause of the crisis was an intentional act by someone in the organization.
2. Someone in the organization knowingly created the cause of the crisis.
3. A deliberate act by someone in the organization caused the crisis.
4. The organization has the capability to stop the crisis from occurring.
5. The crisis was preventable by the organization.
6. The organization had the resources to prevent the crisis from occurring.
7. The organization could have avoided the crisis.
8. The organization should be held accountable for the crisis.
9. The organization should be blamed for the crisis.
10. The crisis was caused by a weakness in the organization.
11. Internal organizational issues contributed to the crisis.
12. The crisis was caused by a problem inside the organization.

*Transportation Scale*
(Adapted from Green & Brock, 2000; Escalas, 2004a)
1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree

1. While I was reading the organization’s statement, I could easily picture the crisis events in it taking place.
2. I could picture myself in the scene of the crisis events described in the statement.
3. I was mentally involved in the statement while reading it.

*Identification Scale*
(Cohen, 2001)
1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree
1. I was able to understand the events in the statement in a manner similar to that in which [CEO name: Lange/Hawn] understood them.
2. I think I have a good understanding of [Lange/Hawn].
3. I tend to understand the reasons why [Lange/Hawn] did what he did.
4. While reading the statement I could feel the emotions [Lange/Hawn] portrayed.
5. While reading, I felt I could really get inside [Lange/Hawn]’s head.
6. At key moments in the statement, I felt I knew exactly what [Lange/Hawn] was going through.
7. While reading the statement, I wanted [Lange/Hawn] to succeed in achieving his goals.
8. When [Lange/Hawn] succeeded, I felt joy, but when he failed, I was sad.

Counterarguing
(Nabi, Moyer-Gusé, & Byrne, 2001)
1= Strongly Disagree; 7=Strongly Agree

1. I found myself actively agreeing with the organization’s points
2. I found myself actively disagreeing with the organization
3. I was looking for flaws in the organization’s arguments
4. It was easy to agree with the arguments made in the message

Empathy with the Organization
(Adapted from Davis, 1983)
1= Strongly Disagree; 7=Strongly Agree

1. I have concerned feelings for [Green Refresh/ClearSoap]
2. I don’t feel sorry for [Green Refresh/ClearSoap] and its problems
3. I feel protective towards [Green Refresh/ClearSoap]
4. [Green Refresh’s/ClearSoap’s] misfortunes do not disturb me
5. I am quite touched by what has happened to [Green Refresh/ClearSoap]
6. [Green Refresh’s/ClearSoap’s] situation makes me feel soft-hearted.
7. I don’t feel very much pity for [Green Refresh/ClearSoap]

Empathy with the Crisis Victims
(Adapted from Davis, 1983)
1= Strongly Disagree; 7=Strongly Agree

1. I have concerned feelings for the people who got sick after the crisis.
2. I don’t feel sorry for the ill people and their problems.
3. I feel protective towards the people who became ill after the crisis.
4. The ill people’s misfortunes do not disturb me
5. I am quite touched by what has happened to the people who became sick.
6. The ill people’s situation makes me feel soft-hearted.
7. I don’t feel very much pity for the people who got sick after the crisis.

*Attitude toward the Organization*
(Boulding & Kirmani, 1993; Yang, Kang, & Johnson, 2010)
Seven-point Semantic Differential

1. 1=Reputable; 7=Not Reputable
2. 1=Responsible; 7=Irresponsible
3. 1=Financially Stable; 7=Financially Unstable
4. 1=Trustworthy; 7=Untrustworthy
5. 1=Established; 7=Fly-by-night
6. 1=Long-run Oriented; 7=Short-run Oriented

*Account Acceptance*
(Blumstein et al., 1974; Yang, Kang, & Johnson, 2010)
Seven-point Semantic Differential

1. 1=Favorable; 7=Unfavorable
2. 1=Acceptable; 7=Unacceptable
3. 1=Adequate; 7=Inadequate
4. 1=Believable; 7=Unbelievable
5. 1=Sincere; 7=Insincere

*Purchase Intent*
1= Strongly Disagree; 7=Strongly Agree

1. If I wanted to buy [PRODUCT TYPE: a salad kit or hand soap], I would be willing to purchase this brand.

*Organizational Reputation*
(Coombs & Holladay, 2002)
1= Strongly Disagree; 7=Strongly Agree

1. The organization is concerned with the well-being of its publics.
2. The organization is basically dishonest.
3. I do not trust the organization to tell the truth.
4. Under most circumstances, I would be likely to believe what the organization says.
5. The organization is not concerned with the well-being of its publics.

*Perceived Manipulative Intent*  
(Campbell, 1995)

1. The way this message tries to persuade people seems acceptable to me.  
2. The organization tried to manipulate the audience in ways that I don’t like.  
3. I was annoyed by this message because the organization seemed to be trying to inappropriately manage or control the audience.  
4. I didn’t mind this message; the organization tried to be persuasive without being excessively manipulative.  
5. This message was fair in what was said.  
6. I think that this message is unfair.

*Narrative Format*  
1=Strongly Disagree; 7=Strongly Agree

1. The message shows personal engagement with characters.  
2. The message demonstrates feeling/thinking  
3. The message has a well-defined beginning, middle, and ending of the story.

*Demographics*

1. How old are you (in years)?  
2. What is your sex?  
   a. Male  
   b. Female  
   c. Other/Prefer not to answer  
3. What year are you at Ohio State  
   a. First-year  
   b. Second-year  
   c. Third-year  
   d. Fourth-year +  
4. What is your race?  
   a. African American  
   b. Asian-Pacific Islander  
   c. Hispanic  
   d. Native American  
   e. White/Caucasian  
   f. Other, please specify