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Crisis, Crisis, Read All About It! Investigating the Direct and Joint Effects of Crisis Response Strategies, Crisis History and Strategic Actions on the Tone of Media Coverage

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**CRISIS, CRISIS, READ ALL ABOUT IT! INVESTIGATING THE DIRECT
AND JOINT EFFECTS OF CRISIS RESPONSE STRATEGIES, CRISIS
HISTORY AND STRATEGIC ACTIONS ON THE TONE OF MEDIA
COVERAGE**

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
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in

The William W. & Catherine M. Rucks Department of Management

by
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To my late father Yusuf Alambo who started this journey with me, my mother Mariam Alambo, my son Yusuf, my sisters Bauwa and Siama, and my dear friend Linnet– I love you all from the bottom of my heart for all the support, kindness and encouragement that you accorded me while

I worked on this dissertation.

Dad, we did it.

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ABSTRACT

Crisis management research has focused on how crisis stricken firms protect their reputation by communicating appropriate messages to evaluators and employing strategic actions that favorably shape public opinion about the stricken firm. Developing conversations have addressed how a firm's crisis history may impact current crisis management efforts. However, little is known about how these factors jointly and directly influence what is said about a crisis stricken firm and subsequently impact evaluators' perceptions.

Primarily guided by the tenets of attribution and situational crisis communication theories, I studied the interactive and main effects of crisis response strategies (accommodative, reframing and defensive), crisis history (first time offenders and repeat offenders) and strategic action (ceremonial and technical) on the tone of media coverage about a crisis stricken firm. I theorized that there would be significant differences in the tone of media coverage about the stricken firm given the 1) the diverse reactions by evaluators to each category of response strategy, 2) differences in perceptions of current crisis responsibility as a result of crisis history and 3) the relative impact of strategic actions on a stricken firm's crisis management efforts. I examined these relationships in the context of 63 high impact crises by analyzing 11,715 relevant articles and press releases to capture the tone of media coverage and code the crisis response strategies and strategic actions employed.

A series of two way ANOVAs and ANCOVAs controlling for initial crisis attribution and organizational ranking indicated that relative to crisis history and strategic actions, crisis response strategies had the strongest effect on the tone of media coverage about a stricken firm. Further, the relationship between strategic actions and crisis response strategies revealed stronger effects on the tone of media coverage in conditions where stricken firms used reframing and

defensive strategies, while employing technical actions and a combination of both technical and ceremonial actions respectively. Surprisingly, a statistically significant interaction between strategic actions and crisis history indicated a more favorable tone for repeat offender firms which did not announce strategic actions. I discuss the theoretical and practical implications of these findings and present suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Crisis management researchers may agree that the crippling impact of the COVID-19 pandemic serves as a reminder that no organization is immune to crises. All organizational systems have a propensity toward failure (Perrow, 1984) given that they exist in turbulent and hostile environments (Smart & Vertinsky, 1984). The vulnerability to organizational crises (Coombs & Holladay, 2012), the likelihood of crisis occurrence and recurrence (Coombs, 2004), and the highly destructive nature of crises (Etter, Ravasi & Colleoni, 2019; Hoffman & Jennings, 2011) has attracted scholarly attention to the understanding of crises, for decades. Crises have the potential to threaten an organization's legitimacy (Sellnow, Ulmer & Snider, 1998; Suchman, 1995), erode reputational assets (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Chance, Cicon & Ferris, 2015; Pfarrer, Smith, Bartol, Khanin & Zhang, 2008), and attenuate firm value (Baucus & Baucus, 1997; Yang, Zheng & Zaheer, 2015). Further, crises are highly public in nature, can trigger institutional transformation and industry revolution (Hoffman & Ocasio, 2001), can threaten an organization's relationships with its stakeholders (Bundy, Pfarrer, Short & Coombs, 2017), and can destabilize the existing patterns of activity within an organization (Desai, 2011; Suchman, 1995). Evidently, extensive scholarly attention to crises is warranted.

Contribution to crisis management research has been extensively multidisciplinary. Scholars with a focus on the pre-crisis stage (e.g. Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Marcus, Bromiley & Goodman, 1987; Weick, 1993; Wicks, 2001), have sought to ascertain why crises occur and how organizations can elevate their preparedness while strengthening stakeholder relationships, social approval, legitimacy and a favorable reputation that will act as a buffer in the event of a crisis. Those with a focus on the in-crisis stage have sought to highlight crisis response strategies and resources such as strategic leadership with which organizations minimize the harms caused

by the crisis (e.g. Coombs, 1995; Kahn, Barton & Fellows, 2013; Marcus & Goodman, 1991). As for the post-crisis phase of the crisis management process, scholars have sought to understand the outcomes of crises, particularly in terms of organizational learning (e.g. Zahra & George, 2002; Shepherd, 2003) and the impact of crises on the external evaluations by stakeholders (e.g. Coombs & Holladay, 2007; Madsen, 2009).

As Smart and Vertinsky (1984) put it, in the long term only organizations that are effective at managing their often hostile and turbulent environments will survive. This dissertation focuses on crisis management efforts aimed at supporting the quest for survival by crisis stricken firms. I focus on three key factors that potentially impact the effectiveness of a stricken firm's crisis management efforts, specifically: the firm's crisis response strategies, strategic actions employed within the in-crisis stage, and crisis history. I suggest that the relative effects of these factors on a stricken firm's crisis management efforts will be reflected in what is said about the stricken firm, i.e. in the tone of media coverage about the stricken firm. Research addressing each of these factors has advanced independently, but greater benefit to the crisis management literature may be accrued from an understanding of the degree to which these factors relate in the quest for more effective crisis management efforts and post-crisis organizational survival.

Extant research on crisis response strategies has focused on prescriptive accounts to guide stricken firms in their selection of crisis response strategies. In general, scholars have argued that the selection of a crisis response strategy should be based upon a myriad of factors, the main ones being the type of crisis, its attribution, and a consideration of the features of the targeted stakeholder group (e.g. Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Coombs, 1995; Coombs & Holladay, 2007; Marcus & Goodman, 1991). The greater the crisis attribution

accorded to the stricken firm, the more accommodative its crisis response strategy should be (Coombs, 1995; Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Marcus & Goodman, 1991). Lesser perceived degrees of organizational transgressions allow for the use of defensive strategies where stricken firms refute crisis responsibility. In essence, stricken firms react with purpose, and that purpose may range from attempts to eliminate the crisis, admit to the existence of the crisis and generate public tolerance, or to emphasize the organization's good deeds, and attempt to win forgiveness from the masses.

Strategic actions also play a pivotal role in crisis management efforts, given that their appropriate applications have the potential to positively shape perceptions about the stricken firm (Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Zavyalova, Pfarrer, Reger & Shapiro, 2012). These actions differ in their effectiveness at restoring desirable organizational attributes such as positive reputation, social approval or even favorable media coverage following organizational violations (Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Zavyalova et al., 2012). The public announcements of strategic actions by stricken firms are pivotal in the crisis management process because they are indicative of the extent to which the stricken firm is willing to rectify any wrongdoing or strengthen weakened organizational systems.

The role of crisis history in crisis management efforts has attracted heightened scholarly interest with Coombs' (2004) finding that evidence of intraorganizational involvement in past crises intensifies perceptions of the firm's crisis responsibility in current crises. Folkes (1984) also found that a history of product recalls negatively affected the current perceptions of a firm. Recurrent crisis involvement and the impact of crisis history on current crisis management efforts should become more salient in current scholarly conversations, given that many organizations are increasingly finding themselves in recurrent crises. Repeated crisis

involvement may diminish the effectiveness of crisis-related messages aimed at stakeholders (Gomulya & Mishina, 2017). Firms that have developed a reputation for crisis-involvement (repeat offenders) are likely to be deemed less credible than their counterparts who have less of such a reputation (first time offenders). Repeat offender firms are likely to experience heightened skepticism, increased scrutiny and spillovers of negative perceptions from previous crises relative to first time offender firms.

Given that crises create negative and tense environments where stricken firms may experience direct negative backlash in the media (e.g. Chandler, Polidoro & Yang, 2020; Etter et al., 2019; Hoffman & Jennings, 2011), the preceding factors should be considered in regard to their effect on what is said about the stricken firm in the media. It is widely accepted in the literature that a favorable evaluation of a firm as presented in the media contributes to a positive organizational reputation (e.g. Carroll, 2009; Chandler et al., 2020; Deephouse, 2000; Zavyalova, Pfarrer, Reger & Hubbard, 2016). Stricken organizations attempt to display ‘appropriate’ actions that align with stakeholder expectations by engaging in impression management strategies (Allen & Caillouet, 1994), diffuse confusions and conflation (Deephouse & Suchman 2008), and respond appropriately (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Coombs, 2007) all in an attempt to favorably influence the media’s narrative surrounding the stricken firm. In essence, the media plays a pivotal role as an informational source from which stakeholders draw to shape their subsequent evaluations of a crisis stricken firm and subsequently decide whether to continue supporting the firm or not (Chandler et al., 2020; Etter et al., 2019; Zavyalova et al., 2012). The pivotal role of the media in the context of a crisis cannot be underscored enough.

As aforementioned, relatively little is known about how crisis response strategies, crisis history and strategic action interact and consequently affect the tone of media coverage about the

stricken firm. I investigate these relationships to ascertain the relative strengths of the effects of these factors on the tone of media coverage about the stricken firm, following a call by Fediuk, Pace and Botero (2010) for more empirical studies concerned with the effectiveness of crisis responses or crisis management efforts. Specifically, they called for a re-evaluation of organizational reputation as a direct outcome of crisis management efforts given that such reputations already exist prior to crises. However, crisis management efforts amplify or attenuate favorable perceptions by evaluators which in turn affect the degree of reputational harms as experienced by the stricken firms. To study the degree to which these factors impact what is said about a stricken firm may be a better assessment of the effectiveness of the stricken firm's crisis management efforts.

I therefore assess the degree to which these factors jointly and directly impact the tone of media coverage about the stricken firm at different levels of crisis history, strategic action and crisis response strategies. To guide my research, I ask: what are the individual and joint effects of crisis response strategies, crisis history and strategic actions on the tone of media coverage about a stricken firm? I employ elements of attribution theory (Kelley & Michela, 1980; Lange & Washburn, 2012; Russell, 1982; Weiner, 1985), situational crisis communication theory (Coombs, 2007), and integrate arguments from image restoration theory (Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Benoit, 1997) to guide my arguments. I anticipate that the tone of media coverage will differ as a result of crisis history for the two categories of stricken firms (first time offenders versus repeat offenders), and for two classes of strategic action (ceremonial and technical) - in the use of accommodative, reframing and defensive crisis response strategies.

I aim to contribute to crisis management research by empirically assessing the interactive effects of crisis history, crisis response strategies and strategic actions on the tone of media

coverage about a stricken firm, following a crisis. Ascertaining the varying degrees to which each of the three factors affect the tone of media coverage about the stricken firm will allow crisis management scholars and crisis managers to ascertain the conditions under which their crisis management efforts will be most effective considering their crisis responses, strategic actions and crisis history. Further, research on crisis attribution will be extended by investigating the impact of crisis history on current crisis perceptions, in a natural setting – where actual crisis-related sentiments by stakeholders are reflected in current media coverage. Overall, this dissertation will provide a more detailed view of the dynamics among these factors hence contributing to a better understanding of this specific facet of the crisis management process.

This dissertation proceeds with a literature review that addresses the research on the factors of interest herein. In subsequent chapters, I present the various arguments that support the theoretical model of this research. The methods and analyses are presented in the later chapters, after which I present an extensive discussion section that addresses the findings, limitations of the dissertation study, and make suggestions for future crisis management research.

CHAPTER II. A LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizational research has long been interested in the management of crises (Bundy et al., 2017; Williams, Gruber, Sutcliffe, Shepherd & Zhao, 2017). Industrial accidents, acts of terrorism, heightened racial tensions and unrest, industrial pollution, devastating product recalls, plane accidents, cases of extortion, fraud and corporate scandals have been headlining media reports with increasing frequency over the years- elevating scholarly interest in the topic (Hallgren, Rouleau & De Rond, 2018). The heightened awareness of the prevalence of crises has led scholars to seek an understanding of both the nature and impact of crises, focusing on how organizations should effectively prepare for, respond to and even overcome crises (Williams et al., 2017). Such organizational efforts are geared towards maintaining positive reputational assets, restoring positive performance standards, maintaining legitimacy and preventing further decline or failure of organizational systems (Williams et al., 2017). Despite the heightened attention paid to crisis management over the years, this research has largely developed in a fragmented manner, given the lack of agreement on a comprehensive definition and conceptualization of a crisis (Roux-Dufort, 2016; Williams et al., 2017). This fragmentation, however, has not impeded efforts towards a consolidation of the literature.

In a bid to be concise, relevant and comprehensive in this literature review, I focus on the following key areas. I begin with a review of the research focused on the conceptualization of a crisis, followed by the progression of the research on crisis response strategies, highlight the trends in the research on the role of the media in crises and subsequently address current discussions on crisis management efforts.

Organizational Crisis

Although it may be collectively agreed that an organization is said to be in a state of crisis when, if no corrective action or intervention is adopted, and no positive future can be prospected (Abatecola, 2019), the literature on conceptualizing organizational crises has faced extensive fragmentation. The complexity of studying crises has been amplified by the fact that observing a crisis in real time is almost radically impossible (Roux-Dufort, 2016), given that the occurrence of crises in many cases are low probability and have an element of surprise (Pearson & Clair, 1998; Roux-Dufort, 2016). In addition to the challenge of observing the core dynamics of the crisis, is the challenge of integrating research conducted on crises from various disciplines. As aforementioned, scholars from organizational theory, strategic management, corporate communication, organizational behavior among others, have addressed the conceptualization of a crisis and the crisis management process in its entirety. This lack of integration among perspectives and disciplines has, according to Shrivastava (1993) produced a ‘Tower of Babel’ effect where many disciplinary contributions have addressed different aspects of the crisis literature, using a myriad of approaches. However, despite the extensive diversity of approaches and perspectives addressing crisis management, two distinct but complementary approaches to the conceptualization of crises has emerged (Roux-Dufort, 2016; Williams et al., 2017). These are the crisis-as-event and crisis-as-process approaches.

Event Perspective on Crises

Hermann’s (1963) discussion on the interplay between crisis occurrence and constrained internal responses by stricken organizations served as the foundational work from which the conceptualization of a crisis as an event emanated. From the early work by Hermann (1963), a definition of a crisis was formulated along specific dimensions- as an unexpected threat to high-

priority values of the organization, with which the organization had a restricted time to respond. In this view, crises are devices of change, stimuli associated with extreme behavior as responses (Hermann, 1963) - generally harmful disruptions that threaten the very survival of the organization (Pearson & Clair, 1998; Roux-Dufort, 2016, Suchman, 1995). Additionally, scholars supporting this view have denoted a crisis to be an unexpected, publicly known, and harmful event that has high levels of initial uncertainty, interferes with the normal operations of an organization, and generates widespread, intuitive, and negative perceptions among evaluators (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Coombs, 2007; Fink, 1986; Roberts, Madsen, & Desai, 2007). Others focused on the conceptualization of corporate crises and denoted them as disasters precipitated by people, organizational structures, economics, and/or technology that cause extensive damage to human life and natural and social environments (Mitroff, Shrivastava & Udwadia, 1987). In essence, the very nature of a crisis, under this view, is highlighted by the organization's inability to plan for, or accurately mitigate its occurrence against an assessment of environmental or organizational risks (Bundy et al., 2017).

According to Roux-Dufort (2016) and Williams et al. (2017), the event approach to crises is helpful particularly when highlighting the dynamics of a crisis in its acute phase. Perceiving the crisis as an event allows scholars to delve into understanding behavioral and emotional responses by organizations directed at recovering from and readjusting to operations following the crisis. Essentially, the crisis-as-an event perspective focuses on how stricken firms respond to the crisis, at its culmination, with an aim to expeditiously reduce its impact and resume normal, or as close to normal activity (Lalonde & Roux-Dufort, 2010).

One of the key shortcomings of this approach, despite its popularity, is that it focuses primarily on the acute crisis phase – and this averts attention from those factors or weaknesses

that progressed over time and caused the crisis to occur (Roux-Dufort, 2016; Williams et al., 2017). As noted by Williams et al. (2017), if the goal of crisis management from this perspective is to bring the system back to realignment following the crisis, then it follows that heightened corrective efforts are only made *after* the crisis occurs. This ex post factor approach accords minimal attention to the crisis-contributing factors. As such, although this perspective seemingly resulted in the typologies of crises, Williams et al. (2017) suggest that in actuality it explicated typologies of trigger events instead. The crisis-as-an-event perspective evidently calls for more scholarly insights on elements or incidences that preceded the trigger event. An appreciation of the factors and processes that lead to crises as embodied in the crisis-as-a-process perspective may address these evident constraints.

Process Perspective on Crises

According to Williams et al. (2017), the crisis-as-process perspective emphasizes the need to understand the *collection* of activities that lead to organizational weakening and crisis evolution, and how organizations respond to different stages of a crisis. As such, this view acknowledges that a crisis 1) develops over time and in phases and 2) forms a disjunction in the normal functioning of an organization (e.g. Coombs, 1995; Morin & Pauchant, 1993; Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992; Williams et al., 2017). Crises result from the incubation, culmination and eventual eruption of organizational weaknesses through the influence of a trigger event (Roux-Dufort, 2016, Williams et al., 2017). This highlights the complementarity of both perspectives. In essence, the trigger event denoted by the crisis-as-event perspective is merely one component of the crisis itself- a part of the bigger picture and the intertwined crisis formation processes. According to Roux-Dufort, (2016), what the event approach considers as the crisis, i.e. the trigger event, the process approach views as the amplifier of a process that started long before

the system failure culminated into a disaster, a catalyst of sorts. This perspective addresses those occurrences that include everyday organizational challenges which go unnoticed, are ignored or misunderstood, and contribute to eventual organizational weakening and system anomalies (Cobb, Wry & Zhao, 2016).

Further, this view systematically analyzes the historical roots and multiple consequences of crises, while uncovering the link amongst various stakeholder groups and issues of interest (Roux-Dufort, 2016). The process approach acknowledges that crises bring forth changes and transformation to different levels of organizational systems. A sudden collapse of the basic assumptions of the organization, as heightened by the trigger event- may highlight the transformative properties of a crisis (Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992; Roux-Dufort, 2016). Such a folding in an organization's basic assumptions call into question the ability of the organization to cope with the crisis (Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992; Roux-Dufort, 2016). Weick's (1988) enactment perspective on the collapse of sense making in organizations depicts the crisis-as-process perspective – where a trigger event challenges taken for granted assumptions and causes organizational members to rethink their own ability to respond effectively within the crisis-shaken environment.

Much of the earlier work conducted on the conceptualization of a crisis argued for the process approach. In his research on the development of disasters, Turner (1976) noted that the sequence of events associated with a failure of foresights, leading to a disaster, are 1) a notionally normal starting point where initial culturally accepted beliefs and norms reside; this develops into an 2) incubation period where unnoticed events that oppose the initially accepted norms and beliefs accumulate, and 3) a precipitating event then captures the attention of constituents that conformed to the initially accepted beliefs, and 4) the onset of the immediate

consequences of the collapse of cultural precautions becomes apparent, where 5) the rescue and salvage work embodies the initial stage of adjustment until 6) a cultural alteration then ensues, where beliefs and norms are shifted to align with the new understandings by constituents. Some scholars have conceptualized crises as both events and processes (e.g. Milburn, Schuler & Watman, 1983), where 1) antecedents are considered 2) moderators of the crisis and crisis response relationships are considered and 3) responses are considered at the individual and organizational levels.

Considered in tandem, both perspectives carry immense advantages in regard to advancing the literature on crises and crisis management given that they are complementary. The event approach has the distinct advantage of providing a clear foothold for action, given that it is directly operational (Roux-Dufort, 2016). On the other hand, the process approach, although less developed theoretically, creates a channel through which scholars can understand how different organizational conditions align to precipitate a conducive environment for crisis occurrence (Roux-Dufort, 2016; Williams et al., 2017).

Evident in this dissertation is an appreciation of the advantages embodied by both perspectives in expounding on the multifaceted nature of crises. However, it is paramount that this dissertation focuses on the crisis-as-event perspective, for theoretical conciseness. I focus on the immediate period surrounding a high-impact crisis, and build off of the definition of a crisis as presented by Pearson and Clair (1998) while incorporating elements from Bundy and Pfarrer (2015) – to define a crisis as a *low probability, high impact, publicly known and harmful event that threatens the reliability and accountability of the organization and is characterized by an initial ambiguity of cause, effect and means of resolution, as well as by a belief that corrective decisions must be made swiftly.*

After a crisis has occurred, the logical progression is that stricken firms must respond to the crisis so as to amplify the firm's chances of survival. The following section addresses the progression of the research on crisis response strategies.

Crisis Response Strategies

The research on crisis response strategies is embedded within the crisis communication literature, where attention is accorded to organizational messages aimed at affected parties and evaluators in the aftermath of a crisis (Bradford & Garret, 1995; Coombs 1995; Sturges, 1994). Conceptualized within the literature as *symbolic resources that managers employ to protect or repair their images* (Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Coombs, 1998; Huang, 2006) and the *set of coordinated communication actions used to influence evaluators crisis perceptions* (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015), initial scholarly attention to such messages emanated from occurrences of product harm crises such as the Johnson & Johnson Tylenol crisis of 1982 (Coombs, 2007). Although a myriad of theories have been applied to the discussions on crisis responses, attribution theory provides a basis for the integration of research results from different studies. Attribution theory focuses on the perceptions of causality, investigating why and how judgments are made about an occurrence (e.g. Coombs, 2007; Kelley & Michela, 1980; Weiner, 1972). Applied within the context of crises, attribution theory provides a framework for the assignment of crisis responsibility to the actor involved or to the actor's environmental influences.

Drawing from attribution theory, situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) emerged in an effort to provide an evidence-based framework to guide crisis response strategy selection. Based on the premise that stricken firms seek to maximize the reputational protection accorded by post-crisis communication (Coombs, 1998), SCCT suggests that crisis managers should select response strategies based on the crisis context and frame with which the public has

interpreted the event (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). As attributions of organizational control increases, so does the perception of crisis responsibility – heightening the damage to a stricken organization’s reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Coombs, 2007). Where attribution theory addresses the cause and responsibility of the crisis, SCCT posits that stricken firms should select appropriate strategies that align with the accorded attributions and associated degree of crisis responsibility (Coombs, 2007).

Crisis response strategies have also been studied by image restoration and impression management theorists, who suggest that stricken firms accused of wrongdoing formulate their crisis messages with the aim of restoring pre-crisis order by preserving favorable impressions of the stricken firm (e.g. Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 1995; Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Coombs & Schmidt, 2000). According to this perspective, not only should stricken firms strive to incorporate the salient beliefs and attitudes of their targeted audience into the framing of their responses, but where possible, firms should influence favorable attitudes towards the stricken firm while simultaneously minimizing the offensiveness of the questionable act (Benoit & Benoit, 2008). For example, a crisis-stricken organization may present the fatal explosion of a research lab as a somewhat acceptable loss in the quest for advanced scientific knowledge; with a justification that the fatalities were not in vain but involved heroes in the pursuit of knowledge.

Within the literature, the various types of crisis response strategies have been explicated along a continuum based on the degree of crisis responsibility an organization assumes (e.g. Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Coombs, 1995; Coombs & Holladay, 2006; Marcus & Goodman, 1991). At one end of the continuum are those strategies in which stricken organizations seek to avoid further loss of social approval from their stakeholders by eliminating any perceived association

with the crisis. Such responses are generally categorized as *defensive* crisis response strategies (Benoit & Brinson, 1994; Bradford & Garrett, 1995; Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Coombs, 2007), and take a myriad of forms, including nonexistence strategies used when an organization seeks to deny that anything happened i.e. there is no crisis (Bradford & Garrett, 1995; Coombs, 1995; Marcus & Goodman, 1991; Sharkey & Stafford, 1990) and that any reports alluding to the existence of the crisis may be untrue (Coombs, 1995). In the same vein, crisis-stricken organizations may attack constituents who report that the crisis exists- illustratively, stricken pharmaceutical firms may discredit the FDA's claims regarding the dangers of a popular drug. Stricken firms may also opt to entirely shift the blame for the crisis to an external constituent, providing an alternative target for any ill will the audience may have (Sellnow et al., 1998). In addition, the defensive strategy of intimidation is evident where stricken organizations use some sort of power, such as making threats of lawsuits against a party of interest (Coombs, 1995). Stricken firms that select to use defensive strategies accept the least amount of crisis responsibility.

In the middle of the continuum are those *reframing* strategies that involve neither outright denial nor acceptance of the crisis responsibility by the stricken firm, but rather involve an attempt by the firm to restructure how evaluators will perceive the crisis (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015). Examples are distance strategies (Coombs, 1999) which exhibit elements of both reframing and defensive strategies, and are employed when stricken firms seek to weaken the link between itself and the crisis. Stricken organizations may also make excuses to minimize the organization's responsibility for the crisis by presenting themselves as victims of the crisis (Coombs, 1995). Illustratively, a stricken firm may argue that their data breach crisis is not as dire as that which resulted from the infamous Facebook- Cambridge Analytica misuse of users'

data in 2018. Another example is Pfizer's claim in 2005, that some of the adversely negative effects of its drug *Bextra* are also common effects evident in other NSAIDs drugs in the market. Such strategies serve to draw evaluators' attention away from the focal crisis to others deemed to be worse in comparison.

Ingratiation strategies are also classified as reframing strategies given that they seek to associate the stricken firm's behaviors and traits to elements that are positively viewed by stakeholders (Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Coombs, 1995). These strategies are employed when stricken firms remind evaluators of commendable past behavior such as donations made to charity, or reminding the public what strong values the firm stands for. Ingratiation strategies may also include praising others, where the stricken firm attempts to 'win over' the stakeholders of interest, i.e. praise of a targeted group so as to influence that group's likelihood of favoring the firm (Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Coombs, 1995).

At the other end of the continuum are those strategies termed *accommodative* (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Coombs, 2007), where the crisis-stricken organization attempts to minimize the loss of social approval by openly acknowledging its causal role in a crisis (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Coombs, 1995; Coombs & Holladay, 2004). Examples include outright acceptance for the responsibility of the crisis by the stricken firm, to displays of mortification (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Coombs, 1995; Coombs & Holladay, 2004). In 2018 when H&M released a racially insensitive advertisement of an African boy wearing a sweater with the label 'coolest monkey in the jungle', an international uproar was precipitated, compelling the organization to act fast to suppress the magnitude of the ensuing crisis. The company's immediate response highlighted an acknowledgement of its causal role and immense misjudgment, stating that it was deeply sorry and would take specific steps to embrace a heightened cultural awareness (Fessler, 2018).

Mortification strategies, also considered accommodative, attempt to win forgiveness of the masses and stakeholders, by impelling an acceptance of the crisis (Coombs, 1995). Crisis stricken organizations employing such strategies tend to compensate victims of the crisis - remediation, appeal to victims and evaluators' forgiveness -repentance, or take measures to prevent crisis recurrence - rectification (Coombs, 1995). Other accommodative strategies include compensation, monetary or otherwise, to offset victim suffering and sympathy, where the stricken firm emphasizes a concern for crisis victims (Coombs & Holladay, 2008). Image restoration theorists concur that compensation in many cases, implies guilt (e.g. Benoit, 1995). However, a deterring aspect of accommodative strategies as noted by Marcus and Goodman (1991), is that in some cases, stricken firms avoid utilizing accommodative strategies due to the associated financial ramifications such as high costs of victim compensation, subsequent recalls, and lawsuit responses among others. Despite these drawbacks, accommodative strategies seek to support perceptions of heightened remorsefulness and regret by the stricken firm, for its causal role in the crisis.

The degree to which these response strategies are effective in their quest to persuade evaluators and influence their judgements about the stricken firm may be immediately reflected in the sentiments made about the stricken firm in the media. As noted by Chandler et al. (2020), the media acts as a vessel through which organizational behavior may be monitored and stricken firms may be evaluated. This calls for a brief review of the research on the role of the media in crises.

The Role of the Media during Crises

During crises, the media becomes one of the most visible and powerful entities involved in the management of the crisis (Deephouse, 2000; Horsley, 2016). The media frames the crisis' narrative, selecting what to cover and what to leave out, encourages the public to donate to disaster relief efforts or boycott products from troublesome firms, elicit the public's empathy for crisis victims, or even influences an organization's subsequent action (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Chandler et al., 2020; Hearit, 1999; Horsley, 2016; Zavyalova et al., 2012). Given that the occurrence of a crisis is indeed a pervasive anomaly, and creates a condition where stakeholders attempt to minimize informational asymmetries (Coombs, 2012; Woon & Pang, 2017), the media provides a source of information through which evaluators may be able to reduce such information asymmetries. According to Carroll and McCombs (2003), the media hosts a myriad of cues that not only underscore its pivotal role as an informational provider, but also highlights its role in focusing the public's attention towards salient issues. Indeed, the media influences what issues should be prioritized and attended to, by the masses, at any given point in time.

Media agenda-setting theory has extensively informed much of the research on media coverage during crises. In their discussion on the media's agenda-setting role, McCombs and Shaw (1972) noted that the press may not always be successful in telling the masses *what* to think, but it is effective in influencing what the masses think *about*, again speaking to the media's influence in elevating the salience of issues. The agenda setting theory suggests that the media shapes what reaches the public, and the more coverage an issue receives, the more the public endorses its importance (Deephouse, 2000; McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

During the initial phases of a crisis, information is usually limited and stricken organizations may not always satisfy stakeholder's informational demands following the crisis.

Resultantly, an informational vacuum occurs (Coombs, 2012). In some cases, an informational vacuum may develop intentionally as a result of the stricken firm's efforts to suppress crisis-related facts and information from the public (Woon & Pang, 2017). According to Holladay (2009), stricken organizations should have their spokespersons available to the media in the early stages of the crisis during the formation of such informational vacuums so as to provide quick, timely responses and avoid the spread of misleading information that arises from false speculations and misinterpretations. However, in reality providing timely information to the public may not be possible particularly if the stricken firm does not have a thorough understanding of the scope of the crisis, its causes or available corrective measures. Despite this constraint, stricken firms must attempt to minimize the length of the informational vacuum given that its prolongation may amplify the negative effects of the crisis and imply that the stricken firm does not have a command of the crisis.

An earlier example of the role of the media in information dissemination following crisis occurrence comes from Hamilton's (1995) investigation of how pollution data by the Environmental Protection Agency impacted a firm's relationships with its stockholders. Hamilton (1995) found that print journalists were more likely to cover the significant toxic release figures reported by these firms, relative to the lower figures associated with perceptions of lesser environmental harm. This coverage influenced negative returns for those firms that were linked to higher levels of toxic release, translating to actual average losses of \$4.1 million in stock value on the initial day of information release. In contrast, the media coverage in the case of Johnson & Johnson's Tylenol recall in 1982 exemplified positive outcomes as a result of more favorable sentiments about the stricken firm. When multiple Chicago-area deaths were linked to the use of cyanide-laced Tylenol, investigations found evidence of foul play linked to

an unknown saboteur (Dean, 2004). Given that extensive recalls in the 1980's were not common due to associated costs and potential organizational reputational harms, Johnson & Johnson was praised in the media for its prompt recall of Tylenol from the shelves, despite the massive recall costs to the company (Dean, 2004).

The media further serves to make crisis conditions more salient, evidenced by journalists' interest to cover mostly what is considered *newsworthy* (Heath, 2010). Hamilton's (1995) study also supports this pattern - given the interest by journalists to cover firms whose pollution figures were above average. Similarly, Shoemaker, Danielian and Brendlinger (1991) found evidence that organizational transgressions which deviated the most from American national values were more newsworthy and likely to be covered by journalists. Chandler et al. (2020) spoke to this pattern and suggested that the media responded to organizational errors that shifted furthest from societal norms such that organizations considered 'bad' due to past transgressions did not receive as much media coverage as those newly classified as 'bad'. Crisis conditions become more salient as the media emphasizes the features of such newsworthy happenings. As a result, stricken organizations may be pressurized to act fast to quell unfavorable reactions by the public. In many cases, amplifying the salience of crises further highlights the media's role in influencing the restructuring of certain organizational processes or reorganizing of strategic business planning efforts (Heath, 2010).

Scholarly attention on crisis-related media coverage has noted a recent shift towards a broader view of different facets of the media. Zavyalova et al. (2012) discuss the role of *infomediaries* – information intermediaries that include not only traditional forms of media, but business press, financial analysts, and industry experts. The role of such infomediaries has broadened the scope and impact of the media, drawing the attention of specific parties within the

crisis management process while simultaneously easing the accessibility of crisis related information by the public and stakeholders.

In tandem with the focus on infomediaries is the eruption of the social media as a vessel of rapid information dissemination and an amplifier of public awareness during crises. Social media, denoted as new information and communication technologies that enable users to connect and publicly exchange views, opinions and experiences on the internet (Etter et al., 2019; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) has granted easier access to information via the internet and facilitated a hyper-connectivity of people around the world. Etter et al. (2019) recounted the infamous United Airlines scandal, where the airline's security dragged a passenger who refused to give up his rightful seat in an overbooked flight, off the plane against his will. This incident was captured on other passengers' phones and instantly made available to millions of viewers via the popular YouTube platform. Consequently, the airline suffered massive reputational harm, with a loss of 800 million US dollars in market value within 24 hours of the incident and an immense reduction in ticket bookings (Etter et al., 2019).

The extensive reach by the social media in its role as a rapid disseminator of information and as a hyper-connector of people across the globe was also evident when recent racial tensions in America culminated into a full-fledged crisis following clashes between law enforcement and minority groups, exhibiting a ripple effect of unrest across the country and across the world. Indeed, the age of social media has elevated the complexity of the crisis management process – information is disseminated faster than ever, and as a result, stakeholders' evaluative judgments are formed more rapidly. This further underscores the important role of the media during crises.

Developing Conversations within Crisis Management Research

What Constitutes Effective Crisis Management?

Scholars have sought to ascertain the measure of successful crisis management – particularly, what efforts would constitute *effective* crisis management. From a relational perspective, Kahn, Barton and Fellows (2013) offered an expanded discussion of what comprises ‘effective’ crisis management. Crisis management efforts are considered effective when operations are sustained or resumed, organizational and external stakeholder losses are minimized, learning occurs so that lessons are transferred to future incidents, and organizational groups create and sustain healthy, balanced, relational patterns of cohesion, flexibility and communication within and across clarified boundaries (Kahn et al., 2013). However, the amplified dynamism of crises makes it such that no definitive assessment can be made regarding whether crisis management efforts are successful or not. As stated by Boin (2009), crises differ greatly in their effects, causes, progression, and in the reactions they draw from different stakeholders. Rather than attempt to categorize crisis management efforts as successful or not, recent discussions have suggested that such efforts be gauged along a continuum of effectiveness (Jaques, 2010).

Undeniably, crisis management efforts considered successful may have faced some constraints and mistakes in their implementation – as no crisis management system can be completely error free. Therefore, efforts to manage a crisis and influence post crisis outcomes should be appreciated in regard to the degree that they minimize crisis-related harms and meet favorable crisis management goals.

Crisis Management and the Stakeholder Approach

As noted by Mitroff, Pearson and Harrington (1996), crises can cause harm to an organization's stakeholders. Such organization-stakeholder relationships become even more critical during crises given that support by stakeholders, particularly in the form of their social approval (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015), can act as a buffer for the stricken firm against crisis-related reputational harm. Given the pivotal role of stakeholder support in the stricken firm's quest for survival, scholars have suggested that a stricken firm's ability to effectively manage a crisis depends on how accurate the firm's understanding of its stakeholder's needs, assumptions and subsequent reactions is (Pearson & Clair, 1998; Ulmer, 2001). This understanding will better equip the stricken firm and enable it to assess its stakeholders' behavior and respond accordingly.

The tenets of stakeholder theory highlight the importance of managing such stakeholder-organization relationships. Janssen, Sen and Bhattacharya (2015) noted that an organization's strategic efforts to create shared value for societies by addressing its needs and challenges prior to any crisis, affects stakeholder's causal attributions regarding a crisis when it occurs. This aligns with the view by Chance et al. (2015) where they studied the relationship between poor firm performance and the value of corporate honesty. According to their findings, firms that exhibited corporate honesty developed stronger relationships with stakeholders and therefore garnered support in the form of less negative evaluations during times of poor performance or crises. Other scholars have sought to ascertain how crises cause relational disturbances (Kahn et al., 2013), of which stakeholder relationships are a major component. According to Kahn et al. (2013), the effects of the relational disturbances propagated by crises can linger even after the crisis ceases to exist. This is an interesting perspective because it focuses on the longer-term

implications of crises, rather than on the immediate crisis-related periods. Such discussions have provided further foundations for the development of empirical research on organizational crises and their effective management.

The preceding literature review has focused on the conceptualization of a crisis, approaches to crisis response strategies and the pivotal role of media coverage in the context of crises. As evidenced from the review, studies are yet to assess the joint and direct effects of crisis response strategies, crisis history and strategic action on the tone of media coverage about a stricken firm. How a firm is portrayed by the media, particularly during a crisis, is quite pivotal given that its portrayal can influence evaluator's perceptions and impact the persuasiveness of crisis-related messages. I base my arguments on the tenets of attribution theory (Weiner, 1972) and Coomb's (2007) SCCT theory to assess the effects of these instrumental factors on the tone of media coverage about a crisis stricken firm.

CHAPTER III. EFFECTS OF CRISIS RESPONSE STRATEGIES AND CRISIS HISTORY ON THE TONE OF MEDIA COVERAGE

To uncover the degree to which crisis response strategies and crisis history differ in their effects on the tone of media coverage about a stricken firm requires an assessment of how these factors differ at their core. I begin this chapter with a focus on crisis response strategies, suggesting that crisis response strategies differ not only in the degree of crisis responsibility they assume, but also in the general sentiment they are likely to evoke in the media. I draw on attribution theory (Kelly & Michela, 1980; Russell, 1982; Weiner, 1985) to assess the varying degrees of crisis attribution, and situational crisis communication theory (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 1996) to discuss the selection of crisis response strategies based on an appreciation of the preceding crisis attribution - ultimately highlighting their differing effects on the tone of media coverage about a stricken firm. Similar to the basis of the concept of the tenor of media coverage by Zavyalova et al. (2012), I adopt Cohn, Mehl, and Pennebaker's (2004) conceptualization of a single summary variable and denote the tone of media coverage herein as the *relative prevalence of positive to negative content in the media coverage about a stricken firm*. The overall theoretical model of the discussions herein is presented in Figure 1.

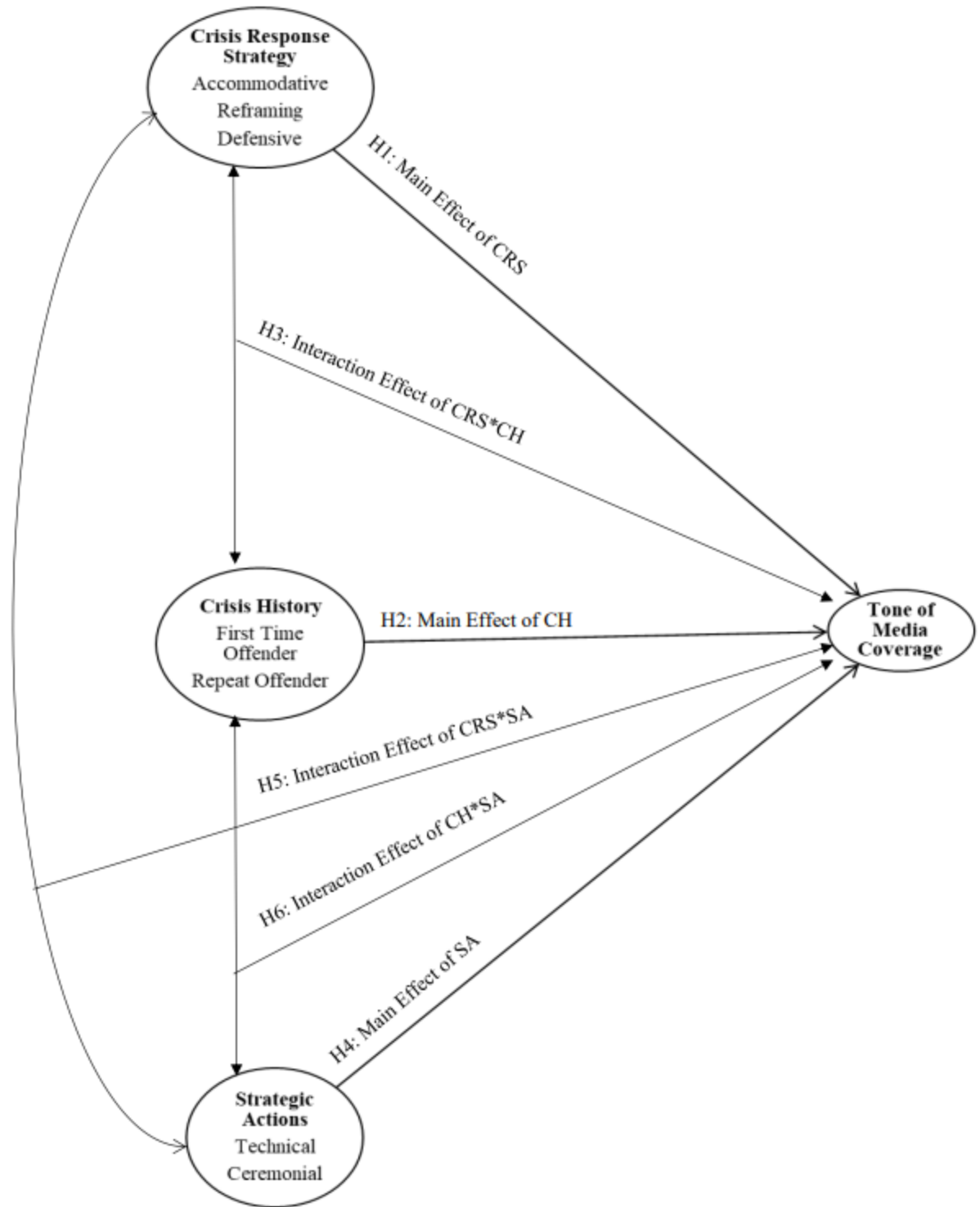


Figure 1. Theoretical Model of the Effects of Crisis Response Strategies, Crisis History and Strategic Actions on the Tone of Media Coverage

Crisis Attributions

Attribution theory, concerned with causal explanations for successes and failures, was developed in social psychology research at the individual level of analysis (Kelly & Michela, 1980; Weiner, 1972) and has been extended to the study of organizational behavior (Coombs, 2007; Lange & Washburn, 2012; Martinko, 1995). Given that crises are precipitated by system failures (Perrow, 1984), scholars have applied attribution theory to assess the processes through which the causes of such failures are accorded to stricken firms (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 1996).

Who then, is to blame for a crisis' occurrence? Attribution theory suggests that the answer to this question depends on certain attributional dimensions, given that attributions are a negotiated component of crisis management efforts and are subject to social influence (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015). Weiner (1985) presented a model of five dimensions with which evaluators employ in their attribution to the cause of events: global/specific, intentionality, locus of causality, stability and controllability dimensions. Directly applicable to this research are the locus of causality, controllability, and stability dimensions.

The *locus of causality*, classified as either internal or external, refers to the position or location of the crisis-causing factors, whether they are located within or outside the focal actor (Martinko, 1995; Weiner, 1985). Is the crisis-causing factor a characteristic of the actor or it is a characteristic of an element in the environment within which the actor exists? Illustratively, the locus of causality of the 2016 Wells Fargo scandal was internal given that firm's corporate culture likely supported aggressive sales targets and compensation incentives that drove employees to open unauthorized accounts (Glazer, 2016). *Controllability* of the cause refers to the degree to which the actor had the power, knowledge or foresight to act to prevent the

outcome (Lange & Washburn 2012; Weiner, 2010). Weiner (1985) argued that despite the high correlation between controllability and locus of causality in some cases, conceptually these dimensions were distinct. Indeed, a firm may be stricken by a crisis that resulted from unethical practices by certain company managers- practices that were unknown to the CEO, limiting his controllability and inability to curb the said practices. This illustration depicts both dimensions occurring within the same context, albeit with clear differences. *Stability* considers whether the crisis cause is enduring and does not vary over time (Coombs, 2004; Martinko, 1995; Weiner, 2010). According to Weiner (1985), the dimension of stability has the greatest effect on expectancy shifts, given that it directly addresses variability of the causal behavior over time.

Crises differ along these causal dimensions resulting in an accordance of internal or external attribution. It should be noted however, that these two categories of crisis attribution likely exists along a continuum due to the intricacies with which each of these dimensions contribute to the stricken firm's overall crisis responsibility. Illustratively, the deaths caused by Johnson & Johnson's 1982 Tylenol poisonings were attributed to tampering of the products by a saboteur, after the products were distributed for sale to various stores. Who then, should be blamed for this impactful crisis? On one hand, this is evidently externally attributed, given that an outside entity injected the cyanide into the capsules while the products were on the store shelves. On the other hand, a case could be made that the firm's failure to use tamper-proof packaging was a weakness that contributed to the crisis- therefore the firm should bear some of the brunt resulting from partial crisis responsibility. The following section further explicates the application of these causal dimensions in assigning attribution to crises.

Internally Attributed Crises

Internally attributed crises are characterized by an internal locus of causality, high levels of controllability and evidence of causal stability by the stricken firm. Given that attributions are negotiated and subject to social influence (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015), internally attributed crises involve evaluators' perceptions that the stricken firm is to blame for the crisis occurrence.

Perceptions of internal attribution precipitate negative reactions from stakeholders and interested parties, since organizational wrongdoing violates stakeholders' expectations that organizations should act responsibly (Gomulya & Mishina, 2017; Jensen, 2006; Sutton & Callahan, 1987).

Such stricken firms are likely to suffer because stakeholders may exit the relationship with the firm (Lange & Washburn, 2012), the firm may lose social approval (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015), the firm may generate negative stock market returns (Bansal & Clelland, 2004; Marcus & Goodman, 1991), and the firm may even experience a decline in positive reputational assets (Chance et al., 2015). The greater the violation, the greater the anger and disdain towards the crisis stricken firm (Marcus & Goodman, 1991; Zavyalova et al., 2012).

SCCT has identified three major clusters of crises based on the differing levels of crisis attribution: intentional, victim and accidental (Coombs, 2007). Aligning with internally attributed crises is the intentional cluster, where the crisis is deemed to be an outcome of purposeful actions (Coombs, 2007). Corporate scandals and misdeeds are a widely studied example of internally attributed crises of the intentional cluster, ranging from Exxon's 1975 political bribery scandal (Marcus & Goodman, 1991), Texaco's racial discrimination scandal of 1994 (James & Wooten, 2006), the Ford Pinto's defective fuel system crisis (Lange & Washburn, 2012), to United Airline's forceful removal of a passenger from its overbooked flight (Etter et al., 2019). Such organizational misdeeds emanate from within the organization and in

many cases are precipitated by influences such as weak leadership, unethical corporate cultures and questionable policies and procedures. Other internally attributed crises may include product safety and health hazards that occur when consumers are harmed and suffer after using certain products (Coombs, 1999). Internal causality is exemplified if the product harms occur as a result of human-error, weaknesses such as poor product design, poorly stated instructions on how to consume the products, or generally defective and poor quality products (Coombs, 1999). In all, internally attributed crises are likely to have a greater impact on evaluator's perceptions about the stricken firm, relative to externally attributed crises, discussed subsequently.

Externally Attributed Crises

The crises categorized as externally attributed depict an external locus of causality and low levels of organizational control and limited evidence of stability. Externally attributed crises align with SCCT's *victim* and *accidental* clusters (Coombs, 2007) where the stricken firm is considered to be a victim of an unintentional and uncontrollable crisis. Previous research on externally attributed crises such as Marcus and Goodman's (1991) study addressed the impact of responses strategies in accidents such as the 1979 American Airline DC-10 crash in Chicago and the Three Mile Island nuclear plant accident and suggested that the less the crisis was attributed to the stricken firm, the lesser the harsh judgements by the firm's shareholders. In such crises, the organization's culpability is minimized by readily available alternative causal agents or explanations (Lange & Washburn, 2012).

In 2016 when the deaths of 8 children were linked to unanchored IKEA dressers – evaluators would not be faulted if they accorded an internal attribution to this case, given that the cause of the deaths could have been due to a weakness in the product's design. However, alternative causal explanations surfaced when IKEA stated that the product was never designed

to be freestanding, and would topple over if assembly instructions were not properly followed (McPhate, 2016) - resulting in a diversion of crisis responsibility to consumers. Worth factoring into the accordance of attribution would be whether IKEA had the power to act to prevent the crisis by possessing relevant knowledge of potential weaknesses in the product's design – indicating a lack of crisis control, or otherwise- as noted by Lange and Washburn (2012). As more crisis-related information becomes available, ambiguity regarding crisis cause is lessened and perceptions of the focal firm's culpability and crisis responsibility shifts accordingly.

As aforementioned, following a crisis, stricken organizations must select the right words to communicate to their stakeholders and the general public – words aimed at favorably influencing the public's perception of the firm (Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Coombs, 1995; Cutler & Muehling, 1989). Favorable perceptions of the stricken firm by evaluators are so sought-after that firms may go to great lengths to identify with figures of legitimate authority (Galaskiewicz, 1985), obtain support from key stakeholders (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) and make known their compliance with laws and industry standards (Oliver, 1990). Efforts to influence stakeholder's judgments are encompassed in crisis response strategies, denoted as *symbolic resources that managers employ to protect or repair their images* (Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Coombs, 1998; Huang, 2006) and *the set of coordinated communication actions used to influence evaluators crisis perceptions* (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015). A firm's initial response following a crisis is particularly very influential in anchoring stakeholder evaluations (Coombs, 1999), given that such first impressions influence evaluator's subsequent reception of the firm's crisis communication messages (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Coombs, 2011, Holladay, 2009). Scholars have termed these attempts at anchoring stakeholder evaluations as *stealing the thunder*, where

stricken firms can benefit from shaping their own narrative by being the one to report the crisis before other sources (Arpan & Pompper, 2003).

SCCT suggests that stricken firms must select strategies that match the level of crisis attribution – depicting a crisis-response match (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Coombs, 1995). As aforementioned, crisis strategies relate along a continuum with accommodative strategies accepting more crisis responsibility, reframing strategies neither denying nor accepting crisis responsibility and defensive strategies refuting crisis responsibility. The generally accepted notion is that the more crisis responsibility and subsequent attribution is accorded to the stricken firm, the more accommodative its response should be (e.g. Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Coombs, 2007; Marcus & Goodman, 1991).

SCCT emphasizes the importance of a stricken firm's match between its response strategy and crisis attribution (Coombs & Holladay, 2004) - suggesting that crisis response strategies have a direct effect on what is said about a stricken firm. This match impacts a stricken firm's social approval and subsequent reputation (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Coombs, 2007; Zavyalova et al., 2012). Coombs and Holladay (2004) suggest that stricken firms which misalign their crisis response strategies to their crisis contexts are likely to experience harsher judgments relative to those firms that lack a concise crisis response. A misalignment and subsequent poor execution of a crisis response strategy further violates evaluator's expectations because stricken firms are expected to respond appropriately, as pertains the level of accorded crisis attribution.

Zavyalova et al. (2012) found that accommodative strategies allowed stricken firms involved in toy recalls to minimize the loss of social approval emanating from the heightened levels of firm wrongdoing in internally attributed product recalls. Chance et al. (2015) found that stakeholders reacted more favorably to stricken firms that openly acknowledged the specific

source of the problems they faced and gave clear instructing and adjusting information relative to those stricken firms that gave vague explanations. Similar conclusions were drawn by Marcus and Goodman (1991) where they found that shareholders reacted differently to crisis response strategies employed by stricken firms depending on the degree to which the response strategy served shareholder interests. Figure 2 depicts a crisis attribution-to-response match as outlined in the literature.

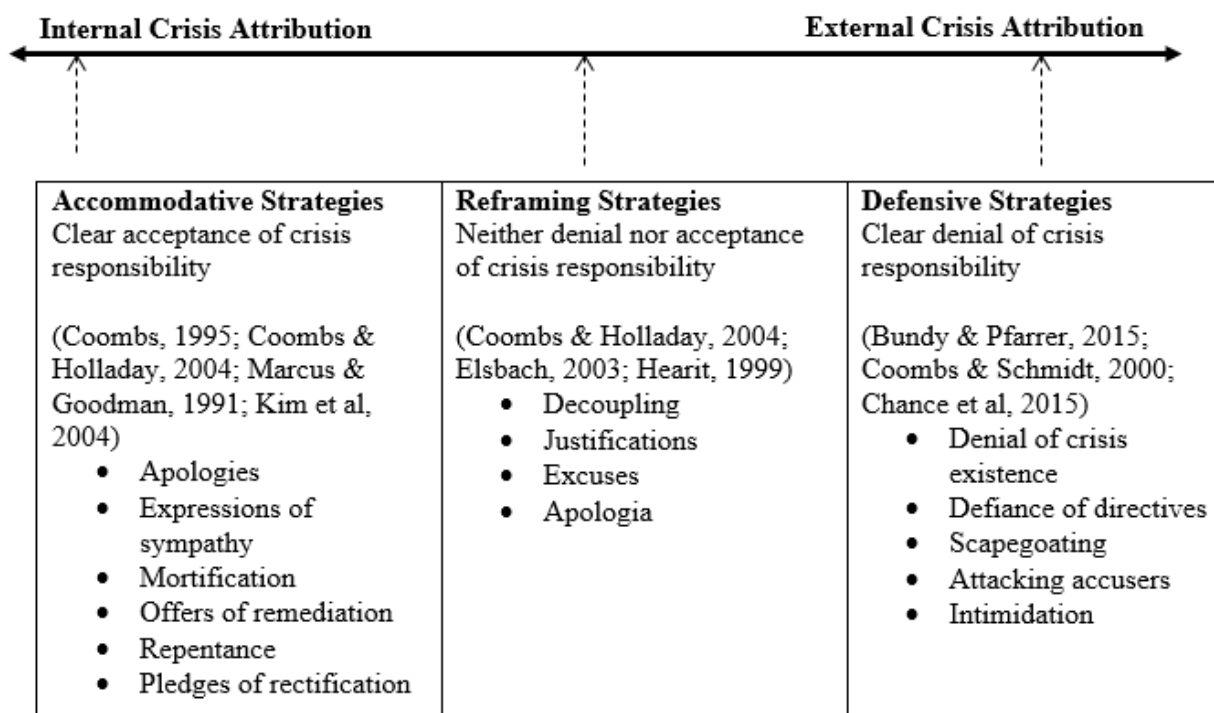


Figure 2. Matching Crisis Attribution to Crisis Response Strategies

The preceding discussion underscores the important role of crisis response strategies in a stricken firm's quest to return to pre-crisis normalcy - particularly in influencing reputational assessments about the stricken firm by anchoring evaluator's initial and subsequent perceptions. Importantly, the degree to which a stricken firm acknowledges its causal role in the crisis may

partially or fully addresses evaluators' need to know what or who caused the crisis. When stricken firms misalign their crisis responses and crisis attributions, they may experience immediate negative effects in the form of heightened negative sentiments in the media. Given that crisis response strategies serve such a pivotal role in influencing evaluators' perceptions and opinions of stricken firms (Coombs, 2007), and represent the firm's response to a highly salient occurrence, sentiments about such organizational actions are likely reflected in the media coverage about the stricken firm (Bednar, 2012; Chandler et al., 2020; Deephouse, 2000). In appreciation of the preceding discussion, I hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1: The tone of media coverage about a stricken firm will differ by the firm's crisis response strategy.

Employing the tenets of SCCT and incorporating discussions by impression management theorists, I now assess the targeted outcomes of the different types of crisis response strategies to unearth their differing effects on the tone of media coverage about a stricken firm. Specifically, I contend that the effects of the different response strategies will differ at each level of the other factors of interest i.e. the crisis history and strategic actions employed by stricken firms.

What are the Targeted Outcomes of the Different Crisis Response Strategies?

Of interest herein is the degree to which these crisis response strategies differ in their content and targeted outcomes – outcomes that are likely to have an effect on what is said about the stricken firm in the media. Arguments from SCCT (Coombs, 2007), impression management and image restoration theories (Benoit, 1997) inform the targeted outcomes of crisis response strategies, as discussed in the subsequent section.

Targeted Outcomes of Accommodative Strategies

Stricken firms may adopt accommodative strategies such as issuing apologies, display sympathy for crisis victims, expressions of mortification, repentance, pledges to adopt corrective actions, and promises to forbear from committing the wrongful act in the future (Benoit, 1995)- so as to minimize the loss of social approval (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015), organizational legitimacy (Suchman, 1995), favorable reputational assets (Chance et al., 2015) and rectify violations of stakeholder expectations (Gomulya & Mishina, 2017). Apologies form the basis of accommodative strategies, and as aforementioned, seek to evoke feelings of forgiveness from the victims, offended parties and stakeholders (Benoit, 1995; Coombs & Holladay, 2008; Kellerman, 2006). Illustratively, when Target experienced a data breach in late 2013, the CEO Gregg Steinhafel released a statement that read in part:

Dear Target Guests - As you have probably heard, Target learned in mid-December that criminals forced their way into our systems, gaining access to guest credit and debit card information. As a part of the ongoing forensic investigation, it was determined last week that certain guest information, including names, mailing addresses, phone numbers or email addresses, was also taken. **Our top priority is taking care of you** and helping you feel confident about shopping at Target, and **it is our responsibility to protect your information when you shop with us. We didn't live up to that responsibility, and I am truly sorry. Please know we moved as swiftly as we could to address the problem once it became known, and that we are actively taking steps to respond to your concerns and guard against something like this happening again** (author's emphasis; Steinhafel, 2014).

Target's accommodative response emphasized an awareness of its own failure to protect guests' personal information, while expressing remorse and highlighting its swift actions to curb the occurrence of future violations of stakeholder expectations. In one fell swoop, Target's CEO addressed what had happened, where the company had failed, what the company was doing to deal with the crisis, while emphasizing that these engagements were all geared towards attending

to the company's top priority – taking care of its customers. In such a case, would the expressions of remorse and apology attenuate the harsh evaluations by evaluators?

Research shows that accommodative strategies, and apologies in particular, may have opposing outcomes. On one hand, when stricken firms indicate an awareness of the crisis-causing problem and apologize, evaluators may perceive this as an indication of sincere remorse and subsequently, the firm's openness to rectification. Studies on trust violations by organizations as evidenced in crises show that trust between organizations and stakeholders may be repaired with greater ease if stricken firms do acknowledge their wrong (e.g. Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). However, this argument may hold only to the degree that the organization's transgression was due to technical incompetency and not a lack of virtuous integrity (Kim, Ferrin, Cooper & Dirks, 2004). Conversely, the acknowledgement of guilt as exemplified in accommodative strategies may fail to achieve the desired forgiveness and sympathy from stakeholders and offended parties if the crisis causing behaviors arose from a lack of integrity. Technical, competency-based violations may be fixed with greater assurance – poor product designs can be reworked, a system's security can be strengthened and unreliable distributors and manufacturers can be replaced. Integrity based violations depict greater transgressions and may require overhauls of unethical corporate cultures- a much more difficult feat to achieve.

How then, does the media react to accommodative strategies? A comprehensive response to this question would consider a myriad of factors, such as the severity of the crisis and prior organizational reputation and perceptions of organizational integrity. For instance, accommodative strategies – more so apologies, for very severe crises may be rendered less effective in garnering sympathy from evaluators, relative to less severe crises. However, given that the general goals of accommodative strategies such as apologies, compensation and

expressions of sympathy is to evoke forgiveness from the expression of sorrow and regret by the stricken firm, it is likely that the media coverage towards stricken firms when an accommodative strategy is used is likely to be less harsh. This is supported within the crisis management literature, by studies that suggest that mistrusted companies experience less punishment if they acknowledge and assume crisis responsibility (Kim et al., 2004). The unique features of accommodative strategies, coupled with their targeted outcomes, are likely to have a distinct effect on what is said about a stricken firm in the media, relative to the other forms of crisis response strategies.

Targeted Outcomes of Reframing Strategies

Reframing strategies are used when the stricken firm opts to minimize crisis-related reputational harms by neither accepting nor denying crisis responsibility, but rather attempting to influence how evaluators perceive the crisis (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015). Some reframing strategies may exhibit a certain degree of remorse or regret for the crisis, but in general, they do not explicitly acknowledge the firm's crisis responsibility.

Portraying an ambiguous or weakened perception of crisis responsibility serves a number of purposes for the stricken firm. First, an information gap is created where the stakeholder's evaluations cannot be based on negative emotions linked to the admittance of crisis responsibility by the stricken firm, since the firm makes no such clear acknowledgment. If any blame surrounds the stricken firm, it will be due to speculations and not from the proverbial horses' mouth- as is the case in accommodative strategies. The stricken firm attempts to shift evaluator's focus to other salient parties or issues, hence minimizing its association to the crisis causing factors. Further, without a clear statement of acknowledgement regarding its crisis' responsibility, a stricken firm may curtail some of the costly aspects associated with more

accommodative strategies, such as lawsuits that multiply in number after firms admit fault (Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Marcus & Goodman, 1991). Reframing strategies include excuses and justifications-of which both may be viewed as insincere attempts at addressing the crisis, given that they lack the moral component of an apology (Mroz & Allen, 2020). Justifications minimize the inappropriateness of the crisis-causing behavior while excuses shift the crisis-causing behavior to mitigating sources. Illustratively, in 1994 following the infamous flaw in Intel's Pentium microprocessor chip, Intel's then CEO Andy Grove communicated in part:

The Pentium processor was introduced into the market in May '93 after the **most extensive testing program** we at Intel have ever embarked on. We held the introduction of the chip several months in order to give OEM customers more time to check out the chip and their systems. **We worked extensively with many software companies** to this end as well. We were very pleased with the result. We ramped the processor **faster than any other in our history** and encountered no significant problems in the user community. **Not that the chip was perfect; no chip ever is.** From time to time, we gathered up what problems we found and put into production a new "stepping"-a new set of masks that incorporated whatever we corrected. . . **After 25 years in the microprocessor business, I have come to the conclusion that no microprocessor is ever perfect; they just come closer to perfection with each stepping** (author's emphasis; Grove, 1994)

The media coverage of this chip flaw was extensive and played a role in magnifying the chip's error- a rare occurrence in the technology industry. The statements by Intel's then CEO weakened the link between Intel and the chip error by highlighting the rigor with which the firm tested its products, working with multiple companies - indicating external checks- all in the quest towards creating a processor at the fastest rate in history. The notion that no chip is ever perfect added to the inevitability of this occurrence, indicating to evaluators that this was bound to happen regardless of any preventive measures. Therefore, rather than focus on the error of the chip which was inescapable – according to the firm's narrative, such a reframing crisis response strategy shifted the attention of evaluators to the fact that despite all the firm's preventive measures, the error was a probable occurrence given that the very nature of a processor is

capsuled in its albeit rare, imperfection. In essence, these attempts at reducing the offensiveness of the chip flaw implied that the situation was not as dire as it may have seemed.

How does the media react to reframing strategies? As suggested by Weiner's (2010) discussion on the perceived causes of success and failures, based on attribution theory and applicable to the context of crises, evaluators have a distinct need to understand the causes of events – a need that may not be adequately addressed by reframing strategies. As such, akin to the opposing effects of accommodative strategies, making excuses, justifying actions that contributed to the crisis and engaging in partial deflections (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Elsbach, 2003) may have opposing outcomes. On one hand, reframing strategies may minimize the organization's crisis culpability, particularly in crises where sufficient information to form and shape evaluative judgments by evaluators may be absent. In such cases, reframing strategies may work in favor of the stricken firm. On the other hand, stricken firms employing reframing strategies may be perceived as attempting to evade any obligation geared towards correcting the crisis-causing behavior or system weaknesses given that the stricken firm makes excuses, justifications and partial deflections while neither accepting nor denying crisis responsibility.

Given that reframing strategies lie in the middle of the continuum of crisis response strategies, the sentiments about the stricken firm in the media may reflect either a disdain of the stricken firm's deflection of crisis responsibility, or they may reflect an approval of the factors that the stricken firm has made salient. Despite the lack of a clear distinction of crisis responsibility by the stricken firm, reframing strategies are still likely to have a unique effect on what is said about the stricken firm in the media because they influence how the crisis itself is perceived.

Targeted Outcomes of Defensive Strategies

Defensive strategies are used by stricken firms that opt to accept the least amount of crisis responsibility (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Coombs, 1995; Marcus & Goodman, 1991).

Stricken firms may, for example, attack parties that suggest a crisis exists. In 2005 when Pfizer's drug Bextra was associated with fatal skin reactions and greater risks of heart attack and strokes, eventually leading to the suspension of sales and recalls of the drug- the firm responded by attacking the FDA's stand on Bextra's profile. The firm issued a statement in part:

Regarding Bextra, Pfizer's other oral Cox-2 inhibitor, the FDA informed Pfizer late yesterday that, in the agency's view, Bextra's cardiovascular risk could not be differentiated from other NSAIDs. However, the agency has concluded that the additional, increased risk of rare but serious skin reactions associated with Bextra, **already described in its label**, warrants its withdrawal from the market. **Pfizer respectfully disagrees with FDA's position regarding the overall risk/benefit profile of Bextra.** However, in deference to the agency's views, the company has agreed to suspend sales of the medicine pending further discussions with the FDA (author's emphasis; Pfizer, 2005).

The statement by Pfizer not only undermines the authority of the FDA by attacking the FDA's position regarding the drug in question, but it somewhat absolves Pfizer of the guilt associated with the drug's health problems i.e. fatal skin reactions, heart problems and strokes, by having made the associated risks known in the products label. Such attacks may also be used by stricken firms in tandem with explanations clarifying to why the crisis does not exist (Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Coombs, 1995). Not included in the excerpt above is Pfizer's reminder that the FDA asked all manufacturers of over-the-counter nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs to revise their labelling (Pfizer, 2005), reminding evaluators that the attention by the FDA was not unique to Pfizer's products, further minimizing the offensiveness of the drug's health problems.

Other forms of defensive strategies such as scapegoating involve blaming alternative entities for the crisis-causing behavior (Coombs, 1995). Scapegoating has been used widely –

where stricken firms shift the blame to an outside entity, or even assign blame to ‘rogue’ members of the organization- once again distancing the stricken firm from crisis-responsibility (Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Coombs, 1995; Marcus & Goodman, 1991). In 2019, Fisher Price shifted the blame for the infant fatalities associated with its Rock ‘n Play sleeper to its consumers’ misuse of the product. Impression management theorists suggest that in such product harm crises, stricken firms are motivated to deny responsibility so as to maintain perceptions of legitimacy (Allen & Caillouet, 1994). Marcus and Goodman (1991) suggested that stricken firms may become defensive so as to serve shareholder interests, given that more accommodative strategies are costly and may attract lawsuits.

The three crisis response strategies have a general targeted outcome – that of protecting organizational reputations, maintaining social approval and protecting perceptions of legitimacy (Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Bundy et al., 2017; Coombs & Holladay, 2008; Marcus & Goodman, 1991). However, they differ in the manner in which they achieve this targeted outcome- with accommodative strategies seeking to evoke forgiveness from stakeholders, reframing strategies seeking to alter stakeholder perceptions and evaluations of the crisis, and defensive strategies seeking to diminish any perceptions of organizational blame for the crisis.

However, if considered in tandem with a stricken firm’s past crisis involvement and current crisis responsibility, different patterns in the tone of the media coverage about the stricken firm may emerge. At this juncture, a discussion of the direct effects of crisis history and perceptions of crisis responsibility on the tone of media coverage about the stricken firm – a relationship considered in tandem with the effects of crisis response strategies, is warranted.

The Effects of Crisis History

The idea that the past is never dead, and it is not even past (Faulkner, 1950) – applies appropriately to the current discussion, by speaking to the unpredictable and dynamic nature of business environments that directly heightens the likelihood of crisis occurrence and in many cases, recurrence. The increasing threat of crisis recurrence has attracted scholarly inquiries into the relationship between past and current crises and the effects this relationship may have on organizational credibility, reputation, stakeholder-organizational relationships among others (e.g. Coombs, 2004; Elliot, 2010). Of interest herein is how this relationship impacts evaluative judgments of stricken firms in subsequent crises given that studies have suggested that individuals rely on dominant and previously held beliefs to formulate current perceptions about parties of interest (e.g. Berger, Sorensen, & Rasmussen, 2010; Edwards & Smith, 1996). Such sense making is influenced by informational sources covering a crisis, which tend to highlight attention-grabbing events that conform to, or challenge existing narratives (Chandler et al., 2020). Subsequent adverse events may contain reminders of the past to inform the prevailing narrative (Coombs, 2004; Lanahan & Armanios, 2018).

Scholars have invoked attribution theory to assess the role of crisis history within the crisis management literature (Combs, 2004; Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Elliot, 2010). Elliot (2010) investigated the effects of extraorganizational crisis history, suggesting that when firms are stricken by crises, it is in their best interest to remind publics and stakeholders that current crises are not unique and other firms have been similarly stricken in the past. This strategy applies only in as far as extraorganizational crises lessen reputational damage to a focal firm in current crises.

In their experimental study, Coombs and Holladay (1996) compared two conditions of crisis history: whether a stricken firm had a clearly known history of crises and whether available information indicated that the firm had no previous crisis involvement. They found evidence that the condition of crisis history created greater perceptions of current crisis responsibility relative to the no-crisis history condition. Indications or evidence of a crisis history mattered. In another study, Coombs and Holladay (2001) noted that a history of past crises hurt an organization's reputation – particularly since information regarding past crises were brought to the forefront in the face of a current crisis. This is supported by the notion that negative information weighs heavier in the formation of judgements, relative to positive information (Ito, Larsen, Smith & Cacioppo, 1998), particularly during crises. In opposition to the halo effect, where a prior positive view of a stricken firm shields it from harsh evaluations in current crises and allows it to be accorded the benefit of the doubt, the velcro effect brings forth additional reputational damage from mentions of the stricken firm's involvement in past crises (Coombs & Holladay, 2006).

Illustratively, when the infamous Volkswagen emissions scandal occurred in 2015, news reports reminded the public of Volkswagen's 1973 defeat device scandal in which the company was fined \$120,000 for violating emission rules and standards by the US Environmental Protection Agency. This connection to past crises reminds constituents about the past 'bad' behaviors of the firm, exemplifying the *velcro* effect (Coombs & Holladay, 2006). Arguably, evidence of crisis history may heighten perceptions of crisis responsibility in current crises.

Crisis history speaks directly to one of Weiner's (1985) dimensions of causal attribution – that of *stability*. As aforementioned, stability denotes the degree to which the crisis cause is enduring and does not vary over time (Martinko, 1995; Weiner, 1985). Crisis history depicts behavioral consistency as it indicates that the organization repeats a specific behavior—its

involvement in crises (Coombs, 2007). A history of crisis involvement signals two key messages to stakeholders: 1) the stricken firm is unable to learn from past crises and therefore ineffectively avoids subsequent crises and/or minimizes crisis-related threats, and 2) a firm may have inherent weaknesses that increases its susceptibility to crises.

Further, crisis history is associated with repeated violations of psychological contracts (Fediuk et al., 2010), entered into by organizations and their stakeholders- whether the crisis was preventable or otherwise. Preventable crises violate these expectations to a greater degree relative to unavoidable crises. Firms involved in repeated violations of stakeholder expectations, termed herein as *repeat offenders*, likely have questionable credibility and this may be reflected in the sentiments about them, in the media. Such firms are perceived to have a greater causal role to play in the current crisis (Coombs, 1998). British Petroleum's crisis involvement history supports this argument.

In 2005, a series of explosions occurred at the BP Texas City refinery, where fifteen workers were killed and about 200 others were injured (CSB, 2007). Following the crisis, the company released a statement admitting that internal process flaws caused the explosion; specifically citing human error (CSB, 2007). In 2010, the infamous BP Oil Spill occurred, causing immense environmental and human damages (Hoffman & Jennings, 2011). The initial attribution for this spill was accorded to BP- particularly heightened by its inability to contain the spill after it occurred. BP's operational problems seemed to be evident in other areas as well. According to Sheppard (2013), BP's history constituted 63 reported incidents of misconduct since 1995, which ultimately precipitated into to full-fledged crises. Some of these prior health and safety violations resulted in the aforementioned explosion and contributed to the oil spill. A logical reaction by stakeholders, in any subsequent crisis occurrences involving BP, is that

greater crisis responsibility is likely to be assigned to the stricken firm and less to its environment. A negative history of crisis involvement tends to heighten harsh evaluations (Coombs, 2004) and evidence past crisis involvement may diminish the validity of the stricken firm's response strategy, once again depicting the velcro effect.

Alternatively, before a stricken firm becomes known for crisis involvement i.e. is a *first time offender* – its word still contains some credibility given that such firms have not yet engaged in repeated violations of stakeholder expectations. Evaluators' perceptions of first time offenders may include a greater degree of leniency because the current crisis which troubles the firm may in fact be an isolated divergence and therefore, such firms should not be punished as severely as would have been if they had violated stakeholder expectations in the past. In essence, it may be that negative spillovers from past transgressions are not entirely applicable to first time offenders. Given these disparities, the sentiments in the media regarding first time offenders relative to repeat offenders, may differ to some degree. In appreciation of the direct effects that a history of crises may have on what is said about a stricken firm, I hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 2: The tone of media coverage about a crisis stricken firm will differ by the firm's crisis history.

As aforementioned, the appropriateness of the responses by either repeat or first time offender firms will depend on the degree of their crisis responsibility in subsequent crises. When stricken firms bear the brunt of a heightened perception of crisis responsibility, they are likely to receive harsher and more negative evaluations (Coombs, 2004). SCCT suggests that the greater the crisis attribution assigned to the firm, the greater the subsequent crisis responsibility and ultimately the more accommodative the stricken firm should be in its response strategy (Coombs, 2007). The lesser the crisis responsibility, the more appropriate a defensive strategy becomes. As such, the

appropriateness of each of these crisis response strategies will likely depend on the degree of crisis attribution and subsequent crisis responsibility accorded to the firm. Recurrent apologies and accommodative strategies may lose their effectiveness if the stricken firm is involved in multiple transgressions. Akin to defensive strategies, reframing strategies may become less effective in repeated crises where evaluators desire more concrete explanations for what caused the crisis. The effects of crisis response strategies on the tone of media coverage about a stricken firm likely depends on the firm's crisis history, and vice versa.

In sum, as crisis responses differ in 1) the degree to which they acknowledge the stricken firm's causal role in the crisis, and 2) the means with which they achieve their targeted outcomes- when considered in tandem with differing levels of crisis responsibility as a result of evidence of past crisis involvement, I hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 3: The tone of media coverage about a stricken firm will differ by the joint effects of the firm's crisis history and crisis response strategy.

Based on the preceding discussions on first time offenders relative to repeat offenders, Table 1 lists crisis cases studied herein, coded for crisis response strategies and crisis history. Thus far, I have addressed the direct and joint effects of crisis response strategies and crisis history on the tone of media coverage about the stricken firm by suggesting that the degree to which a stricken firm assumes responsibility for the crisis has a direct impact on the ensuing sentiments about the firm. Similarly, the degree to which the stricken firm has a crisis history may influence the extent of leniency accorded to the firm by its evaluators – impacting the tone of sentiments about the stricken firm. In the following chapter, the effects of strategic actions-pivotal contributors towards a stricken firm's quest to survive its crisis – are discussed.

Table 1. Sample of Cases Coded By Crisis Response Strategies and Crisis History

	Accommodative Strategies	Reframing Strategies	Defensive Strategies
First Time Offenders	Target Corp. Data Breach Facebook Data Scandal Starbucks Racial Profiling Wells Fargo Accounts Scandal United Airlines PR Crisis Coca Cola Belgian Crisis Texaco Racial Crisis Jet Blue Logistics Crisis H&M Racial Controversy Maple Leaf Listeria Outbreak Peanut Corp. Of America Listeria Outbreak Foster Farms Salmonella Outbreak Topps Meat E.coli Outbreak	Equifax Data Breach Imperial Sugar Co. Explosion Penn. State Uni. Sexual Abuse Scandal BP Texas City Explosion Mattel Power Wheels™ Crisis Johnson & Johnson Tylenol Crisis Union Carbide Bhopal Tragedy Merck- Vioxx Crisis Jensen Farms Listeria Outbreak Livestrong Foundation Drug Abuse Scandal Peregrine Systems Accounting Fraud Qwest Comm. Accounting Fraud Xerox Accounting Fraud Intel Pentium™ Chip Error Crisis Odwalla Inc. E.coli Outbreak Adobe Systems Data Breach Perrier Benzene Contamination Denny's Racial Bias Scandal	Jack In The Box E.coli Outbreak Tyco International Accounting Fraud The Weinstein Co. Sexual Abuse Scandal Cendant Corp. Accounting Fraud WorldCom Accounting Fraud Theranos Investor & Technologies Fraud Takata Corp. Seatbelt Crisis Dow Corning Breast Implant Crisis Enron Accounting Scandal Procter & Gamble Toxic Shock Syndrome Crisis Menu Foods Pet Food Crisis Global Crossing Accounting Scandal Sony PlayStation™ Network Breach
Repeat Offenders	General Motors Ignition Switch Crisis Takata Corp. Airbag Crisis Volkswagen Emission Scandal Archdiocese Of Boston Sexual Abuse Scandal Chipotle E.coli Outbreak Wells Fargo Insurance Accounts Scandal	America Airlines Flight 587 Crash Boeing 737 Max Crisis Mattel Lead Paint Crisis Toyota Gas Pedal Crisis Massey Energy- Upper Big Branch Explosion	Mattel Rock 'N Play™ Sleeper Crisis CBS Sexual Abuse Scandal IKEA Chests And Dressers Crisis BP Gulf Of Mexico Oil Spill Coca Cola Pesticide Crisis (India) Hudson Foods E.coli Outbreak Sony Network Breach (Guardians Of Peace) Pfizer – Bextra Crisis

CHAPTER IV. EFFECTS OF CRISIS RESPONSE STRATEGIES AND STRATEGIC FIRM ACTIONS ON THE TONE OF MEDIA COVERAGE

Strategic Actions in the Face of a Crisis

The destructive nature of crises may attenuate the effectiveness of crisis response strategies - so much so that stricken firms may be driven to engage in additional measures aimed at favorably influencing stakeholders' judgements about the stricken firm. Indeed, to effectively cope with crises and enhance a firm's chances of survival, firms must strategically use available resources to minimize the impact of crisis related harms (Smart & Vertinsky, 1984). Such crisis-related resources include the effective use of purposeful strategic actions discussed within the literature in regard to impression management tactics (e.g. Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Zavyalova et al, 2012) and image restoration (e.g. Benoit, 1997).

Allen and Caillouet (1994) present a discussion on the legitimization endeavors by crisis stricken firms. After a firm is stricken by a crisis, it may select to identify with legitimate external power figures, make donations to charities, and announce reforms to internal procedures- all in a bid to strategically communicate legitimate images. A crisis in and of itself, represents failures of organizational systems and workings (Perrow, 1984) and stricken firms become 'performers' of sorts in their communication of legitimate images – attempting to absolve themselves from associations of crisis-related failure while accentuating the favorable features of their crisis response strategies. To add to the complexity of these conditions is the notion that stricken firms exist in societies within which they must manage multiple identities at the same time (Cheney, 1991) and communicate legitimate images simultaneously to different stakeholders within the same crisis (Marcus & Goodman, 1991). Legitimate images embodied in such purposeful strategic actions accord stricken firms with the opportunity to address the

concerns of multiple evaluators, and even strengthen the persuasive powers of employed response strategies.

From an image restoration perspective, Brinson and Benoit (1996) assessed Dow Corning's image repair strategies during its breast implant crisis. They found that Dow Corning's aggressively defensive strategies and denial of claims levied against the safety of its breast implants did not work to protect the company's image. Neither did the subsequent use of more positive transcendence and bolstering tactics. Interestingly, after months of mismatching their responses to their crisis attribution, Dow Corning opted to reverse its crisis management plan and communicate a heightened commitment to corrective actions, in tandem with extensive apologies and acknowledgment of its causal role in the crisis. They admitted their failure at ensuring product safety and at effectively managing the crisis. Only when Dow Corning employed the appropriate crisis response strategy in tandem with the expected strategic actions did the damage to its image begin to show signs of decline.

Scholars have sought to group the impression management tactics employed by stricken firms, in a myriad of ways (e.g. Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Benoit 1997). Directly applicable to this research is the discussion by Zavyalova et al. (2012) of such strategic engagements by a comparison between technical and ceremonial actions, which differ in the degree to which they address the crisis-related causing behaviors or factors. Considered directly and in tandem with crisis response strategies, I discuss their effects on the tone of media coverage about the stricken firm.

Technical Actions

Technical actions, denoted as *those that have the potential to address the actual causes of the crisis and thus attract the attention of stakeholders to the internal processes of the stricken firm* (Zavyalova et al., 2012), not only signal that the stricken firm is aware of the cause of the crisis, but they also signal that the stricken firm is in control of the crisis and is working towards crisis-recovery and restoration of normalcy or stability (Coombs, 2007; Pfarrer et al., 2008; Sellnow et al., 1998; Zavyalova et al., 2012). Image restoration theorists posit that corrective actions, the cornerstone of technical actions – involves stricken firms pledging to restore the pre-crisis state, by taking required steps to prevent crisis recurrence (Benoit, 1995; Brinson & Benoit, 1996).

Technical actions contain instructing information- directing stakeholders on what to do to protect themselves from the harms of the crisis (Coombs, 1995; Holladay, 2009). Crises associated with weaknesses in the stricken firm's internal processes, such as product safety and health hazards and corporate misdeeds require instructing information so as to reduce the crisis harms on victims. In addition, technical actions contain adjusting information – that which reassures the stakeholders about what has happened – going further to explicate the corrective measures being undertaken by the stricken firm to prevent a similar crisis in future and cope psychologically with the crisis (Coombs, 1995). In essence, technical actions contextualize the crisis, reduce uncertainty, give direction and essentially reassure stakeholders (Coombs, 1995; Holladay, 2009).

Illustrative of instructing and adjusting information embodied in technical actions is that used by Sony when its PlayStation Network was hacked in 2011 and the personal information of 77 million users was accessed. In regards to this quagmire, Sony responded in part:

For your security, we encourage you to be especially aware of email, telephone, and postal mail scams that ask for personal or sensitive information. Sony will not contact you in any way, including by email, asking for your credit card number, social security number or other personally identifiable information. If you are asked for this information, you can be confident Sony is not the entity asking. When the PlayStation Network and Qriocity services are fully restored, **we strongly recommend that you log on and change your password.** Additionally, if you use your PlayStation Network or Qriocity user name or password for other unrelated services or accounts, we strongly recommend that you change them, as well.

We thank you for your patience as we complete our investigation of this incident, and we regret any inconvenience. Our teams are working around the clock on this, and services will be restored as soon as possible. **Sony takes information protection very seriously and will continue to work to ensure that additional measures are taken to protect personally identifiable information. Providing quality and secure entertainment services to our customers is our utmost priority** (author's emphasis; Sony Network Entertainment, 2011).

Sony's statements concisely instructed users on how they could protect themselves, while simultaneously outlining the precise undertakings by the firm in its quest to restore the safe use of its network. Its commitment to providing quality and secure services may reassure users that the firm is indeed in control of this quagmire- further helping users cope psychologically with the crisis (Coombs, 1995). Although Sony used a defensive strategy by wholly blaming the hackers and not acknowledging the security weaknesses in its systems, it sought to restore its image as a secure company by communicating its heightened commitment to corrective actions.

In crises where perceptions of firm wrongdoing are heightened and the firm is thought to be complicit in the crisis occurrence, simply apologizing, justifying or using excuses and partial deflections of crisis blame may not suffice to attenuate the negative effect of the firm's wrongdoing on evaluations about the stricken firm. Illustratively, Facebook's statement in regard to the misuse of data by Cambridge Analytica in 2018 almost overemphasized the company's commitment to corrective actions, where it pledged to minimize data access and ban developers

who did not agree to thorough audits. Table 2 presents a sample of the technical actions as announced by stricken firms analyzed in this dissertation.

Table 2. Sample of Technical Action Announcements by Crisis Stricken Firms

Crisis	Technical Actions
Facebook Data Misuse Scandal	<p>First, we will investigate all apps that had access to large amounts of information before we changed our platform to dramatically reduce data access in 2014, and we will conduct a full audit of any app with suspicious activity. We will ban any developer from our platform that does not agree to a thorough audit. And if we find developers that misused personally identifiable information, we will ban them and tell everyone affected by those apps. That includes people whose data Kogan misused here as well. Second, we will restrict developers' data access even further to prevent other kinds of abuse. For example, we will remove developers' access to your data if you haven't used their app in 3 months. We will reduce the data you give an app when you sign in -- to only your name, profile photo, and email address. We'll require developers to not only get approval but also sign a contract in order to ask anyone for access to their posts or other private data. And we'll have more changes to share in the next few days - Facebook CEO – Mark Zuckerberg (author's emphasis; Salinas, 2018).</p>
Starbucks Racial Bias Crisis	<p>We also will further train our partners to better know when police assistance is warranted. Additionally, we will host a company-wide meeting next week to share our learnings, discuss some immediate next steps and underscore our long-standing commitment to treating one another with respect and dignity. I know our store managers and partners work hard to exceed our customers' expectations every day—which makes this very poor reflection on our company all the more painful. Finally, to our partners who proudly wear the green apron and to customers who come to us for a sense of community every day: you can and should expect more from us. We will learn from this and be better. Starbucks CEO- Kevin Johnson (author's emphasis; Johnson, 2018).</p>
Wells Fargo Accounts Scandal	<p>Our commitment to addressing the concerns covered by these agreements has included: An extensive review by a third party consulting firm going back into 2011, which we completed prior to these settlements. The review included consumer and small business retail banking deposit accounts and unsecured credit cards opened during the period reviewed. As a result of this review, \$2.6 million has been refunded to customers for any fees associated with products customers received that they may not have requested. Accounts refunded represented a fraction of one percent of the accounts reviewed, and refunds averaged \$25.</p> <p>Disciplinary actions, including terminations of managers and team members who acted counter to our values. Investments in enhanced team-member training and monitoring and controls. Strengthened performance measures that are tied to customer satisfaction, loyalty and ethics. (author's emphasis; Wells Fargo, 2016)</p>

Ceremonial Actions

Ceremonial actions by stricken firms have been addressed at length in the literature (e.g. Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Zavyalova et al., 2012) and differ from technical actions in their content and purpose. They are denoted to be *those actions that have the potential to positively alter impressions about the firm and deflect stakeholder's attention away from the causes of the crisis* (Zavyalova et al., 2012). These actions emphasize the stricken firm's positive traits while turning evaluator's attention away from the negative traits associated with the crisis. Stricken firms may engage in symbolic portrayals of their actions to give the impression of consistency with stakeholder expectations and societal norms (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990). At their core, ceremonial actions involve offering symbolic assurances of credibility rather than communicating substantive action taken towards true crisis rectification.

When stricken firms support favorable perceptions of certain traits, such as philanthropic engagements by making charitable contributions, investing in technologies that benefit communities or end world problems, it communicates that the firm is not solely focused on profit generation, but rather places in high regard its role as a positive contributor to the society of which it is a part. Ideally, the public should be positively receptive towards ceremonial actions by stricken firms. However, according to Zavyalova et al. (2012), the outcomes of ceremonial actions can be conflicting given that ceremonial actions do not specifically address crisis-related issues, and are deflective in nature. The greater the transgression, the less effective ceremonial actions are likely to be at attenuating the reputational harms to the stricken firm. Commitments to such actions, particularly following a firm's transgressions or crisis involvement, may come off as insincere and calculating (Zavyalova et al., 2012) – amplified if the stricken firm has no known history of engaging in such virtuous acts. On the other hand, lesser perceived

transgressions attenuate the need for such ceremonial actions – rendering them to be perceived as more genuine. As the crisis takes on more of an external attribution, or the crisis cause is attributed to other firms in the industry, ceremonial actions have been found to be more effective at reducing the crisis-related reputational harms to the focal firm (Zavyalova et al., 2012). This is because stakeholders are less likely to question the motives behind the ceremonial actions if the focal firm is not deemed to be at fault for the crisis. Table 3 depicts a sample of ceremonial actions committed to by stricken firms.

Table 3. Sample of Ceremonial Action Announcements by Crisis Stricken Firms

Crisis	Technical Actions
Merck & Co. – Vioxx Crisis	Merck & Co., Inc., announced a new comprehensive prescription drug discount program today designed to benefit the more than 45 million uninsured in the United States. The Merck Prescription Discount Program, to be launched April 25, will provide all uninsured Americans, regardless of age or income, with easy and immediate access to discounts of 15 to 40 percent off many Merck medicines (Business Wire, 2005).
Chipotle Mexican Grill, Inc., E-Coli Outbreak	Chipotle Mexican Grill Inc. said it plans to set aside up to \$10 million to help local growers meet its new food safety standards, as the burrito chain outlined for its employees its efforts to recover from disease outbreaks tied to its food that have roiled its business (Jargon, 2016).
Wells Fargo Accounts Scandal	Wells Fargo announced that it will donate \$250,000 to support Unite Charlotte, a new community fund established in response to the recent unrest in Charlotte. The fund will be housed at United Way of Central Carolinas and will support programs and organizations focused on community healing, rebuilding trust and creating opportunities, including work being done by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Opportunity Task Force (Wells Fargo, 2016).

How then, would the media react to announcements of technical relative to ceremonial actions by stricken firms given that these actions differ in the degree to which they intend to address the crisis-related causing behavior? At a broader level, both technical and ceremonial actions serve to preserve favorable reputational assets about the firm following a crisis. For technical actions, this is done through reassuring stakeholders that a plan of rectification is in place, and a commitment to putting effort in preventing crisis recurrence (Coombs, 1995; Holladay, 2009). Benoit (1997) noted that corrective actions- the cornerstone of technical actions, have been found to have the strongest impact on a stricken firm's image. For ceremonial actions, effective attempts at the preservation of favorable reputational assets result from the narrative created after the stricken firm reminds the public of its positive traits. However, ceremonial actions may be perceived by some stakeholders to be the stricken firm's attempts at trivializing the crisis, propagating additional backlash (Benoit, 1997; Zavyalova et al., 2012).

Given the different aims of these categories of strategic actions, I anticipate that there will be significant differences in the sentiments about the stricken firms, in the media—differences that are dependent on the level of wrongdoing and appropriateness of either action within the crisis' context. In appreciation of the role of strategic actions in general and the differences between the types of strategic actions in particular, I offer the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: The tone of media coverage about a stricken firm will differ by the strategic action employed by the stricken firm.

The discussion now turns to the joint effects between strategic action and the crisis response strategy used by a stricken firm. This relationship is important to assess, given that SCCT argues for the viable selection of a crisis response strategy based on levels of perceived attribution and subsequent crisis responsibility (e.g. Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Elliot, 2010) and

impression management theories add to this discussion by explicating the additional impression management tactics that stricken firms engage in to reduce crisis-related reputational harms (e.g. Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Benoit, 1997).

The arguments made in the previous chapter drew attention to the differences in the messages supported by each of the crisis response categories- accommodative, reframing and defensive. To enhance the effectiveness of the crisis response strategies, the discussion turned to those strategic actions- technical and ceremonial, that stricken firms undertake to achieve these ends. An appropriate combination of these elements of crisis communication may play an important role in the survival of a stricken firm. Illustratively, when Theranos' massive fraud was exposed in 2015, the firm vehemently adopted a defensive strategy, arguing that there was no fault in its technology (Carreyrou, 2016). It acknowledged no crisis responsibility, nor did it adopt any form of corrective action. The ensuing public outcry and negative media coverage about the firm was immense. On the other hand, Wells Fargo adopted an accommodative strategy immediately following its 2016 unauthorized account opening scandal – apologizing to its stakeholders and clearly delineating the corrective measures it would take. Both firms suffered immeasurable harms to their reputation and credibility, but Wells Fargo is still in business and has lived to see another day. Despite the differences between these crises in the alignment of crisis response strategies and strategic actions, lessons in crisis management can still be derived from their comparison.

Accommodative strategies expectedly align with technical actions that address the cause of the crisis and offer corrective measures to prevent crisis recurrence. As aforementioned, the greater the transgression by the stricken firm, the more accommodative it is expected to be (Coombs, 1995; Coombs & Holladay, 1996) and the greater the expectations of its commitment

to corrective measures. Illustratively, corporate scandals, such as the Sandusky sexual abuse scandal at Pennsylvania State University had ripple effects on stakeholders, causing alumni to question their affiliation with the organization (Eury, Kreiner, Trevino & Giois, 2018). Further, the 2001 Enron scandal had ripple effects when its reach extended beyond the implicated top executives to Enron's auditors, investors, associates and the energy and financial industries (Adler, 2002). Consequently, scandal stricken firms are expected to attempt to win stakeholders' forgiveness, offer compensation to those impacted by the crisis, and take preventive measures to attenuate the likelihood of crisis recurrence (Bundy et al., 2017; Coombs, 1995). Evaluators of such crises expect that such firms will, at the very least – be accommodative in their responses and go above and beyond in undertaking corrective measures that will rectify such heightened levels of transgressions. Engaging in ceremonial actions would be a bonus towards furthering the narrative that the firm has not lost all of its credibility.

The same logic may be applied to reframing strategies which are largely deflective of crisis responsibility, where stricken firms neither deny nor accept crisis responsibility. Despite the deflective nature of reframing strategies, employing technical actions may signal that the firm is working towards preventing crisis recurrence, whereas employing ceremonial actions may amplify the favorable narratives about the firm's desirable values. As for defensive strategies that deny crisis responsibility, a complimentary logic applies. Zavyalova et al. (2012) found that ceremonial actions were more effective at restoring the positive perceptions of a stricken firm if it was involved in an externally attributed crisis such as those caused by competitors in the same industry. However, it may also be argued that technical actions may attenuate reputational harms even when defensive strategies have been used – given that corrective actions as a technical strategy can reduce the offensiveness surrounding the crisis (Benoit, 1997). Illustratively, in

2014 when Sony's networks was hacked by a group of attackers known as the Guardians of Peace- Sony employed a defensive strategy, presenting itself as a victim of the attackers and distancing itself from any crisis responsibility. However, in its statements, Sony went ahead and made announcements of technical actions –addressing the concise steps it would take to prevent any future cyber-attacks. Table 4 depicts cases coded for crisis response strategies and strategic action – embodying the different combinations that arose from the applications of these factors within the crisis management process.

Overall, both technical and ceremonial actions carry the benefits of attenuating crisis-related harms if used strategically in tandem with the appropriate crisis response strategy. The preceding discussion allows for the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5: The tone of media coverage about a stricken firm will differ by the joint effects of the firm's crisis response strategy and strategic action.

Table 4. Sample of Cases Coded By Crisis Response Strategies and Strategic Action

	Accommodative Strategies	Reframing Strategies	Defensive Strategies
Technical Actions	Target Corp. Data Breach Facebook Data Scandal Starbucks Racial Profiling Wells Fargo Accounts Scandal* United Airlines PR Crisis Coca Cola Belgian Crisis* Texaco Racial Crisis Jet Blue Logistics Crisis H&M Racial Controversy Maple Leaf Listeria Outbreak Peanut Corp. Of America Listeria Outbreak Foster Farms Salmonella Outbreak General Motors Ignition Switch Crisis Takata Corp. Airbag Crisis Volkswagen Emission Scandal Archdiocese Of Boston Sexual Abuse Scandal Chipotle E.coli Outbreak* Wells Fargo Insurance Accounts Scandal*	Equifax Data Breach Penn. State Uni. Sexual Abuse Scandal BP Texas City Explosion Johnson & Johnson Tylenol Crisis Union Carbide Bhopal Tragedy* Livestrong Foundation Drug Abuse Scandal Peregrine Systems Accounting Fraud Qwest Comm. Accounting Fraud Xerox Accounting Fraud Intel Pentium™ Chip Error Crisis Odwalla Inc. E.coli Outbreak* Adobe Systems Data Breach* Perrier Benzene Contamination Denny's Racial Bias Scandal America Airlines Flight 587 Crash* Boeing 737 Max Crisis* Mattel Lead Paint Crisis Toyota Gas Pedal Crisis Massey Energy- Upper Big Branch Explosion	Tyco International Accounting Fraud The Weinstein Co. Sexual Abuse Scandal Cendant Corp. Accounting Fraud WorldCom Accounting Fraud Global Crossing Accounting Scandal Sony PlayStation™ Network Breach CBS Sexual Abuse Scandal IKEA Chests And Dressers Crisis* BP Gulf Of Mexico Oil Spill Hudson Foods E.coli Outbreak Sony Network Breach (Guardians Of Peace) Pfizer – Bextra Crisis
Ceremonial Actions	Chipotle E.coli Outbreak* Wells Fargo Insurance Accounts Scandal* Wells Fargo Accounts Scandal*	Mattel Power Wheels™ Crisis Airlines Flight 587 Crash* Boeing 737 Max Crisis* Merck- Vioxx Crisis Adobe Systems Data Breach* Odwalla Inc. E.coli Outbreak* Union Carbide Bhopal Tragedy*	IKEA Chests And Dressers Crisis* Coca Cola Pesticide Crisis (India) Jack In The Box E.coli Outbreak Dow Corning Breast Implant Crisis Procter & Gamble Toxic Shock Syndrome Crisis

*Both technical and ceremonial actions

The Interaction between Strategic Actions and Crisis History

The theoretical model herein identifies 3 main key factors that affect the tone of media coverage about a stricken firm. Thus far, the relationship between crisis response strategies and crisis history on the tone of media coverage about a stricken firm have been discussed- as has the relationship between crisis response strategies and strategic action. However, the interactive effects between strategic action and crisis history must also be investigated for the following reasons.

According to SCCT, the degree of crisis responsibility attributed to an organization may be intensified by the stricken firm's crisis history given that the firm displays consistency in crisis involvement (Coombs, 2007). Illustratively, in late 2003, Boeing was involved in a major corporate scandal involving its procurement dealings with the Pentagon, negatively impacting Boeing's credibility and ethical stand, not to mention future Boeing-related government interactions (Lunsford & Squeo, 2003). Over the years, media coverage involving the firm reflected negative sentiments. In 2019, the company was yet again in the news when the Federal Aviation Administration temporarily grounded all Boeing 737 Max aircrafts in US territory due to product safety issues involving repeated fatal air crashes.

Although these crisis types are different, recurrent crisis involvement in general increases responsibility in subsequent crises since it may have been expected that Boeing should have tightened its overall organizational processes and systems to avoid any future transgressions, whether in the form of a scandal or a preventable product defect. Perceptions of greater crisis responsibility – in this case as a result of a history of crisis involvement, heightens perceptions of firm wrongdoing and attracts harsher evaluations from stakeholders (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Coombs, 2004; Gomulya & Mishina, 2017). Indeed, evidence of crisis history may call for the

heightened use of strategic actions – primarily technical actions due to their focus on rectifying the weaknesses within the workings of the stricken firm. I anticipate that such judgments will be reflected as differences in the tone of media coverage about a stricken firm.

Further, impression management tactics would call for heightened engagements in strategic action given that recurrent involvement in crises increases the reputational threats to the stricken firm's reputation (Coombs, 2007) and strategic actions serve to provide additional protective measures to attenuate these reputational harms. What then, would the outcome be on the tone of media coverage about a stricken firm if strategic action and crisis history was considered in tandem? Aligning these reasons with the previous discussions on the independent variable of interest herein, I hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 6: The tone of media coverage about a stricken firm will differ by the joint effects of the firm's strategic action and crisis history.

CHAPTER V. METHODS

The purpose of this dissertation is to contribute to the crisis management literature by investigating the degree to which crisis response strategies (accommodative, reframing and defensive), crisis history (first time offenders and repeat offenders) and strategic actions (ceremonial and technical) affect the tone of media coverage about a stricken firm by unearthing the main and interactive effects in these relationships. Guided by attribution theory, SCCT and discussions on organizational impression management tactics, I anticipated that the three crisis response categories would induce different sentiments by evaluators, and subsequent effects on the tone of media coverage about the firm. Further, the heightened crisis attribution and loss of credibility in subsequent crises as a result of crisis history (Coombs, 2007; Elliot, 2010) may promote negative judgments of the stricken firm - reflected in the tone of media coverage. In addition, I anticipated that strategic actions in the form of additional impression management tactics undertaken by stricken firms to minimize the loss of legitimacy (Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Suchman, 1995), mitigate further loss of favorable reputational assets (Chance et.al, 2015) and minimize the loss of social approval (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015) would also have an effect on the tone of media coverage about a stricken firm. Lastly, I anticipated combined effects on the tone of media coverage as a result of interactions among the three factors.

Research Design

A comparative case study approach was the most appropriate in performing a structured, focused comparison of these factors of interest within the context of multiple crises. Described by Creswell (2013) as a method through which real-life, multiple bounded systems are explored by detailed data collection from multiple sources, the comparative case study design has carried a myriad of benefits for this research. Importantly, it allowed for the study of the tone of media

coverage across multiple crisis contexts, without any manipulations. A realistic representation of the effects of crisis response strategies, crisis history and strategic action on the tone of media coverage was required to address the research questions posed in this dissertation, hence the suitability of this design. To investigate the aforementioned individual and joint effects of crisis response strategies, crisis history and strategic action on the tone of media coverage about a stricken firm, a series of two-way ANOVA and ANCOVAs were run. The subsequent sections describe the sample characteristics and case selection criteria, factors of interest and subsequent analyses.

Sample and Data Description

Case Selection

The approach used in this dissertation varied slightly from previous studies, given that cases included in this research vary in size, crisis attribution, and industry membership. Previous studies on crises and media coverage focused on a specific crisis type and industry (e.g. Chandler et al., 2020; Zavyalova et al., 2012), or a specific category of crisis response strategy (e.g. Coombs & Holladay, 2008). I adopted Marcus and Goodman's (1991) case selection strategy and identified high impact crises that were covered in case books and business reports. In addition, I searched Wall Street Journal's (WSJ) ProQuest database and general media outlets by using keywords including corporate misdeeds, corporate scandals, corporate bribery, corporate fraud, corporate greed, product harm, product recalls, product safety, product hazard, product defects, product crises, plant explosion, plane crash, data breach etc. As an illustration, an advanced search in WSJ ProQuest for 'corporate scandals', 'corporate misdeeds', 'corporate greed', or 'corporate transgressions' would yield results with an option to constrain the results by company or organization. This list would indicate potential cases for further assessment for

inclusion. Incidents were not included in this sample, given that they represent less severe violations (Coombs, 2004). Some firms may have been involved in lesser charge disruptions that are less salient and less of a major threat to stakeholder expectations. Such events are not likely to cause a major shock to, or extensively violate stakeholder's expectations.

To ascertain whether the potential cases were high impact or otherwise, I examined publicly available investigative reports, media reports, watched interviews by organizational officials and read commentaries on the crisis. Case inclusion criteria included the following: it must be *high impact*, and essentially impact the core of the organization, its values, and its credibility and even have a possible impact on the organization's continuation; it must be clearly aligned to one organization i.e. a *focal firm* must be identified within the crisis, and there must be sufficient analytical materials for the crisis. I identified 79 initial cases that were considered high impact for use in this research, of which further assessments called for the removal of 12 cases due to a lack of substantial impact contrary to the initial assessment. In the last phase of data cleaning, 4 cases were removed due to a lack of sufficient media coverage in the four leading business publications used to assess the tone of media coverage. This process resulted in 63 unique case studies for final assessment. The timelines for these cases ranged from Johnson & Johnson's cyanide poisonings of 1982 to Mattel's fatal Rock n' Play™ sleeper recall of 2019.

Variables

Tone of Media Coverage. This is the dependent variable and is conceptualized as the *relative prevalence of positive to negative content in the media coverage about a stricken firm* (Deephouse, 2000; Love, Lim & Bednar, 2017). Through positive and negative language, the media shapes the narrative about firms and influences perceptions about the firm (Chandler, et al., 2020; Deephouse, 2000; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Hamilton, 1995; Zavyalova et al., 2012).

For a crisis stricken firm, a positively toned narrative is of even greater importance as a buffer against negative evaluations by stakeholders. Media coverage was sourced from the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Financial Times and The Washington Post accessed via Nexis Uni and LSU ProQuest libraries - business publications considered opinion leaders that depict the general portrayal of an organization in the media (Bednar, 2012; Coombs, 1995).

I accessed the Wall Street Journal archive covering the crisis via the ProQuest Database, where I searched for newspaper articles using the stricken organization's name in the document title and inserting predetermined dates of interest. The same approach was employed for the Financial Times Historical Archive and Nexis Uni database used to extract articles for the New York Times and Washington Post. To ensure that the extracted articles were relevant, I employed the rules by Bednar (2012) and focused on articles that mentioned the stricken firm in the title. Exceptions were made if the stricken firm was included in the article's opening paragraph and the article gave primary coverage to the stricken organization. I also excluded articles that contained less than 50 words and those that mentioned more than four other organizations. Articles that did not substantially discuss the stricken firm, relative to other mentioned firms, were excluded.

The dates of interest for the media coverage of each case in the sample had been determined in the second phase of data cleaning. Detailed notes were made for all the cases – highlighting what events transpired leading to the crisis, ascertaining the actual dates of crisis occurrence, the firm's response and any pivotal subsequent event that would influence the trajectory of the tone of the media coverage about the firm. Such end events included the release of investigative reports about the actual cause of the crisis, levies of civil penalties against

stricken firms, bankruptcy declarations, settlement of class action suits, business closures etc. This search yielded 7,554 relevant articles covering the final 63 unique cases.

To measure the tone of media coverage, I used the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) text analysis software that is designed to determine the degree of negative or positive emotion words in an article (Bednar, 2012; Pennebaker, Booth & Francis, 2015; Zavyalova et al., 2012). All articles were formatted and prepared according to recommendations made by Pennebaker et al. (2015). LIWC contains predefined dictionaries with categories and sub dictionaries that cover various constructs. In order to minimize the confusion arising from coding the affective content of entire articles that may mention multiple other firms in the same article (Zavyalova et al., 2012), I adopted Bednar's (2012) approach and used articles that primarily addressed the stricken firms and did not mention more than four other firms as aforementioned. I used a single summary variable- the *tone* - that included both positive and negative emotion dimensions (Cohn, Mehl & Pennebaker, 2004). The higher the value, the more positive the content of the article.

Crisis Response Strategies. Denoted as *symbolic resources that managers employ to protect or repair their images* (Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Coombs, 1998; Huang, 2006) and the *set of coordinated communication actions used to influence evaluators crisis perceptions* (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015), crisis response strategies are reflected in the press release statements, interviews by representatives of stricken firms, and corporate policy statements directed at stakeholders and the public at large. Guided by the case notes that I generated in the earlier phase of the data collection, I used the dates of interest to search for media reports, press release statements from PR Newswire and company newsrooms where available, for initial messages to the public by the stricken firm. In some cases, I also used communication from CEOs to their

companies, to give further support to their use of a particular strategy. The focus on the initial crisis periods is pivotal to this research. From a theoretical perspective, this initial period is important given that a firm's initial response following a crisis is very influential in anchoring stakeholder evaluations and their first impressions, which in turn influences stakeholders' subsequent reception of the crisis-related messages from the organization (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Holladay, 2009). This focus also allows for conciseness and uniformity across the varied cases in this sample.

Following SCCT guidelines (e.g. Coombs, 1995; Coombs & Holladay, 2004) response strategies were coded according to the degree to which the stricken firm accepted or refuted crisis responsibility. In cases where the stricken firm acknowledged its causal role in the crisis and apologized for the crisis causing behavior, this response was coded as accommodative. Other forms of this response type included expressions of remorse, mortification, offers of remediation, repentance, pledges of rectification – generally seeking to evoke feelings of sympathy and understanding from stakeholders and the public. To the degree that the stricken firm distanced itself from crisis responsibility by either denying that the crisis exists, defying directives by regulatory bodies, scapegoating by shifting the blame to rogue employees or external entities, attacking or intimidating accusers, the response was coded as defensive. Responses were coded as reframing if the stricken firm neither denied nor accepted crisis responsibility – but engaged in making excuses, giving justifications of certain behaviors to change the attitude of the public towards these actions, and giving vague statements about what caused the crisis.

In cases where no clear press statements were extracted from PR Newswire, statements in news reports and interviews were used. It should be noted that there were instances when stricken firms did not show consistency in their crisis response strategy, especially at the onset of

the crisis. In such cases, the crisis response strategy was coded as the dominant narrative propagated by the stricken firm. Illustratively, if four out of five company representatives issued messages that were accommodative and one issued a message that was reframing, I coded such crises as having employed accommodative strategies. Each case had only one assignment of a crisis response strategy classification.

An issue that arose from the coding of these crisis response strategies was the challenge in ascertaining what precise differences there may be between statements that depicted expressions of remorse but were devoid of an acknowledgement of crisis responsibility, given that in some cases what would appear as accommodative to one evaluator may appear as reframing to another. To add to this complexity, such fine lines must be assessed within the entirety of the crisis of interest. To follow already established practices in content analysis methods and ascertain the degree of interrater reliability (Desai, 2011; Zavyalova et al., 2012), I randomly selected cases for recoding by a second, independent coder. 15 randomly selected cases were recoded for their crisis response strategies and Cohen's Kappa was run to determine the level of agreement between the two coders' judgements on whether the crisis stricken firms used accommodative, reframing or defensive strategies. The coders agreed on 14 out of the 15 randomly selected cases, with the second coder denoting the WorldCom's accounting scandal of 2001 as reframing rather than defensive as coded by the primary coder. Following the guidelines from Altman (1999), there was a very good level of agreement between the coders' judgments, Cohen's Kappa= 0.896.

Crisis History. All cases included in this sample have been coded as either first time offenders or repeat offenders. First time offender cases involve those organizations without evidence of a substantial history of crises, whereas repeat offenders have such a history. For a

case to be classified as a first time offender does not necessarily indicate that the firm has never been involved at all in a disruptive event in the past. Evidence of incidents- less severe and less serious violations (Coombs, 2004) were not coded as evidence of crisis history. As such, first time offenders may have been involved in incidents, but not high-impact crises. As for the repeat offender cases included in the sample, I code as such those firms that have been involved in salient and highly disruptive crises more than once. Further, this crisis history condition includes having past involvement in either similar or dissimilar trigger events. Illustratively, if a firm had a past involvement in an internally attributed crisis such as a corporate scandal and is currently involved in a technical-error product harm crisis, it would be coded as a repeat offender. In coding a case as either a first time offender or repeat offender, the label ‘offender’ emanates from 1) the crisis itself violating stakeholder expectations of normal business functioning and 2) the firm in some cases, being the primary offender within the crisis.

Strategic Firm Action. Denoted as either *technical* – those that address the causes of the crisis and draw attention to the internal processes of the stricken firm, or *ceremonial*- those have the potential to positively alter impressions about the firm and deflect stakeholder’s attention away from the causes of the crisis (Zavyalova et al., 2012), I examined press release statements from PR Newswire via Nexis Uni. Used by a myriad of studies (e.g. Carroll & McCombs, 2003, Kennedy, 2008; Marcus & Goodman, 1991) and as noted by Zavyalova et al. (2012), press releases are reports that firms themselves view as important and the media uses these reports as information sources about firm actions. Additional sources are relevant media reports, interviews, and company newsrooms. I constrained my examination of evidence of these actions to the period of interest following the crisis response statement date to the respective end date as

used in the analyses of the tone of media coverage- so as to ensure that the announcements were relevant to the timing of the crisis.

An examination of 4,161 disseminations allowed for the coding of these actions. I found that: 1) some firms did not have substantial evidence of either technical or ceremonial actions, 2) others had evidence of both strategic actions and 3) others had clearly delineated evidence of technical or ceremonial actions. Illustratively, no evidence of strategic action was found after Theranos' defensive strategy in its technology and investor fraud case. In a 2015 interview on CNBC's *Mad Money*, Theranos' CEO Elizabeth Holmes made it clear that the company's technology was sound, and called for no rectification, stating:

This is what happens when you work to change things. First they think you are crazy, then they fight you, and then all of a sudden you change the world.

(CNBC, 2015)

The Wells Fargo 2016 accounts scandal on the other hand, had evidence of both technical and ceremonial actions following its crisis response. The firm communicated a detailed plan of corrective actions following its investigative efforts and a series of engagements aimed at supporting healing and revitalization efforts in various American cities. Overall, I coded strategic actions as: 0=none, 1=technical, 2=ceremonial, 3=both technical and ceremonial.

Control Variables

Two variables were included to control for possible effects on the tone of media coverage about the stricken firm. Crisis attribution and prior organizational reputation and size which were collectively addressed under organizational ranking.

Crisis Attribution. It is possible that the tone of media coverage about a stricken firm may be impacted by the degree of crisis attribution accorded to the stricken firm, at the onset of a

crisis. Given that current crises are at the forefront of the news and draw a lot of attention, heightened emotions attached to perceptions of greater firm wrongdoing may sway the tone of media coverage about a firm (Chandler et al., 2020), rendering response strategies and strategic action less effective. To what degree this may occur, is unknown.

To sparse out effects of crisis attribution, I initially assessed each case based on Weiner's (1985) causal attribution dimensions in two phases. In appreciation of the high levels of crisis ambiguity at the onset of a crisis (Sellnow & Ulmer, 1995), I coded all the cases based on the background notes and supplementary information I collected. After a few weeks, I then recoded every case separately based on the likely perceived initial attribution of the case incorporating guidelines from Lange and Washburn's (2012) study. Only two cases were changed from the initial coding. Internally attributed crises – such as corporate scandals involving accounting fraud, racial discrimination, sexual abuse and consumer data misuse depicted an internal locus of causality and a moderate to high degree of controllability. Similarly, human-error product harms due to poor product designs, poor quality standards, unacceptable sanitary standards leading to outbreaks of food related illnesses, were also coded as internally attributed.

In cases where the press or the stricken firm itself concisely provided alternative causal agents or explanations for the crisis, such as information on whether the firm likely had the power to act to prevent the crisis, or whether the crisis was propagated by outside parties, meant that the degree of controllability by the stricken firm was low (Lange & Washburn, 2012). As such, cases that had external locus of causality, the perception of low controllability were coded as externally attributed.

Organizational Ranking. Previous research has shown that what is said about a firm in the media may also be influenced by a firm's prior reputational assets – with high reputations acting as a buffer following negative events (e.g. Love & Kraatz, 2009; Love, Lim & Bednar, 2017; Rindova, Williamson, Petkova & Sever, 2005; Zavyalova et al., 2012). Evaluators may have an elevated affinity toward those firms with higher social approvals in terms of their prior financial performance, such that they become hesitant to attribute crisis responsibility to such high ranking firms (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015). Love et al. (2017) measured firm reputation by assessing firms' scores in *Fortune's* "Most Admired Companies" survey. Companies included in this list may have more visibility and salience than companies that do not appear in it (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Love et al., 2017). Adopting this method would serve this research given that these rankings also capture firm size in terms of earnings. In essence, this variable of organizational ranking would control for the effects on the tone of media coverage brought about by organizational salience and size. To ascertain that all the case dates were covered, I added the Global 500 and Fortune 500 lists to the World Most Admired Companies (WMAC) list. For the years 1984-1997, Fortune only published a list of America's Most Admired Companies (AMAC). From 1997- 2009, it published two separate lists, that of AMAC and the then newly introduced World's Most Admired Companies (WMAC). From 2009-2019, WMAC included both lists comprehensively. This survey's results are published in February or March of the year after the actual survey was conducted. I used these lists to search for the crisis stricken firms in this sample. Where I found that the firm was listed, I coded that as (1), otherwise, (0).

CHAPTER VI. ANALYSES AND RESULTS

A series of two-way ANOVAs and ANCOVAs was conducted to explore the effects of crisis response strategies, crisis history and strategic action on the tone of media coverage about a crisis stricken organization as analyzed by the Linguistic Inquiry Word Count content analysis program. To begin with, main and interaction effects were tested for crisis response strategies (CRS) and crisis history (CH) on the tone of media coverage tested for hypotheses 1-3. Following this, interaction and main effects were tested for crisis response strategies (CRS) and strategic action (SA) on the tone of media coverage, testing for hypotheses 4 and 5. Lastly, interaction effects between crisis history and strategic action were tested on the tone of media coverage for hypothesis 6. Relevant simple effects were also reported.

ANOVA and ANCOVA Assumption Checks. Given the small sample size in each cell, a collective assessment of normality for distribution of the tone of media coverage, sufficed (Kutner et al., 2005). Shapiro-Wilk's test confirmed normality ($p=0.401$). Outliers were assessed by an inspection of a boxplot where two outliers were identified: the case on Mattel's Rock n' Play™ fatal product recall and the case on Archdiocese of Boston's sexual abuse scandal of 2002. It was determined that these two cases were representative of the effects of interest and would not affect the results of the tests given that normality was established and homogeneity of variances by Levene's test was insignificant for each run (see respective analyses under each model). Further, inclusion of these cases are theoretically supported given that they represent crises that have evoked highly emotional responses about the stricken firm, as reflected in the tone of media coverage.

Checks of the two covariates, organizational ranking and initial crisis attribution were conducted. Correlations between the two covariates had an $r = 0.219$, considered small (Cohen,

1988). As evident in Summary Table 5, assumptions of regression slopes were also not violated given a statistically insignificant interaction between crisis attribution and organizational ranking for the six different combinations of the independent factors included in the models. However, one combination out of the six (strategic action and organizational ranking), had a significant interaction at $p > 0.05$, $F(2, 56) = 5.377$, $p = 0.007$ showing a potential violation of this assumption. This would generally call for an alternative analytical approach- such as removing the covariate (organizational ranking) from the model. However, as aforementioned, the theoretical logic behind its inclusion in the model is justified given that firms ranked in these lists are listed according to size and financial performance and hence may be more salient relative to those stricken firms that are not included in these lists. (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Love et al., 2017). Estimation procedures were therefore not altered.

Table 5. Summary Values for the Test of Homogeneity of Regression Slopes (ANCOVA)

Source	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Crisis History * Crisis Attribution	1	116.329	1.006	0.320
Strategic Action * Crisis Attribution	3	97.905	0.814	0.492
Crisis response strategy * Crisis Attribution	2	199.177	1.816	0.172
Crisis History * Organizational Ranking	1	96.589	0.858	0.358
Strategic Action * Organizational Ranking	2	531.509	5.377	0.007
Crisis Response Strategy* Organizational Ranking	3	28.583	0.253	0.778

Model 1: Interaction and Main Effects of Crisis Response Strategies and Crisis History on the Tone of Media Coverage about a Stricken Firm.

A series of two-way between-groups ANOVAs and ANCOVAs were conducted to explore the impact of crisis response strategies and crisis history on the tone of media coverage about a crisis stricken firm as analyzed by the Linguistic Inquiry Word Count program. In the ANCOVA model, I controlled for the effects of crisis attribution and organizational ranking- two variables that may have an effect on what is said about a firm. The cases were divided into 6 groups as a 2 X 3 matrix, as earlier depicted in Table 1. Tables 6 and 7 compare and summarize the results of the analyses and estimated marginal means from ANOVA and ANCOVA models of tone of media coverage.

Table 6. Analyses of Variance and Covariance of the Tone of Media Coverage:
Effects of Crisis Response Strategies and Crisis History

ANOVA						ANCOVA				
Source	df	MS	F	Sig.	p. η^2	df	MS	F	Sig.	p. η^2
C.H	1	49.125	0.429	0.515	0.007	1	98.631	0.865	0.357	0.015
C.R.S	2	242.229	2.116	0.130	0.069	2	192.706	1.689	0.194	0.058
C.H*C.R.S	2	72.196	0.631	0.536	0.022	2	62.376	0.547	0.582	0.019
Error	57					55				

P ≤ 0.05

Table 7. Estimated Marginal Means from ANOVA and ANCOVA Models of Crisis Response Strategies and Crisis History on the Tone of Media Coverage

	ANOVA				ANCOVA			
F.T.O	Overall	Accomm.	Ref.	Def.	Overall	Accomm.	Ref.	Def.
Mean	33.695	31.890	33.922	35.272	33.963	32.464	33.997	35.428
s.e	1.632	2.968	2.522	2.968	1.640	3.004	2.539	2.968
n	44	13	18	13	44	13	18	13
R.O								
Mean	31.738	26.302	31.340	37.574	31.135	26.872	29.746	36.787
s.e	2.501	4.368	4.785	3.783	2.531	4.423	4.999	3.815
n	19	6	5	8	19	6	5	8
Mean	-1.957	-5.588	-2.582	2.302	-2.828	-5.592	-4.251	1.359
Difference								

$P \leq 0.05$

All tests were conducted at the 0.05 significance level. As aforementioned, preliminary checks were conducted to address assumptions of both ANOVA and ANCOVA with results reported prior to this section. Levene's of equal variances was insignificant for both models $p=0.604$ (ANOVA), $p=0.364$ (ANCOVA) passing assumption of equal variances test. Generally, interaction and main effects are described within the context of the interaction effect first. For example, in conditions where the interaction effect is significant, results would then be analyzed based on the simple effects to ascertain where the significance emanates from. Similarly, in cases where there is no interaction effect, the interpretation of main effects would then take precedence. However, for theoretical and progressive conciseness in these analyses, and to give a comprehensive and true presentation of these relationships, I follow the progression of the

hypotheses in the preceding chapters - and present the results of the main effects followed by the interaction effects. Simple effects were tested for all relevant relationships. In the discussion section, the results are discussed in their entirety.

As shown from the ANOVA model's results, the main effect of crisis response strategies on the tone of media coverage was insignificant, $F(2, 57) = 2.116, p=0.13$. The effect size, partial $\eta^2 = 0.069$, is the proportion of the total variance in the tone of media coverage attributable to the crisis response strategies when the effects of crisis history from the total nonerror variation is partialled out (Cohen, 1973; Pierce, Block & Aguinis, 2004; Richardson, 2011). The ANCOVA model depicted similar results even after controlling for initial crisis attribution and organizational ranking, $F(2, 55) = 1.689, p=0.194$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.058$. These non-significant results indicate a lack of support for Hypothesis 1- despite a medium effect size on the tone of media coverage about the stricken firm, the results do not support a significant main effect by crisis response strategies on the tone of media coverage

To test for hypothesis 2 - the main effect of crisis history on the tone of media coverage about a stricken firm, the ANOVA results – $F(1, 57) = 0.429, p=0.515$ was insignificant with a partial $\eta^2 = 0.007$ considered a small effect size (Pallant, 2013; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). The ANCOVA results, controlling for organizational ranking and initial crisis attribution – $F(1, 55) = 0.865, p=0.357$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.015$ was also insignificant for main effects of crisis history. These findings indicate that there was no statistically significant difference in the mean tone of media coverage about a stricken firm by crisis history. Hypothesis 2 was thus not supported. Controlling for initial crisis attribution and organizational ranking doubled the effect size of crisis history from partial η^2 0.007 to 0.015, both considered small (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

Figures 3 and 4 exhibited an interaction effect between crisis history and crisis response strategies. However, the interaction was insignificant for both ANOVA and ANCOVA models. ANOVA results of this interaction were $F(2, 57) = 0.631, p = 0.536$ and an effect size partial $\eta^2 = 0.022$. Controlling for organizational ranking and initial crisis attribution yielded similar outcomes as $F(2, 55) = 0.547, p = 0.582$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.019$. Both models indicate that there was no statistically significant interaction between crisis response strategies and crisis history- yielding a lack of support for hypothesis 3.

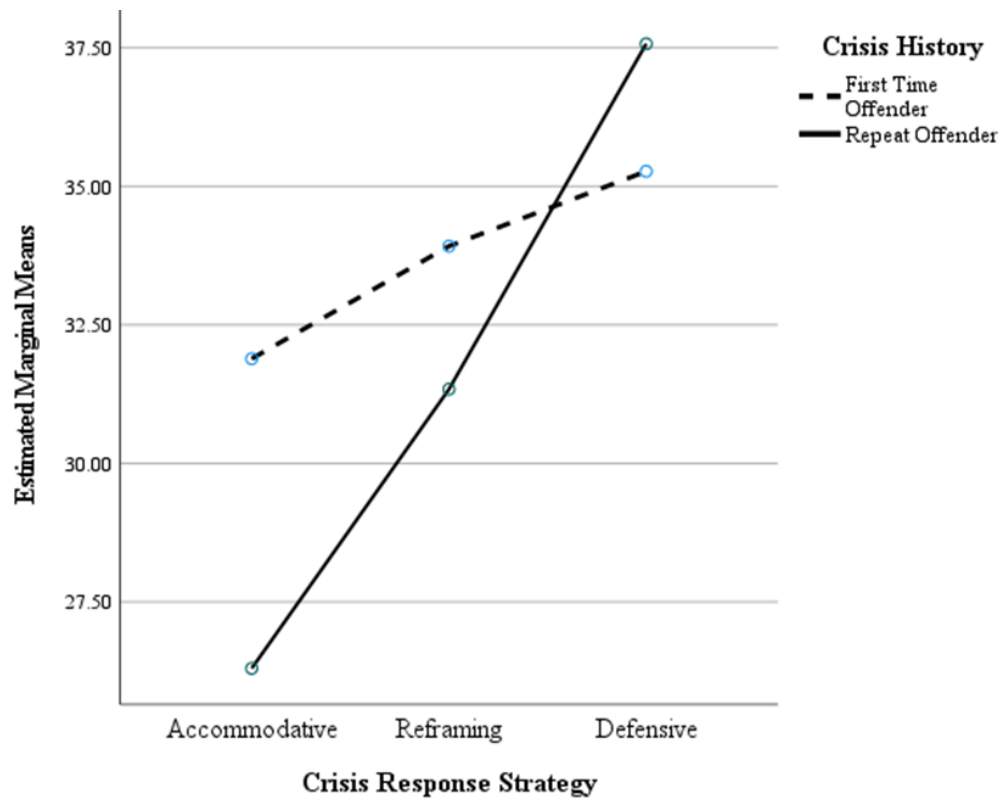


Figure 3. Estimated Marginal Means of the Tone of Media Coverage: Crisis Response Strategies and Crisis History (ANOVA)

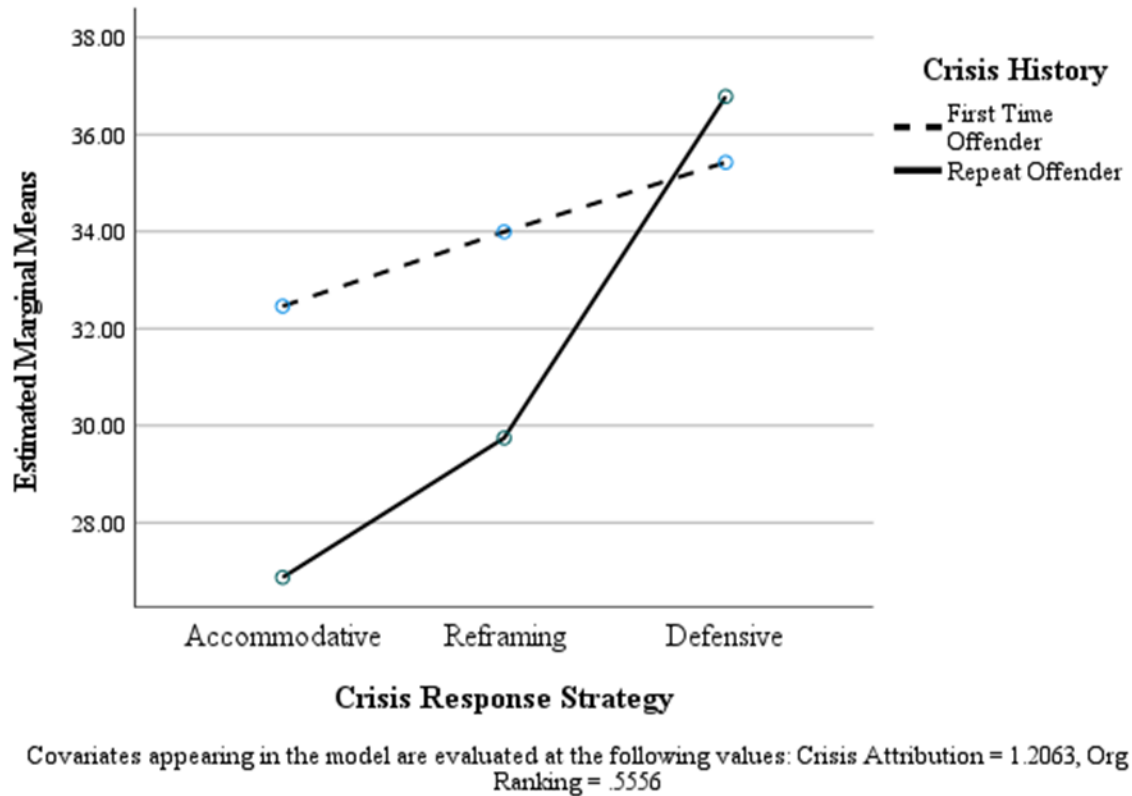


Figure 4. Estimated Marginal Means of the Tone of Media Coverage: Crisis Response Strategies and Crisis History (ANCOVA)

Despite the insignificant interaction between crisis response strategies and crisis history, an analysis of their simple effects was warranted so as to unearth the underlying patterns within this relationship. The examination of the simple effects of crisis response strategies, i.e. the effect that accommodative, reframing or defensive strategies have on the tone of media coverage in regard to first time or repeat offender firms, resulted in two simple effects for crisis response strategies at each level of crisis history. ANOVA results were $F(2, 57) = 0.330, p=0.720$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.011$ for first time offenders and $F(2, 57) = 1.934, p=0.154$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.064$ for repeat offenders. Both results were insignificant. Controlling for initial crisis attribution and organizational ranking in the ANCOVA model yielded similar results where $F(2, 55) = 0.249$,

$p=0.781$, partial $\eta^2=0.009$ for first time offenders and $F(2, 55) = 1.586$, $p=0.214$, partial $\eta^2=0.055$ for repeat offenders.

An analysis was also conducted for the simple effects of crisis history at each level of the crisis response strategy i.e. the effect that being either a first time offender or a repeat offender has on the tone of media coverage in regard to accommodative, reframing and defensive strategies. From this analysis, results for simple effects of crisis history on accommodative strategies were $F(1, 57) = 1.120$, $p=0.294$ with partial $\eta^2=0.019$, reframing $F(1, 57) = 0.228$, $p=0.635$ with partial $\eta^2=0.004$ and defensive $F(1, 57) = 0.229$, $p=0.634$ with partial $\eta^2=0.004$ were not significant. These indicate that none of the three simple main effects of crisis history in the ANOVA model were significant. The two way ANCOVA, controlling for organizational ranking and initial crisis attribution yielded the following results: $F(1, 55) = 1.121$, $p=0.294$ with partial $\eta^2=0.020$ on accommodative strategies, $F(1, 55) = 0.585$, $p=0.448$ with partial $\eta^2=0.011$ on reframing strategies, and lastly, $F(1, 55) = 0.079$, $p=0.780$ with partial $\eta^2=0.001$ for defensive strategies. Collectively, these results indicate that there are no significant differences in the tone of media coverage about a stricken firm as a result of the joint effects of the firm's crisis response strategy and its crisis history.

Additional Analyses: I ran pairwise comparisons, reported at 95% confidence intervals and p -values were corrected by Bonferroni method. As evident from the supplemental Table 8, none of the combinations of crisis response strategies and levels of crisis history were significantly different, showing insignificant simple effects of both crisis history and crisis response strategies at the different levels of either factor.

Table 8. Supplemental Analyses: Pairwise Comparisons for the Interaction between Crisis Response Strategies and Crisis History

Crisis Response Strategy	Crisis History		Mean	Sig.
			Difference	
Accommodative	First Time Offender	Repeat Offender	5.588	0.294
Reframing	First Time Offender	Repeat Offender	2.582	0.635
Defensive	First Time Offender	Repeat Offender	2.301	0.634

Based on estimated marginal means

a. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni

Model 2: Interaction and Main Effects of Crisis Response Strategies and Strategic Action on the Tone of Media Coverage about a Stricken Firm.

To test for the effects of interest in this model, I ran a two-way ANOVA and ANCOVA and as before, I controlled for the effects of crisis attribution and organizational ranking in the latter model. The cases listed in Table 4 were divided into 12 groups. However, the model in this case lacked observations for the combination of accommodative strategies and ceremonial actions. To address the issue of using Type II instead of Type III Sums of Squares (SS) in such unbalanced designs, both SS were run with no significant difference in the results, thus the default Type III SS were reported. Prior tests, checks and actions for assumptions of both ANOVA and ANCOVA were addressed and reported in the section prior to the analyses. Levene's test of equality of error variances was insignificant for the ANOVA model ($p=0.387$) and ($p=0.480$) for the ANCOVA model, confirming a non-violation of the assumption of homogeneity of variances. Summaries and comparison of results from both models are presented in Tables 9 and 10.

Table 9. Analyses of Variance and Covariance of the Tone of Media Coverage:
Effects of Crisis Response Strategies and Strategic Action

ANOVA						ANCOVA				
Source	<i>df</i>	MS	F	Sig.	p. η^2	<i>df</i>	MS	F	Sig.	p. η^2
S. A	3	53.620	0.455	0.715	0.026	3	59.936	0.522	0.669	0.030
C.R.S	2	149.494	1.268	0.290	0.046	2	167.996	1.462	0.242	0.055
C.R.S*S.A	5	73.231	0.621	0.684	0.056	5	87.745	0.764	0.58	0.071
Error	52					50				

P≤ 0.05

Table 10. Estimated Marginal Means from ANOVA and ANCOVA Models of Crisis Response Strategies and Strategic Action on the Tone of Media Coverage

	ANOVA					ANCOVA				
	Non			Both		Non			Both	
	Overall	Action.	Tech.	Cer.	T&C	Overall	Action.	Tech.	Cer.	T&C
Mean (A)	29.925	28.740	29.950	-	31.085	31.188	31.884	30.914	-	30.764
s.e	4.161	10.858	2.902		5.429	4.178	10.861	2.922	-	5.471
n	19	1	14	-	4	19	1	14		4
Mean (R)	30.783	22.630	35.414	33.070	32.018	30.301	24.375	35.449	31.594	29.787
s.e	3.061	7.678	2.902	7.678	4.856	3.066	7.913	2.890	7.779	5.029
n	23	2	14	2	5	23	2	14	2	5
Mean (D)	36.949	38.314	37.029	29.263	43.190	37.375	39.610	36.470	27.087	46.334
s.e	3.370	4.856	3.274	5.429	10.858	3.339	4.864	3.247	5.532	10.861
n	21	5	11	4	1	21	5	11	4	1

The ANOVA yielded an insignificant main effect of strategic action on the tone of media coverage, $F(3, 52) = 0.455, p=0.715$, with partial $\eta^2 = 0.026$ considered small (Pallant, 2013; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Controlling for initial crisis attribution and organizational ranking in the ANCOVA model resulted in $F(3, 50) = 0.522, p=0.669$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.030$. This indicates no significant differences in the tone of media coverage about the stricken firm by strategic actions. Hypothesis 4, testing for the main effects of strategic action on the tone of media coverage about the stricken firm, was not supported. The effect sizes in both models, testing for the main effect, were considered small indicating that strategic action accounted for 2.6- 3% of the variation in the tone of media coverage, excluding effects of crisis response strategies.

Hypothesis 5 addressed the interaction effect between strategic actions and crisis response strategies on the tone of media coverage about a stricken firm. The ANOVA results for interaction effect between strategic action and crisis response strategies, $F(5, 52) = 0.621, p=0.684$ with partial $\eta^2 = 0.056$, was not significant. The ANCOVA results- $F(5, 50) = 0.764, p=0.580$ with partial $\eta^2 = 0.071$ also indicated that there was no significant difference in mean tone of media coverage about the stricken firm as a result of the combined effects of crisis response strategies and strategic actions, even after controlling for initial crisis attribution and organizational ranking. Hypothesis 5 was not supported.

Additional Analyses: Although not explicitly stated in the theoretical framework, simple effect of crisis response strategies in the second model was run, to identify the presence of any statistically significant combinations as a result of crisis response strategies in this model. Results are similar to those of the simple effects of strategic actions, with insignificant values for non-action $F(2, 52) = 1.586, p=0.214$ with partial $\eta^2 = 0.058$, technical $F(2, 52) = 1.519$,

$p=0.228$ with partial $\eta^2=0.055$, ceremonial $F(1, 52)=0.164$, $p=0.687$ with partial $\eta^2=0.003$ and both technical and ceremonial announcements $F(2, 52)=0.521$, $p=0.597$ with partial $\eta^2=0.020$. All pairwise comparisons combinations were insignificant.

Further, a test for interaction contrasts resulted in three simple effects for strategic action at each level of the crisis response strategies. These tested for the effects that technical versus ceremonial actions had on the tone of media coverage if the stricken firm used accommodative, reframing and defensive strategies. ANOVA results were $F(2, 52)=0.026$, $p=0.975$, partial $\eta^2=0.001$ for accommodative strategies, $F(3, 52)=0.844$, $p=0.476$, partial $\eta^2=0.046$ for reframing strategies and $F(3, 52)=0.767$, $p=0.518$, partial $\eta^2=0.042$ for defensive strategies. The simple effects indicated a lack of significant mean differences as a result of strategic action for each type of crisis response strategy. Controlling for organizational ranking and initial crisis attribution in the ANCOVA model yielded similar results for the simple effects of strategic action where $F(2, 50)=0.004$, $p=0.996$, partial $\eta^2=0.000$ for accommodative strategies, $F(3, 50)=0.812$, $p=0.493$, partial $\eta^2=0.046$ for reframing strategies and $F(3, 50)=1.302$, $p=0.284$, partial $\eta^2=0.072$. These results indicate that there are no statistically significant differences in the adjusted mean of the tone of media coverage about a stricken firm as a result of strategic action on accommodative, reframing and defensive strategies. These results indicated that the interaction between crisis response strategies and strategic action, on the tone of media coverage about the firm, did not achieve statistical significance.

Model 3: Interaction Effects of Crisis History and Strategic Action on the Tone of Media Coverage about a Stricken Firm.

The last effect of interest in this study is that of the joint effect of crisis history and strategic action on the tone of media coverage about the stricken firm, stated as hypothesis 6. I ran a two-way ANOVA and ANCOVA to control for the possible effects of crisis attribution and organizational ranking as in prior analyses. Earlier data checks for an unbalanced model showed values were present in all cells, in the 2 by 4 model for combinations of both independent variables. Levene's test of equality of error variances was insignificant for the ANOVA model ($p=0.795$) and ($p=0.564$) for the ANCOVA model, confirming a non-violation of the assumption. The summary of results from both models are presented in Tables 11 and 12 below.

Table 11. Analyses of Variance and Covariance of the Tone of Media Coverage:
Effects of Crisis History and Strategic Action

ANOVA						ANCOVA				
Source	<i>df</i>	MS	F	Sig.	$p \cdot \eta^2$	<i>df</i>	MS	F	Sig.	$p \cdot \eta^2$
C.H	1	231.919	2.150	0.148	0.038	1	188.003	1.798	0.186	0.033
S.A	3	178.152	1.651	0.188	0.083	3	213.010	2.037	0.120	0.103
C.H*S.A	3	350.662	3.251	0.029	0.151	5	324.232	3.101	0.034	0.149
Error	55					53				

$P \leq 0.05$

Table 12. Estimated Marginal Means from ANOVA and ANCOVA Models of Crisis History and Strategic Action on the Tone of Media Coverage

	ANOVA					ANCOVA				
	Overall	Non Action	Tech.	Cer.	Both T&C	Overall	Non Action	Tech.	Cer.	Both T&C
FTO.										
Mean	32.141	29.316	35.38	31.52	32.35	31.855	31.206	35.98	29.57	30.66
s.e	2.059	3.926	1.963	5.193	4.645	2.032	4.047	1.957	5.275	4.655
n	44	7	28	4	5	44	7	28	4	5
RO										
Mean	38.063	60.360	30.16	28.56	33.18	37.280	59.320	29.26	27.52	33.02
s.e	3.475	10.386	3.132	7.344	4.645	3.520	10.352	3.129	7.409	4.575
n	19	1	11	2	5	19	1	11	2	5
Diff	5.922	31.044	-5.223	-2.97	0.832	5.425	28.114	-6.72	-2.06	2.361

As predicted, the interaction effect between strategic action and crisis history, $F(3, 55) = 3.251, p=0.029$ with partial $\eta^2 = 0.151$, considered large (Cohen, 1988; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013) - was significant as shown from the ANOVA analysis. Controlling for initial crisis attribution and organizational ranking yielded similar results, with the ANCOVA model's results as $F(3, 53) = 3.101, p=0.034$ with partial $\eta^2 = 0.149$, showing statistical significance. A comparison of means from both the ANCOVA and ANOVA models suggests that controlling for crisis attribution and organizational ranking causes a difference of almost 3 times in the tone of media coverage about stricken firms that use both technical and ceremonial actions (ANOVA = 0.832 relative to ANCOVA= 2.361). The effect of strategic action on the tone of media coverage

depends on whether the stricken firm is either a first time offender or a repeat offender. Figure 5 represents this disordinal interaction.

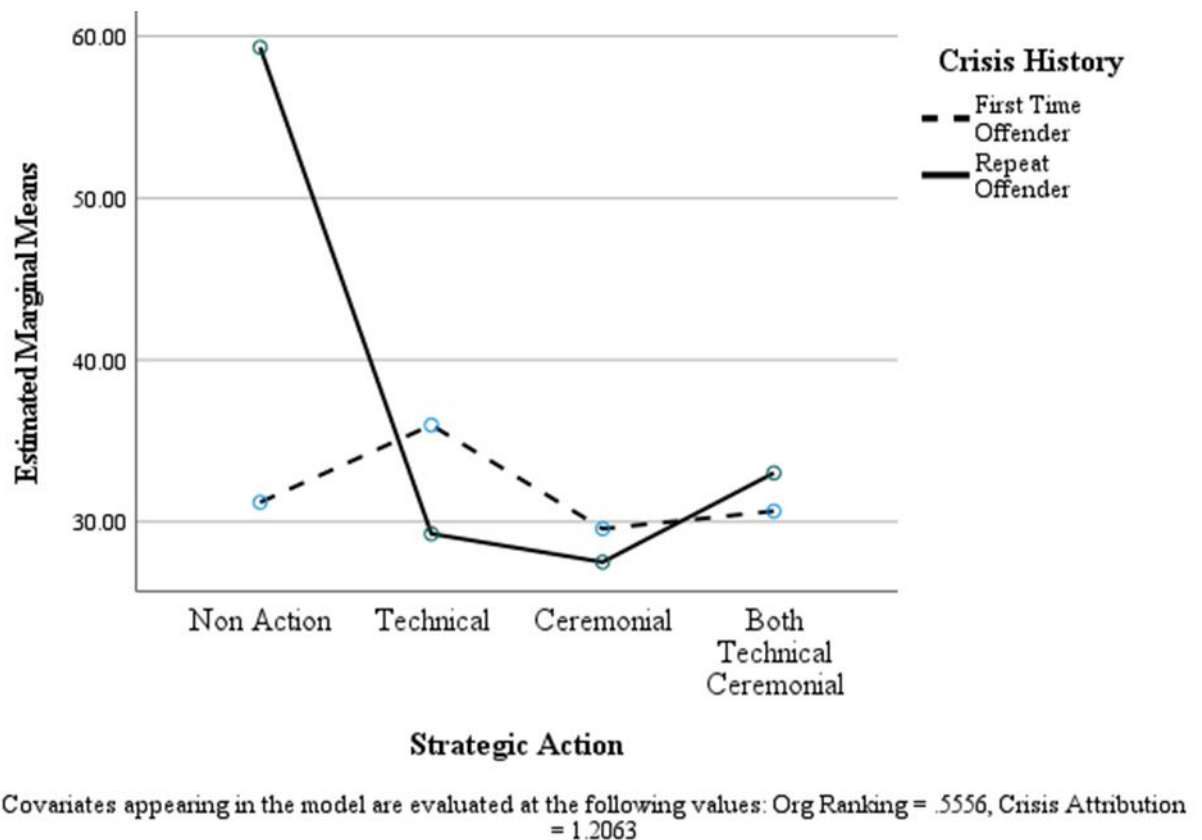


Figure 5. Estimated Marginal Means of the Tone of Media Coverage: Crisis History and Strategic Action

The significant interaction found in both ANOVA and ANCOVA models calls for the analyses of simple effects to ascertain the underlying mean differences of strategic actions at different levels of crisis history (first time offenders vs repeat offenders) in the significant interaction. A summary of the pairwise comparisons is in Table 13. The mean difference between two levels of crisis history, first time offenders relative to repeat offenders, is significant, $p=0.007$. The marginal mean of repeat offenders employing non action is almost double to that of first time offenders employing non-action (29.316 vs 60.360). This relationship,

denoted as $F(1, 55) = 7.817$ $p = 0.007$ with partial $\eta^2 = 0.124$ implies that non-action is more favorable for repeat offenders - is a peculiar find. As will be discussed, this result should be interpreted with caution given that the data cell of interest had minimal cases for analysis.

Table 13. Pairwise Comparisons for the Interaction between Crisis History and Strategic Action

Strategic Action	Strategic Action		Sig.
Non Action	First Time Offender	Repeat Offender	0.007
Technical	First Time Offender	Repeat Offender	0.163
Ceremonial	First Time Offender	Repeat Offender	0.743
Both Technical & Ceremonial	First Time Offender	Repeat Offender	0.900

Based on estimated marginal means

*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

b. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Least Significant Difference (equivalent to no adjustments).

The results of this research thus far showed no evidence of statistically significant main effects for crisis response strategies, strategic action and crisis history on the tone of media coverage about a stricken firm. Of greater implications is the limited evidence of statistically significant interaction effects for crisis response strategies with both strategic actions and crisis history, but the presence of a significant interaction effect between crisis history and strategic action. Further analysis of this relationship via pairwise comparisons showed that the significant effect emanated from the mean difference in declaration of non-action for repeat offenders, relative to the other strategic action categories. Additional inspection of this effect may be a reflection of one of the inherent limitations of a multiple case study research design, with an unbalanced ANOVA/ANCOVA matrix. The following chapter presents a discussion of these findings at greater lengths, offers implications for crisis management theories and practice,

presents limitations of this study and highlights subsequent directions for future research. However, before proceeding, a brief address of the effect sizes in these analyses is warranted.

Effect Size Evaluation

In reporting the effect size of each of the factors in their respective models herein, it should be noted the statistical program used in the analyses herein is SPSS, which by default reports the partial eta squared which differs from the traditional eta squared. According to Levine and Hullett (2002) SPSS help menu denotes eta squared as the *proportion of the total variability in the dependent variable that is accounted for by the variation in the independent variable*- the ratio of the between groups sum of squares to the total sum of squares. This is computed from the ANOVA summary table as:

$$\text{Traditional } \eta^2 = \text{SS factor} / \text{SS corrected total}$$

Reporting the effect size as the traditional eta squared is not problematic in simpler, one factor designs, given that the magnitude of the effects on the tone of media coverage as the dependent variable herein would have been only attributable to one factor, equaling R^2 . However, scholars (e.g. Levine & Hullett, 2002; Pierce, Block & Aguinis, 2004) have brought attention to studies that have misreported effect sizes given that earlier versions of statistical programs such as SPSS labeled Partial η^2 as the traditional η^2 . Partial η^2 denotes the *variance attributed to a specific factor plus error, excluding variance attributed to other factors in the model* (Pierce et al., 2004). This measure is not additive, unlike the traditional η^2 . The Partial η^2 can be computed from the ANOVA summary table as:

$$\text{Partial } \eta^2 = \text{SS factor} / (\text{SS factor} + \text{SS error})$$

Following recommendations by Levine and Hullett (2002) in making sure that the partial η^2 is not overestimated relative to the eta squared, while at the same time minimizing bias by the latter in designs of small sample sizes, I also hand calculated the effect sizes (eta squared) in the ANOVA and ANCOVA models, using the corrected totals within the respective model. This additional step was crucial in objectively comparing effect sizes between the factors studied given that minimal guidelines are provided to describe the strength of the different values of partial η^2 . Using the formula $\eta^2 = \text{SS factor} / \text{SS corrected total}$, the results follow:

Main effect of Crisis Response Strategies = $484.459/7068.927 = 0.0685$

Main effect of Crisis History = $49.125/7068.927 = 0.00694$

Interaction effect of Crisis History and Crisis Response Strategies= $144.392/7068.927 = 0.0204$

Main effect of Strategic Action = $160.859/7068.927 = 0.022755$

Interaction effect of Strategic Action and Crisis Response Strategies= $366.155/7068.927 = 0.05179$

Interaction effect of Crisis History and Strategic Action= $1051.985/7068.927 = 0.14881$

The calculation of the traditional η^2 shows that in these analyses, the partial eta squared and the traditional eta squared are consistent, indicating that the reporting issues found in more complex models as discussed by Levine and Hullett (2002) is not present in these analyses. As such, the implications and reporting of the effect sizes may now be discussed with greater confidence in the following chapter.

CHAPTER VII. DISCUSSION

In this dissertation, I sought to investigate the joint and direct effects of crisis response strategies, crisis history and strategic action on the tone of media coverage about a stricken firm. The arguments made herein were guided by the tenets of attribution theory (Weiner, 1985) and SCCT theory (Coombs, 1995; Coombs & Holladay, 2006; Elliot, 2010; Fediuk et al., 2010) – where the former is concerned with people’s general need to search for the causes of events such as crises and the subsequent assignment of crisis attribution to stricken firms or their environments. The latter compliments the former, and is concerned with how crisis stricken firms select the most appropriate response strategies that offer the greatest protection to the firm’s reputational assets and ultimately restore pre-crisis order (Coombs, 2007). SCCT suggests that the selection of crisis response strategies should align with the levels of crisis attribution accorded to the stricken firms (Coombs, 2007). Generally, greater perceptions of organizational wrongdoing and crisis responsibility call for accommodative strategies, whereas lesser perceived organizational transgressions call for defensive strategies (Coombs, 1995; Marcus & Goodman, 1991). These crisis response strategies differ in their core message and in the sentiments they elicit from message recipients and evaluators such as stakeholders and the public.

In tandem with the set of coordinated communication actions used to influence evaluators’ crisis perceptions (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015), stricken firms employ either ceremonial or technical actions (Zavyalova et al., 2012), all in a bid to influence what is said about the firm and attenuate crisis-related reputational harm. However, evaluators’ judgments about stricken firms may also be influenced by the stricken firm’s past crisis involvement (Coombs, 2004; Coombs & Holladay, 1996). Collectively, the effects of these factors on the stricken firm’s crisis management efforts will be reflected in the tone of media coverage about the stricken firm,

denoted as the *relative prevalence of positive to negative content in the media coverage about the stricken firm* (Deephouse, 2000; Love, Lim & Bednar, 2017). In this dissertation, I anticipated that crisis response strategies, crisis history and strategic actions will have significantly different joint and individual effects on the tone of media coverage about a stricken firm.

The results of this dissertation have been somewhat surprising, raising interesting questions paramount for crisis management research, given the number of statistically insignificant effects found herein. However, suggestions have been made that reporting and fully discussing the magnitude of effects, in addition to significance levels, is paramount in understanding the relationships studied (e.g. Levine & Hullett, 2002; Preacher & Kelley, 2011).

In assessing the main, simple and interactive effects of crisis response strategies and crisis history on the tone of media coverage, model 1 yielded surprising results given the theoretical and empirical arguments made for the role of these factors within the literature (e.g. Bednar, 2012; Coombs, 2004; Deephouse, 2000). Unexpectedly, both the interaction effect and the main effects of both crisis response strategies and crisis history were insignificant, implying that in this model, the effect of either variable is similar to its counterpart's effect on the tone of media coverage about the stricken firm despite contradictory indications by the profile plots of the estimated marginal means. Reporting multiple effects sizes may generate a greater understanding of these effects, as recommended by Preacher and Kelley (2011). An assessment of the magnitude of these effects on the tone of media coverage about the stricken firm indicates that the magnitude of the effect of crisis response strategies was greater than that of crisis history, in both ANOVA and ANCOVA models, with partial eta squared values of 0.069 and 0.007, and 0.058 and 0.015 respectively. This finding implies that when crises occur, the degree

to which the stricken firm acknowledges its causal role in the crisis is more impactful in influencing the trajectory of the tone of media coverage to a greater degree than an acknowledgement of the stricken firm's past crisis involvement.

This finding directly supports earlier arguments made regarding the pivotal role of crisis response strategies. As Holladay (2009) noted, crises create exigencies that demand for the dissemination of rapid information regarding the crisis. In most cases, evaluators immediately turn to the stricken firm for explanations and details about what has occurred- given that attribution theory suggests that people are driven by the need to ascertain why certain events occur, or why entities fail or succeed (Weiner, 1985). Crisis response strategies contain information that may fulfill the informational desires by evaluators – even if partially, as evidenced in certain crises. Evaluators get to hear – directly from the stricken firm- about what has happened and who is responsible for the crisis. Resultantly, the form and content of crisis responses, particularly at the onset of a crisis characterized by a lack of sufficient information for evaluators plays a pivotal role in shaping subsequent perceptions (Arpan & Pompper, 2003; Coombs, 1995; Holladay, 2009). It is therefore not surprising that crisis response strategies are the most impactful, relative to considerations of crisis history or employment of strategic actions- given that they are the primary tools with which stricken firms can shape their own narratives as regards the crisis (Arpan & Pompper, 2003). What a firm says and does immediately following a crisis, specifically the degree to which it acknowledges its causal role in the crisis, is indeed pivotal in shaping the trajectory of subsequent crisis management efforts.

A number of explanations may account for the statistically insignificant main effect for crisis response strategies on the tone of media coverage, even after controlling for current crisis attribution and organizational ranking. To begin with, previous studies on the effectiveness of

crisis response strategies such as Marcus and Goodman's (1991) study found that a stricken firm's investors will respond more favorably to accommodative and defensive strategies for scandals and accidents respectively if the strategy aligned with investor interests. Their focus on investor reactions attenuates the 'noise' that may arise from the opinions of other stakeholders, an aspect that was not factored into the model herein. Assessing the degree to which crisis response strategies are directed at a specific stakeholder group was not factored into the analyses herein given that the very nature of media coverage is that it contains messages disseminated to multiple evaluator groups simultaneously.

Further, the complexities of each level of the crisis response strategies may have contributed to the statistically insignificant results. Not all defensive, reframing and accommodative strategies are created equal. This insignificant finding may highlight the need to study each crisis response category within its different sub-levels. Illustratively, accommodative strategies such as offers of compensation, issuing of apologies, and expressions of sympathy differ to the degree in which they express remorse and offer corrective actions (Coombs & Holladay, 2008). Illustratively, the infamous United Airlines dragging of a passenger off of an overbooked plane in 2017 was followed by a social media statement issued by the firm's CEO in which he apologized for the overbooking, but not the inhumane manner in which the passenger was dragged off the plane. This may have attenuated the sincerity of the second apology issued by the firm in which they eventually apologized for the poor treatment of the passenger. Coombs and Holladay (2008) compared the various effects of different facets of accommodative strategies and found that in less serious crises, non-victims reacted favorably to offers of compensation relative to concise apologies which were required by the primary victims of the crisis.

Similarly, stricken firms may experience a lowered effectiveness in their apologies due to a delay in their acceptance of crisis responsibility (Sellnow et al., 1998). As Holladay (2009) suggested, crisis managers must respond to crises as early as possible following the trigger event, so as to establish a strong presence with the media and elevate their influence in how the narrative progresses or risk facing an obstruction in favorably influencing what is said about them in the media. Ideally, the true effects of each of the facets of the categories of crisis response strategies should likely be assessed separately, with a consideration of those factors that may weaken or strengthen the response strategy. Grouping crisis response strategies collectively even within the appropriate category may have contributed to the insignificant finding.

Examining the effects of crisis history yielded results that may, on one hand, support Elliot's (2010) study of extraorganizational and intraorganizational crisis history, implying that crisis history may matter less than suggested. Extending this notion, I suggest that perhaps, the impact of intraorganizational crisis history as studied herein may become pivotal but under certain conditions. One such condition may include cases where past and current *crisis similarity* is considered. When past and current crises exhibit high degrees of similarity, stricken firms may be faced with an additional violation of the expectations of organizational learning, as exemplified when an entity has prior experience in an undertaking. The concept of organizational learning following a crisis highlights growth opportunities for stricken organizations, where they may be able to generate new competitive capabilities relative to their counterparts (James, Wooten & Dushek, 2011) or rectify crisis-related weakness and minimize the prospects of crisis recurrence as a result of their crisis-related experience. Studies found that organizations with prior disaster-related experiences were less likely to find themselves involved in similar disasters in future – indicative of organizational learning from past experiences (e.g. Haunschild &

Sullivan, 2002; Madsen, 2009). Firms that violate such additional expectations by stakeholders likely face greater levels of scrutiny, lowered social approval, and intensified negative judgments. It is bad enough for a stricken firm to appear in the news for crisis involvement, let alone for repeated involvement in similar crises. Violations of this expectation to learn may heighten the relevancy of crisis history in shaping the perceptions of stricken firms in current crises – perceptions that may be reflected in the tone of media coverage about the stricken firm. Not controlling for such effects may have impacted the true effects of crisis history as measured herein.

Crisis history may also matter less if the severity of a current crisis is considered. A current crisis may be so severe in its impact that stakeholders are unable to exhibit leniency in their judgements towards the stricken firm, even if the stricken firm lacks evidence of past crisis involvement. Illustratively, the infamous Theranos scandal coded herein as a first time offender, was so impactful, heavily costing investors and employees, that any leniency by evaluators towards the firm was unlikely. A repeated involvement in more severe crises will raise more alarm bells and accord of greater crisis attribution and responsibility to the stricken firm, in current crises.

Additionally, crisis history may become less attended to by stakeholders if a long period of time elapses between the past and current crisis, causing the dynamics of the past crisis to be more moved from what is currently happening. If a long period of time has passed between the crises, the negative emotions elicited by the past crisis may not be as heightened, unless the past crisis was quite severe, speaking to the aforementioned argument. Illustratively, in this analysis, the automaker Volkswagen was coded as a repeat offender in its emissions scandal case of 2015. This is because in 1973, the company had been involved in a similar crisis where the firm failed

to properly disclose the installation of emission defeat devices in some of its vehicles. It should be remembered that the 1973 crisis may have had a lesser impact at the time given that the Environmental Protection Agency had been established only 3 years prior, and a lack of adherence to its guidelines by a major company such as Volkswagen, had not yet been witnessed. Compare this to another stricken firm such as Wells Fargo, also coded as a repeat offender because of its fraudulent accounts scandal of 2016 coupled with its insurance accounts scandal of 2017. One case had a difference of 42 years between the past and current crisis, whereas the other had a difference of only a year. Perhaps, a stricken firm with a very long period of time in between crises may be perceived as a first time offender and given ‘credit’ by evaluators for minimal crisis involvement for 42 years. Overall, further analyses on the impact of time lapses between crises on current crisis management efforts is indeed warranted.

The additional analyses as reflected in Table 8 displays pairwise comparisons for simple effects among the three levels of crisis response strategies and two levels of crisis history shows that the largest mean differences were between first time offenders relative to repeat offenders who employed accommodative strategies. Accommodative strategies yielded a much more favorable marginal mean in the tone of media coverage for first time offenders relative to repeat offenders –aligning with the arguments by SCCT theorists, that subsequent crisis involvement yielded higher perceptions of crisis responsibility (Coombs, 2004; Coombs & Holladay, 1996), and such subsequent responsibility may attenuate the favorable effect of accommodative strategies. First time offenders may experience a greater degree of leniency in regard to evaluator’s judgments about their causal role in the crisis, particularly because they have not yet developed a reputation of crisis involvement. According to Coombs (2004), a history of past crises would lead to stronger perceptions of crisis responsibility in subsequent crises. Indeed,

repeat offenders may experience the velcro effect (Coombs & Holladay, 2006), where they are judged based on their prior crisis involvement. In essence, although first time offenders do suffer reputational harms and diminished credibility in internally attributed current crises, their lack of repetitive crisis involvement accords them the perception that their current quagmire may be an isolated event. The tone of media coverage about first time offenders may therefore be more favorable when accommodative strategies are employed, given the leniency they are likely to receive relative to their counterparts.

The results also indicate that crisis response strategies have the largest effect on conditions where the firm is a repeat offender, given the larger effect size of simple effects of crisis response strategies on the two levels of stricken firms. This may imply that the aforementioned constraints of the velcro effect (Coombs & Holladay, 2006) create conditions where crisis-related messages coming from the repeat offender firm are scrutinized to a greater degree, relative to their counterparts. Indeed, although the effects of crisis history did not achieve statistical significance, there is something to be said about these complementary results that indicate interactive effects of crisis history and crisis response strategies.

An important outcome that should be underscored is that of the effects of strategic actions on the tone of media coverage, when considered in tandem with crisis response strategies. First, that under conditions of accommodative strategies, a combination of both technical actions and ceremonial actions yield a higher mean of tone of media coverage. This implies that a combination of accommodative strategies and technical actions may not strongly influence evaluator's sentiments given that this combination is almost expected by evaluators. When a firm acknowledges its causal role in a crisis, evaluators expect that the firm will offer corrective

measures (Coombs, 1995). However, engaging in additional ceremonial actions may serve as an additional lever with which stricken firms may influence favorable perceptions about themselves.

Second, under conditions where stricken firms use reframing strategies, the largest effect on the tone of media coverage within that condition was seen to emanate from the use of technical strategic actions by such firms. Indeed, committing to corrective action and rectification of internal system processes (Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 1995), may act as a buffer to the harsh judgments that may result from stricken firms not having a clear stand on whether or not they are responsible for the crisis- a feature of reframing strategies.

Third, under conditions where the stricken firm uses defensive strategies, employing a combination of both technical and ceremonial strategies resulted in the most favorable tone of media coverage. This implies that when crisis stricken firms use defensive strategies, a combination of these strategic actions may reduce not only the offensiveness of the defensive strategy in some cases, but they can reduce negative sentiments by evaluators by indicating that although the firm refutes blame for the crisis, it still committed to technical actions in addition to ceremonial actions . Given that accommodative responses may be costly (Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Coombs & Holladay, 2008; Marcus & Goodman, 1991), stricken firms may deny their causal role in the crisis but still employ technical and ceremonial actions that will contribute towards their image protection. Such a case would be IKEA's 2016 dressers crisis where the company denied any wrongdoing, while simultaneously engaging in corrective measures and donating to foundations supporting vulnerable communities' children's rights to play. However, this does not apply in those conditions where the defensive strategy involves refuting the very existence of the crisis, as in the case of Theranos' investor and technology fraud. The degree to which the latter refuted the existence of any problem constrained the applicability of any

corrective measures or ceremonial actions. Comprehensively, stricken firms should at the very least communicate their commitment to corrective actions.

Lastly, the interaction between strategic action and crisis history was significant, in these analyses, essentially indicating that the effect of strategic actions on the tone of media coverage about the stricken firm depends on the category of crisis history. More specifically, upon further analyses for simple effects, the results showed that the significance emanated from the mean differences in the tone of media coverage between repeat offender firms and first time offender firms employing non-action. However, the constraints associated with identifying ample high impact cases for inclusion into the model for analysis resulted in an unbalanced two way ANOVA, with the data cell of interest having minimal cases for analysis. To find support calling for a more favorable tone of media coverage for those stricken firms considered repeat offenders that do not clearly communicate strategic actions may be attributed to the unbalanced ANOVA and ANCOVA model. The cell of interest was populated by only one case, given that the third model established a 2 by 4 matrix. For the analysis to compute an average meant that it would only be able to compare the single case to itself. Although the finding of an interaction has theoretical backing, to make a case for this particular aspect of the simple effects would require a much larger sample size and a model of much higher statistical power.

Theoretical Contributions

Despite the statistically insignificant findings that were incongruent with prevalent research, I acknowledged that significance testing must be accompanied by effect size reporting so as to support a heightened understanding of the relationships under study herein. As such, this dissertation contributes to the research on crisis management- expanding SCCT and supporting impression management theories in a number of ways. First, this dissertation extends research

that has examined crisis response strategies and their effectiveness (e.g. Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Marcus & Goodman, 1991) by suggesting that crisis response strategies- particularly the degree to which a stricken firm acknowledges its causal role in the crisis- has a stronger effect on influencing the tone of media coverage about the stricken firm, relative to its crisis history or its employment of tactful strategic action. Crisis response strategies directly speak to evaluator's desire for information that can allow them to make sense of the crisis particularly at its onset. These response strategies attend to a pivotal question that evaluators seek to address – what happened and who is to blame for the crisis? A stricken firm's purposeful communication efforts at the onset of a crisis can influence the trajectory and subsequent effectiveness of crisis management efforts as the crisis unfolds because it anchors evaluator's perceptions about the firm to a greater degree than the firm's crisis history or strategic actions.

Of course, the stronger effect of crisis response strategies relative to crisis history and strategic action does not imply that the latter factors are non-pivotal in crisis management efforts and impression management. Directly addressing impression management research that highlights the actions taken by stricken firms to maintain their legitimacy and minimize reputational harms in the face of a crisis (e.g. Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Caillouet, 1991 Zavyalova et al., 2012) the analyses herein indicate that employing technical actions has a favorable effect at influencing what is said about the stricken firm, relative to ceremonial actions.

Indeed, the effects of technical actions in the use of reframing strategies suggests that when stricken firms are ambiguous about their causal role in the crisis, a commitment to technical actions may serve as a buffer and deterrent against evaluator's harsh judgements. In certain cases, crisis stricken firms may avoid apologies and acknowledgement of fault because acceptance of fault may attract lawsuits and invite costly repercussions to the stricken firm

(Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Coombs & Holladay, 2008; Marcus & Goodman, 1991). However, victims and evaluators may be expecting such accommodative strategies, without which harsh judgments would follow. Stricken firms may be aware of this, but in order to protect themselves from the likely cost associated with accommodative strategies, employ reframing strategies instead and commit to corrective actions that will address the crisis. The same logic applies to stricken firms that employ defensive strategies. The most favorable tone of media coverage resulted in those conditions where stricken firms were defensive in their response but employed both technical and ceremonial actions to attenuate reputational harms. This finding aligns with Marcus and Goodman's (1991) study where they found that shareholders react more favorably to defensive strategies if the defensive strategies supported the firm's reputation of profitability i.e. aligned with shareholder interests in regard to value creation. At the very least, stricken firms should emphasize their commitment to technical actions. An even better option is to employ both technical and ceremonial actions so as to attenuate reputational harms following a crisis - regardless of crisis responsibility and response strategy used. This implication contributes to both crisis and impression management discussions.

Despite the important indications of the different effect sizes herein, the statistically insignificant mean differences may imply a number of things, impacting crisis communication theories. Given that these strategies represent coordinated communication efforts by stricken firms (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015) aimed at protecting or repairing stricken firm's images (Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Coombs, 1998; Huang, 2006), the results of the analyses suggest that at a general level, they achieve the desired ends albeit in different ways. This finding runs contrary to the research that favors more accommodative strategies relative to defensive strategies (e.g. Sellnow et al., 1998), it may imply that other categories may be equally or more effective at

attenuating the reputational harms caused by a crisis, only if they are used strategically with the crisis context in mind. These strategies may lead to similar outcomes given that it is plausible that they were each appropriate in their respective contexts.

In summary, the key theoretical contributions made by this study are that: 1) a stricken firm's crisis response strategy, particularly the extent to which the firm takes responsibility for the crisis, has a greater influence on the sentiments made about the firm relative to an acknowledgement of its crisis history or its employment of tactful strategic actions, and 2) at the very least, stricken firms should emphasize their commitment to technical actions, with greater benefits accrued from employing a combination of both technical and ceremonial actions. These theoretical implications contribute to the crisis communication literature by underscoring the importance of crisis response strategies relative to crisis history and strategic action, indicating that crisis history may become relevant only under certain conditions, whereas strategic actions are complementary to the actual crisis response strategy. The degree to which a stricken firm acknowledges its causal role in the crisis occurrence has a greater effect on influencing evaluator's subsequent behavior, as reflected in the sentiments about the stricken firm in the media.

Practical Implications

The stronger effect on the tone of media coverage by crisis response strategies relative to strategic actions and crisis history suggests to crisis managers that they should direct their immediate crisis-related resources towards establishing and employing the most effective and appropriate response strategy given that they may be better served to focus on how effective they are at handling the current crisis rather than determining ways in which they can minimize the firm's perceived connections to its past crises. This is not to say that stricken firms should ignore

their crisis-related past. Rather, they may be better off investing their crucial management efforts in changing the standard with which they are evaluated, particularly if they are repeat offenders. By strategically focusing their resources into what they say and do as relates to the current crisis they are facing, stricken firms will be better placed to alter the standard with which they have previously been judged. An effectively managed *current* crisis has the potential to be the new standard with which these stricken firms will be judged moving forward.

In addition, this research emphasized the importance of technical strategic actions that communicate commitment to corrective actions, relative to ceremonial actions which seek to direct evaluator's attention away from the causes of the crisis, by attempting to positively alter impressions about the stricken firm (Zavyalova et al., 2012). Crisis managers may be better placed in their efforts towards influencing evaluator's perceptions if they exhibit high degrees of commitment to more technical actions- with instructing and adjusting information that allow evaluators and victims to cope with the harms of the crisis. For firms that completely avoid crisis responsibility, perhaps due to legal ramifications, crisis managers in such contexts may seek to apply both ceremonial and technical actions given that the firm can reap the reputation-protecting benefits of both types of strategic actions. Ceremonial actions must be employed strategically, in particular contexts so as not to fail in their quest (Zavyalova et al., 2012).

Limitations

An immediate limitation of this research is the strict inclusion criteria used in sampling. The criteria for case inclusion was that the case must be a high impact crisis that had the potential to impact the core workings of the stricken organization. As a result, a substantial number of cases were dropped in the second phase of data cleaning and note making, further constraining the sample size. Consequently, the power of the significance tests were minimized,

reducing the probability of actually ascertaining significant differences in the tone of media coverage by the different factors. The issue of sample size and subsequent limited power of significance tests may be countered by an inclusion of high impact crisis cases in a broader context such as within the international business context, given that the complexities of the international business environment present ripe conditions for crisis occurrence and recurrence particularly for multinational corporations constrained by the opposing demands of operating in multiple foreign countries.

A second limitation was the constraint emanating from the strict focus on the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Washington Post and Financial Times – publications considered opinion leaders (Bednar, 2012; Love et al., 2017). These reputable publications are deemed to be representative of the frame with which the stricken firm is actually represented across various media outlets. However, these publications may be somewhat biased towards covering large organizations, primarily within the corporate realm. Illustratively, a high profile crisis such as the mismanagement of the first Ebola case in America by the Texas Presbyterian Hospital in Dallas had to be withdrawn from the sample due to a lack of sufficient media coverage in these publications for the period of interest. Expanding the breadth of article sources may add insights into the tone of media coverage by incorporating opinion pieces and articles from a wider variety of credible news sources.

A third limitation faced in this dissertation was the use of complex crisis cases, which extensively differed from one another in their characteristics. Crises are inherently unique and involve a myriad of complex factors, such that attempting to compare them objectively may yield challenges. Certain factors may have been very relevant in some crises, and less so in others, such as crisis similarity which mattered in both cases involving Wells Fargo, and time

considerations between past and current crises, relevant in the cases involving Volkswagen. Different facets of crisis history may have mattered in certain crisis scenarios more than others, but such effects may have been attenuated within the model. Extant research (e.g. Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Coombs, 2004; Elliot, 2010) employed less complex approaches, by investigating each of these factors separately in different contexts, not within the same model. Ways in which to incorporate these additional factors must be considered in order to counter this limitation.

Future Research

Additional empirical support regarding the effects and applications of crisis response strategies is still warranted, particularly a more structured comparison within the types of accommodative, reframing and defensive strategies. Comparing accommodative, reframing and defensive strategies may in some cases, be akin to comparing apples to oranges to pineapples. If these crisis responses carry different messages but in general have similar outcomes in regard to what is said about the stricken firm, how then should underlying differences be unearthed? An area for exploration would be to assess the relative effects of examples under each category, within the larger scheme of crisis conditions. Illustratively, under what conditions would defensive strategies such as scapegoating, intimidation, and attacks be more effective at attenuating reputational harms to stricken firms? What of the relative effectiveness of accommodative strategies such as expressions of remorse and sympathy, and offers of compensation, within the various facets of crisis history? Such comparisons may give theoretical insights in less complex models, with a consideration of crisis history and strategic action that will give a more comprehensive view of these crisis management efforts.

An important aspect not captured by this dissertation was the effects of crisis *message inconsistency* as a crisis unfolds. Previous research highlighted the importance of crisis message consistency (Coombs, 1995; Holladay, 2009), suggesting that consistent messages not only signal that the stricken firm is in control of the current predicament and crisis management efforts, but also commands an understanding of the problems surrounding the crisis. Comparisons of crisis message consistency across multiple contexts of crises may unearth how different approaches allow stricken firms to recover from a crisis. Illustratively, in this sample, when Foster Farms was struck by a massive salmonella outbreak that affected hundreds of customers, its initial actions depicted a defensive stance via a reluctance to issue a recall, denying that any problem existed. Later on, the firm apologized, showing an inconsistency in the crisis message and likely making the subsequent response less effective in attenuating reputational damage. The same goes for BP's initial stance of blaming its drilling contractors for the massive oil spill in 2010, attenuating the effectiveness of subsequent apologies. Future research should make assessments of these effects over longitudinal studies across multiple crisis contexts.

Additionally, this study highlights the need to assess the effects of crisis history on current crisis management efforts, with a consideration of *crisis similarity* between past and current crises which were beyond the scope of this dissertation. Crisis recurrence has become rife, as evidenced by the uncertain and dynamic environments within which organizations exist. To what degree does crisis similarity in past and current crises matter? More importantly, to what degree should evaluators consider the stricken firm's crisis history, and crisis similarity when assessing the credibility of the firm's current messages? As Gomulya and Mishina (2017) asked – should stakeholders continue to rely on what stricken firms say after violations of

expectations? Future research should assess the degree, if any, to which a similarity between past and current crises within the condition of crisis history attenuates the credibility of current crisis messages and effectiveness of crisis management efforts.

Lastly, future studies interested in the impact of crisis history in crisis management should consider the impact of time between crisis occurrences. Indeed, not all conditions of crisis history are created equal, and future research should assess whether short or lengthy time lapses between crises impact the evaluative perceptions regarding stricken firms. This directly assesses the moderating effect of time between past and current crises on the relationship between crisis history and current crisis responsibility. Wells Fargo's 2016 and 2017 scandals were so close in occurrence, that there could be spillover effects of the past crisis on current crises- some may even suggest that it was essentially the same crisis: when does one end and when does one start? These questions are worth highlighting. Contrarily, during Volkswagen's 2015 emission's scandal, reminders of its 1973 scandal may not have been as impactful as intended by journalists, given that 42 years had passed and thus a weaker association prevailed. Despite these immense differences, both cases were included in the model as repeat offenders. The impact of time should be assessed with a consideration of the appropriate response strategies that may align with the heightened or diminished crisis responsibility, if any. There is still much work to be done in regard to better understanding the effects of crisis history in current crises management efforts.

CHAPTER VIII. CONCLUSION

In sum, the results of this dissertation indicate that when faced by a crisis, the degree to which the stricken firm acknowledges its causal role in the crisis has a greater effect on what is said about the firm, relative to the stricken firm's strategic actions and evaluator's consideration of its crisis history. Attribution theory suggests that evaluators' causal judgments guides subsequent behavior (Weiner, 1972), aligning with the indication that the heightened need by evaluators to favorably tilt informational asymmetries and fill informational vacuums following a crisis may be met to a great degree by the crisis-related messages broadcasted by the stricken firm. The pivotal role of crisis response strategies, and the need for their strategic and accurate execution cannot be underscored enough.

Considered in tandem with crisis response strategies, the results of this dissertation support the impression management discussions concerned with the use of strategic actions (e.g. Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Benoit & Brinson, 1994) given that they complement a stricken firm's primary crisis-related message by enforcing certain images about the stricken firm. At the very least, stricken firms should heighten their commitments to technical actions, regardless of the crisis response strategy they select to employ. Using both technical and ceremonial actions, strategically, will have even greater benefits for stricken firms in their quest towards restoring pre-crisis normalcy, protecting their reputational assets and favorably influencing evaluators' perceptions.

In closing, a reminder must be made that the lack of statistical significance in many of the effects investigated herein does not imply a lack of the existence of such effects. Optimal sample sizes may be required to ascertain the true nature of these relationships and effects. Indeed, there

is still much left to be known about the true effects of crisis history on perceptions of crisis attribution in subsequent crises, and in particular, on what is said about the stricken firm following a crisis. In investigating the main and joint effects of crisis response strategies, strategic action and crisis history on the tone of media coverage about a stricken firm, this dissertation addressed some pivotal queries in crisis management research, but brought forth even more questions that should be addressed in future research engagements. Elements that were not captured herein, such as the effects of crisis severity, time lapses between crisis occurrences, and the relevance of past and current crisis similarity should be incorporated into future models so as to support more viable recommendations towards more effective crisis management efforts.

APPENDIX A. SAMPLE CODING OF CRISIS RESPONSE STRATEGIES

Case	Press Release	Code Category
Starbucks Racial Profiling	Dear Starbucks Partners and Customers: By now, you may be aware of a disheartening situation in one of our Philadelphia-area stores this past Thursday that led to a reprehensible outcome. I'm writing this evening to convey three things: First, to once again express our deepest apologies to the two men who were arrested with a goal of doing whatever we can to make things right . Second, to let you know of our plans to investigate the pertinent facts and make any necessary changes to our practices that would help prevent such an occurrence from ever happening again. And third, to reassure you that Starbucks stands firmly against discrimination or racial profiling. In the coming days, I will be joining our regional vice president, Camille Hymes—who is on the ground in Philadelphia—to speak with partners, customers and community leaders as well as law enforcement. Most importantly, I hope to meet personally with the two men who were arrested to offer a face-to-face apology . To our partners who proudly wear the green apron and to customers who come to us for a sense of community every day: You can and should expect more from us. We will learn from this and be better . Respectfully, Kevin Johnson- CEO (author's emphasis; John, 2018).	ACC
Imperial Sugar Co. Explosion	"We are all concerned for the welfare of our associates and our thoughts and prayers are with them and their families this evening. We are grateful for the superb response by the local emergency agencies to this tragic event . Currently, we are focusing our efforts on working with authorities on the continued rescue efforts, providing all available support to those receiving medical attention as well as the families of those coworkers who have been affected. We are in communications with our customers and suppliers about the ongoing operations at our Gramercy Louisiana refinery, and appreciate their patience and understanding ." John Sheptor, Imperial's President and CEO (author's emphasis; Business Wire, 2008).	REF
Mattel Rock 'N Play™ Sleeper Crisis	"A child fatality is an unimaginable tragedy. For almost 90 years, Fisher-Price has made the safety of children our highest priority. In recent days, questions have been raised about the Fisher-Price Rock 'n Play Sleeper. We stand by the safety of our products. However, due to reported incidents in which the product was used contrary to the safety warnings and instructions , we have decided to conduct a voluntary recall of the Rock 'n Play Sleeper in partnership with the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Fisher-Price has a long, proud tradition of prioritizing safety as our mission . We at Fisher-Price want parents around the world to know that we have every intention of continuing that tradition. -Chuck Scothorn, GM Fisher-Price (author's emphasis; Mattel, 2019).	DEF

APPENDIX B. COMPARISON OF EFFECT SIZES

Hypothesis	Effect of Interest	Partial η^2 ANOVA	Partial η^2 ANCOVA	Calculated η^2
Model 1				
1	Main Effect: CRS	6.9%	5.8%	6.85%
2	Main Effects: CH	0.7%	1.5%	0.694%
	Simple Effects: CRS			
	On FTO	1.1%	0.9%	1.1%
	On RO	6.4%	5.5%	6.4%
	Simple Effects: CH			
	On Accommodative Strategies	1.9%	2%	1.9%
	On Reframing Strategies	0.4%	1.1%	0.4%
	On Defensive Strategies	0.4%	0.1%	0.4%
3	Interaction Effects: CRS*CH	2.2%	1.9%	2.04%
Model 2				
4	Main Effects: SA	2.6%	3%	2.275%
	Simple Effects: SA			
	On Accommodative Strategies	0.1%	0%	0.1%
	On Reframing Strategies	4.6%	4.6%	4.6%
	On Defensive Strategies	4.2%	7.2%	4.2%
5	Interaction Effect: CRS*SA	5.6%	7.1%	5.179%
Model 3				
6	Interaction Effect: SA *CH	15.1%	14.9%	14.881%

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VITA

Habiba Nefisa Alambo was born and raised in Nairobi, Kenya where she attended the United States International University- Africa, and earned her Bachelor's degree in International Business Administration, in 2009. She then worked in Nairobi for a few years, for organizations such as the United States Agency for International Development- Kenya and Custody & Registrars Group, within research and administrative capacities respectively. In tandem with her father's immense encouragement and her zeal to learn more about the inner workings of multinational corporations past the Bachelor's level, she found herself making applications to join Masters programs in the USA- where she was sure to learn more about these corporations alongside students from very diverse backgrounds and cultures. In December of 2013, she attained her Master's degree in Business Administration from Illinois State University. At this time in her journey, she was no longer motivated by the prospects of applying the knowledge from her Master's program to more challenging managerial positions in Kenya. Instead, her interaction with her professors at Illinois State University had made her realize that there was still more to learn about why and how organizations do what they do. Coupled with her intense love for cats and the belief that one day she would get to hug Mike the Tiger – a larger version of her ginger house cat- she decided to pursue a doctoral degree in Management at LSU. Hoping to make a positive impact in her country by applying what she learnt in the US, she aims to return to Kenya upon her graduation.