HOW PUBLICS IN THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA RESPOND TO CRISIS COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES VIA SOCIAL MEDIA: A CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARATIVE STUDY

by

ZIFEI CHEN

(Under the Direction of Bryan H. Reber)

ABSTRACT

A two by four factorial experiment was conducted to test the effects of crisis response strategy (apology, compensation, excuse, and excuse plus ingratiation) and social cultural context (the United States and China) via social media on the publics' evaluation of organizational reputation, negative word-of-mouth intention, and negative online crisis reaction intention in a corporate accident crisis event. Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) provided the theoretical framework for this study. Results indicated that mortification strategies were more effective than non-mortification strategies on the evaluation of organizational reputation, and apology generated less negative word-of-mouth intention than excuse, but different strategies had no effect on negative online crisis reaction intention. Moreover, the public in China had significantly higher negative online crisis reaction intention than the public in the United States across all strategies.

INDEX WORDS: Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), Crisis Communication, Crisis Response Strategy, United States, China, Social Media

HOW PUBLICS IN THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA RESPOND TO CRISIS COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES VIA SOCIAL MEDIA: A CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARATIVE STUDY

by

ZIFEI CHEN

B.A., Zhejiang University, China, 2011

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2013

HOW PUBLICS IN THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA RESPOND TO CRISIS COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES VIA SOCIAL MEDIA: A CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARATIVE STUDY

by

ZIFEI CHEN

Major Professor:	Bryan H. Reber
Committee:	Lynne M. Sallot
	Juan Meng

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
August 2013

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved parents, Qiaoyu Chen and Yan Ni, and my grandparents, Zhicheng Ni and Cuihua Cao, who are living over 7,000 miles away from here and will not be able to attend my graduation ceremony due to the distance. They are constantly proud of me and have always been supportive of what I do, no matter whether I am in Mainland China, Hong Kong, the United States, or anywhere else in the world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my major professor, Dr. Bryan H. Reber, without whose support I could never have written this thesis. He offered me so much of his time and knowledge. In fact, Dr. Reber has provided me constant encouragement and support throughout my two-year experience in the Grady College. I have grown a lot intellectually and am now a better researcher. Thank you, Dr. Reber.

I also could not have written this thesis without the help of my committee members, Dr. Lynne M. Sallot and Dr. Juan Meng, from whom I gained insightful suggestions and comments. I am so blessed to have these knowledgeable professors on my committee. I tremendously thank them for their support.

I would also like to express my special thanks to my undergraduate professor Dr. Weiping Xiong and my friend Ms. Mingfei Sun, who offered me full support and enormous help for my data collection in China.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Page

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Crisis communication is a fully embraced topic in the field of public relations (Avery, Lariscy, Kim, & Kocke, 2010). Numerous studies have been conducted to test the effectiveness of crisis communication, and two primary streams of research have been the focus: Benoit's image restoration theory (Benoit, 1995, 1997) and Coombs' situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 1995) (Avery et al., 2010). In recent years, attention has been given to the role social media play in crisis communication. However, most of the studies focus on the application of social media rather than incorporating it into theoretical models. Furthermore, the application of social media into crisis communication models has not yet been studied in different social cultural contexts.

The purpose of this study is to examine and compare how publics in the United States and China respond to different crisis communication strategies proposed by Coombs in the situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 1995; Coombs, 2012) via social media in a corporate crisis event. Through the examination of two identical scenarios in the United States and China, this study aims to explore how different crisis response strategies perform in different social cultural contexts.

Specifically, this study answered the following two sets of research questions:

RQ1: What are the public's (a) evaluation of organizational reputation, (b) negative word-of-mouth intention and (c) negative online crisis reaction intention in response to different crisis communication strategies via social media?

RQ2: What are the similarities and differences between the public's (a) evaluation of organizational reputation, (b) negative word-of-mouth intention and (c) negative online crisis reaction intention in response to different crisis communication strategies via social media in the United States and China?

By answering these two research questions, this study aims to help increase understanding of the effects of crisis response strategy in different social cultural contexts and the use of social media during corporate crisis events both in the United States and in China.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Crisis Management and Social Media Defined

A crisis is "the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization's performance and generate negative outcomes" (Coombs, 2012, p. 2). Crisis management "seeks to prevent or lessen the negative outcomes of a crisis and thereby protect the organization, stakeholders, and industry from harm" (Coombs, 2012, p. 5). It is an ongoing process and consists of four steps: prevention, preparation, response, and revision (Coombs, 2012). This study primarily focused on the crisis response stage.

Social media is a collection of online communication channels/tools and have five characteristics: participation, openness, conversation, communities, and connectedness. Interactivity is the key factor connecting the five characteristics (Coombs, 2012, p. 21). Social media consist of various categories including social networks, blogs, wikis, podcasts, forums, content communities, microblogs, aggregators and social bookmarking (Coombs, 2012, p. 24). This study chose microblogs (Twitter in the U.S. and Weibo in China) as the representative social media channels to test.

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

Situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) is considered the dominant paradigm in crisis communication research along with the image restoration theory (Avery et al., 2010). Based on a variety of variables including crisis type, evidence, damage, victim status, and performance history, it tests how different crisis situations affect crisis response strategy and how

those response strategies affect outcomes such as the audience's judgment of the organization's reputation, secondary crisis communication, and reactions (Coombs, 1995, 2007; Schultz, Utz, & Goeritz, 2011).

Sorted by the external/internal and unintentional/intentional dimension, crises can be categorized into four types: faux pas (external/unintentional), accidents (internal/unintentional), terrorism (external/intentional) and transgressions (internal/intentional) (See Figure 2.1) (Coombs, 1995, p. 455).

TABLE 2.1: Crisis Type Matrix (Coombs, 1995)

	UNINTENTIONAL	INTENTIONAL
EXTERNAL	Faux Pas	Terrorism
INTERNAL	Accidents	Transgressions

In SCCT, different crisis response strategies should be tailored for different crisis types. Those strategies can be categorized into four postures: denial, diminishment, rebuilding and bolstering (Coombs, 2012). The denial posture includes the strategies of attacking the accuser, denial, and scapegoating (Coombs, 2012). The diminishing posture includes excusing and justification (Coombs, 2012). The rebuilding posture includes compensation and apology, and the bolstering posture consists of reminding, ingratiation, and victimage (Coombs, 2012).

Various empirical studies have been conducted to test the effectiveness of SCCT for different types of organizations. For example, Sheldon and Sallot (2009) used Coombs' crisis

response standards theory to test effects of communication strategy and performance history in a political faux pas. Sisco (2012) used SCCT as the theoretical framework and examined its applicability for nonprofit organizations in crisis. For corporate organizations, Claeys, Cauberghe, and Vyncke (2010) tested the impact of matches between crisis types and crisis response strategies and the moderating effects of locus of control.

Crisis communication research has indicated that mortification strategies such as apology, sympathy and compensation would lead to perception of higher reputation and less anger and negative word-of-mouth than an information-only condition (Coombs, 1999; Coombs & Holladay, 2008), whereas an organization's denial of its crisis responsibility would lead to a more negative impression of organizational reputation (Lee, 2004). Compared with corrective action, bolstering, mortification, and separation, blame-shifting would lead to more negative reactions (Coombs & Schmidt, 2000). This therefore leads to the first two sets of hypotheses:

H1: Mortification strategies (apology and compensation) will generate (a) more positive evaluation of organizational reputation, (b) less negative word-of-mouth intention and (c) less negative online crisis reaction intention than non-mortification strategies (excuse and ingratiation).

H2: Excuse combined with ingratiation will generate (a) more positive evaluation of organizational reputation, (b) less negative word-of-mouth intention and (c) less negative online crisis reaction intention than excuse alone.

Social Media and Crisis Communication

Crisis communication today is more complicated than ever before with the development of social media channels (Coombs, 2012). However, social media are being incorporated more in practice than in research (Coombs, 2008). Most studies of social media in crisis communication

mainly focus on describing how they are being used in crisis communication, and aim to provide guidelines for practice.

Champoux, Durgree, and McGlynn (2012) studied the case of Nestlé's Facebook fan page attack and generated seven steps for businesses to reduce the complication of a Facebook social media crisis. Similarly, Veil, Sellow, and Petrun (2011) probed the case of Domino's response to the paradoxical challenge of its hoax crisis on YouTube and suggested that responding to hoaxes through the same medium in which they were distributed could help the company to directly counter the hoax message. Through the examination of the seven basic elements of communication plans (situation analysis, objectives, audience, strategy, tactics, timing and budget), Gonzalez-Herrero and Smith (2010) analyzed how professional communicators need to adapt their crisis communication plans. In a literature review, Veil, Buehner, and Palenchar (2011) provided 11 guidelines and recommendations on how to incorporate social media in risk and crisis communication.

Although many organizations are integrating the Internet and social media into their crisis responses (Taylor & Perry, 2005), there is a lack of theoretical framework in incorporating social media into crisis communication. The only theoretical model found so far is the social-mediated crisis communication (SMCC) model, in which the connections among publics (social media creators, social media followers, and social media inactives), organizations, media content (traditional media and social media), and crisis information source (from the organization and from a third party) are explained (Liu, Austin, & Jin, 2011). Five factors are taken into consideration in the given organization in a given crisis: crisis origin, crisis type, infrastructure, message strategy, and message form (Liu et al., 2011).

Research gaps exist when it comes to the impact of different media types on crisis communication (Coombs & Holladay, 2009). The gaps become even more prominent as social media is emerging as the channels that are frequently used in crisis communication. To fill the research gap of the impact of different media types on the effects of crisis communication strategies, Schultz et al. (2011) analyzed the combined effects of communication strategy and media on the organization's reputation, audience's secondary crisis communication and reactions.

Crisis communication strategies need to be cultivated according to crisis type, evidence, damage made, victim status, and organizational performance history (Coombs, 1995). The results of Shultz et al.'s (2011) study indicate that the media type plays a more important role than message strategy in reputation, secondary crisis communication and reactions. Social media tend to be more effective than traditional media during crisis communication (Utz, Schultz, & Glocka, 2013). Social media allow organizations to respond in a timelier manner when crises occur than traditional media, and the openness of social media platforms also makes it possible to conduct two-way communications. Therefore, it is valuable to probe how the public would react to different crisis response strategies sent via social media, leading to this research question:

RQ1: What are the public's (a) evaluation of organizational reputation, (b) negative word-of-mouth intention and (c) negative online crisis reaction intention in response to different crisis communication strategies via social media?

Corporate Crisis Communication in the Chinese Context

Most crisis communication research has been conducted in Western social cultural contexts. Little research was found regarding corporate crisis communication in the Chinese context, among which even fewer studies tested the SCCT in China.

In a qualitative study, Liu, Chang, and Zhao (2009) found that Chinese executives tend to focus on the external constituencies as the cause of organizational crisis and equate crisis management with reaction to adverse circumstances. In an investigation of actual experiences of handling crises among managers in Taiwan's top-500 companies, Huang, Lin, and Su (2005) suggested that a specification-ambiguity continuum should be placed in a two-continuum matrix along with the defense-accommodation continuum. From an audience-centered approach, Lee (2004) studied Hong Kong consumers' evaluation of a corporate organizational crisis.

It is believed that crisis communication in Chinese culture is different from that in Western cultures because of the role that traditional values and norms play in society (Yu & Wen, 2003). In their study, Yu and Wen (2003) identified face-saving and risky communication avoidance as the two traditional Chinese values that influenced crisis communication in Taiwan. In a case study of the malemine-contaminated milk crisis in Mainland China, Ye and Pang (2011) examined the Chinese approach of crisis management and pointed out that government relationships, cover up, and denial were frequently used in crisis management in China, which differs from what are believed to be the best practices of crisis management.

In a different social cultural context, different effects can be found in response to the same crisis message strategy. In Asian cultures, apology is oftentimes regarded as a routine and ritualistic behavior, and would more likely to be less in favor for the audience than more practical and specific offers such as informational instruction and compensation (Lee, 2004). Therefore, it was assumed that compensation in China will lead to more positive results than apology.

However, previous research in the U.S. showed that apology is not always the "best" strategy to be used in crisis communication (Coombs & Holladay, 2008), in which no significant

differences among the sympathy, compensation, or apology conditions were found. It can therefore be assumed that apology and compensation strategies should therefore generate similar reactions from the public in the United States.

H3: In China, compensation will generate (a) more positive evaluation of organizational reputation, (b) less negative word-of-mouth intention and (c) less negative online crisis reaction intention than apology, whereas no such difference will be found in the United States.

Social Media in China

Besides culture dynamics, political and media systems are important parts to consider in crisis communication (Lyu, 2012).

Due to the strong media censorship in China, it is virtually impossible for Chinese citizens to get access to major social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube (Chui, Ip, & Silverman, 2012). However, realizing the fast-developing social media trend, Beijing understands social media are playing an important role in shaping government policy, and signs of encouragement can be found in the growth of popular microblogging sites such as Sina Weibo (Young, 2012).

Sina Weibo is known as the Twitter in China and one of the most popular social media sites in China, along with Renren, Tencent, Douban and WeChat (Mei, 2012). With more than twice as many users as Twitter, Sina Weibo is an essential platform to more than 22% of the Chinese Internet population. (Mei, 2012).

For Chinese citizens, the use of social media has drastically changed the breadth and nature of public debate (Hewitt, 2012). On Weibo, the 140 characters in Chinese can express much more than in English, and Weibo's inclusion of video and photographic information are giving more opportunities for grass-roots' self-expression (Hewitt, 2012). Moreover, Weibo has

embodied features that are not incorporated in Twitter such as threaded comment, rich media, micro topics, and medal reward system, thus making it even easier to participate in dissemination on a variety of topics (Falcon, 2011). It can therefore be assumed that a more significant contrast will exist between publics' response to mortification strategies (apology and compensation) and excuse on Weibo in China than on Twitter in the United States.

H4: Excuse strategy sent via social media will generate (a) more negative evaluation of organizational reputation, (b) more negative word-of-mouth intention and (c) more negative online crisis reaction intention in China than in the United States.

Due to the fact that no research has been conducted prior to this study in cross-cultural comparison involving crisis communication via social media in the United States and in China, an open research question is formulated as follows:

RQ2: What are the similarities and differences between the public's (a) evaluation of organizational reputation, (b) negative word-of-mouth intention and (c) negative online crisis reaction intention in response to different crisis communication strategies via social media in the United States and in China?

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

This research aims to answer two sets of research questions and four sets of related hypotheses. The first set of research questions mainly focuses on the effects of crisis response strategy on the dependent variables.

RQ1a: What is the public's evaluation of organizational reputation in response to different crisis communication strategies via social media?

RQ1b: What is the public's negative word-of-mouth intention in response to different crisis communication strategies via social media?

RQ1c: What is the public's negative online crisis reaction intention in response to different crisis communication strategies via social media?

Two sets of hypotheses for the first set of research question were generated based on the findings of previous studies.

H1a: Mortification strategies (apology and compensation) will generate more positive evaluation of organizational reputation than non-mortification strategies (excuse and ingratiation).

H1b: Mortification strategies (apology and compensation) will generate less negative word-of-mouth intention than non-mortification strategies (excuse and ingratiation).

H1c: Mortification strategies (apology and compensation) will generate less negative online crisis reaction intention than non-mortification strategies (excuse and ingratiation).

H2a: Excuse combined with ingratiation will generate more positive evaluation of organizational reputation than excuse alone.

H2b: Excuse combined with ingratiation will generate less negative word-of-mouth intention than excuse alone.

H2c: Excuse combined with ingratiation will generate less negative online crisis reaction intention than excuse alone.

The second set of research question focuses on the effects of the social cultural context as well as the combined effects of crisis response strategy and social cultural context on the dependent variables.

RQ2a: What are the similarities and differences between the public's evaluation of organizational reputation in response to different crisis communication strategies via social media in the United States and China?

RQ2b: What are the similarities and differences between the public's negative word-of-mouth intention in response to different crisis communication strategies via social media in the United States and China?

RQ2c: What are the similarities and differences between the public's negative online crisis reaction intention in response to different crisis communication strategies via social media in the United States and China?

Two sets of hypotheses for the second set of research questions were generated based on previous studies.

H3a: In China, compensation will generate more positive evaluation of organizational reputation than apology, whereas no such difference will be found in the United States.

H3b: In China, compensation will generate less negative word-of-mouth intention than apology, whereas no such difference will be found in the United States.

H3c: In China, compensation will generate less negative online crisis reaction intention than apology, whereas no such difference will be found in the United States.

H4a: Excuse strategy sent via social media will generate more negative evaluation of organizational reputation in China than in the United States.

H4b: Excuse strategy sent via social media will generate more negative word-of-mouth intention in China than in the United States.

H4c: Excuse strategy sent via social media will generate more negative online crisis reaction intention in China than in the United States.

However, since this study is the first to test crisis response strategy in SCCT via social media across different countries, the second set of research questions is also exploratory. More findings for the second set of research questions are expected in this research.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Case studies and experiments are most frequently used as methods in research of crisis communication. Case study is a common way used to understand crisis communication in Benoit's image restoration theory (Benoit, 1995, 1997), in which crisis responses during each phase would be identified and evaluated. Unlike in image restoration theory, research using SCCT relies on experimental methods rather than case studies (Coombs, 2007). Since the theoretical framework of this study is primarily based on SCCT, an experiment was conducted to test how publics in the United States and China respond to different crisis communication strategies via social media. Experiments can help to measure the effectiveness of different crisis communication strategies, and the results may serve as "both theoretical and practical guidelines" during crises (Sisco, 2012).

Study Design

This experiment had a 2 (country: the United States and China) x 4 (strategy: apology, compensation, excuse, and excuse plus ingratiation) between-subjects design (see Figure 4.1). Four strategies (apology, compensation, excuse, and excuse plus ingratiation) used in this experiment were chosen according to the accident decision flowchart developed by Coombs (1995).

In this way, eight conditions were generated: crisis response with apology in the U.S. (N = 44), crisis response with compensation in the U.S. (N = 44), crisis response with excuse in the U.S. (N = 44), crisis response with excuse plus ingratiation in the U.S. (N = 44), crisis response

with apology in China (N = 40), crisis response with compensation in China (N = 42), crisis response with excuse in China (N = 42), crisis response with excuse plus ingratiation in China (N = 37) (See Table 4.1).

Strategies exposed to participants in the two countries were incorporated into the messages designed for the two commonly used social media platforms in the United States and China. Two versions of questionnaires were designed, one written in English (Appendix A) and the other written in Mandarin Chinese (Appendix B). The eight manipulations were embedded in four pairs of identical fictional news in brief and responses via social media in the two languages.

The news brief reported a fictional plane crash while landing caused by loss of flight control due to engine failure. The fictional news brief was immediately followed by the airline company's brief response on its social media outlet created in PhotoShop (Twitter in the U.S. and Weibo in China). United Airlines and China Southern Airlines were chosen in this fictional story because of several reasons. First, they are both large and well-known airline companies for the audiences they were presented to in this experiment (United Airlines for the public in the United States and China Southern Airlines for the public in China). Second, neither of the airline companies' headquarters is located at the state/province where the experiment took place, so less biased view towards the particular airline company would be expected. Last but not least, both United Airlines and China Southern Airlines are actively involved in microblogs. By the time the questionnaire and manipulations were designed (Fall 2012), United Airlines had 5,990 Tweets, 1,224 followings, and 177,181 followers on Twitter. China Southern Airlines had 5,906 Weibo messages, 1,182 followings, and 463,053 followers on Sina Weibo. Following are the messages containing the manipulations:

(Apology--U.S.) We are very sorry, and we express our deep-felt apology to the victims and their families.

(Compensation U.S.) We will do all that we can to compensate the victims and their families and help them through their loss.

(Excuse U.S.) Investigation showed this crash was caused by engine failure. The Boeing Company should take responsibility for this incident.

(Excuse plus Ingratiation U.S.) Flight 232 crew members sacrificed their own safety for an efficient evacuation. Boeing should take responsibility for the engine failure.

(Apology China) 我们对此次广州空难事故感到非常痛心。在此，我们对伤者和他们的家属表示深深的歉意。

(Compensation China) 我们将尽一切所能，为广州空难事件的受伤人员及家属提供赔偿，帮助他们渡过此次难关。

(Excuse China) 事故调查表明，此次广州空难源于波音公司所产飞机的引擎故障，波音公司须为此次事故负责。

(Excuse plus Ingratiation China) 2321 号航班机组人员在此次广州空难事故中先人后己，保证了组织紧急撤离的高效率。事故调查表明，此次广州空难源于波音公司所产飞机的引擎故障，波音公司须为此次事故负责。

Population and Sample

The populations studied in this research are the publics in the U.S. and in China. Participants in the U.S. were recruited from introductory communication courses at a large university in the southeastern United States, while participants in China were recruited from an introductory communication course at a large university in southeastern China.

The use of student participants is deemed appropriate in experiments in public relations research (Sisco, 2012). In an experiment with 585 participants, among which half were students and half were nonstudents, no significant differences were found between the two groups (Sallot, 2002). Student populations have been used in various experiments on crisis communication. Coombs and Holladay (2002) used student participants in their initial tests of the SCCT for for-profit organizations. Based on the theoretical and methodological framework provided by the image repair theory and the SCCT, Sheldon and Sallot (2009) used student participants to test the effects of communication strategy and performance history in a political faux pas. For non-profit organizations, Sisco (2012) conducted an experiment with student participants, and argued that using student participants was an appropriate approach because it replicates Coombs' previous tests and creates an environment that "mimics the theory's original development" (p. 8).

Moreover, college students, as members of the Generation Y, share the eight norms that were yielded in Tapscott's (2009) survey: freedom, customization, scrutiny integrity, collaboration, entertainment, speed, and innovation. Growing up in the digital age, members of Generation Y are usually familiar and highly engaged in social media (Dodd & Campbell, 2011). Previous research showed that micro-blogging sites should be specifically advocated as an effective channel for organizations to target Generation Y (Dodd & Campbell, 2011). Therefore, the sample of this experiment was appropriate.

Participants

One hundred-and-ninety-one volunteers in the U.S. and 166 volunteers in China participated in this study, for a total of 357 participants, among which 176 in the U.S. and 161 in China completed the experiment. Three hundred-and-thirty-seven questionnaires were analyzed.

Participants in China ranged in age from 18 to 38 years (M = 20.13, SD = 2.41), among which 88.2% were pursuing a bachelor's degree (N = 142), 9.3% a master's (N = 15), and 1.2% a doctoral degree (N = 2), with 1.2% unknown (N = 2). Thirty-seven percent (N = 60) were male, and 62% were female (N = 99), with 1% unknown (N = 2). Participants in the U.S. ranged in age from 18 to 49 years (M = 19.91, SD = 2.67), among whom 96.6% were pursuing a bachelor's degree (N = 170), 2.8% a master's (N = 5), and 0.6% other (N = 1). Nineteen percent (N = 33) were male, and 81% were female (N = 143).

Procedure

Two major airline companies (United Airlines for participants in the U.S. and China Southern Airlines for participants in China) were used for the fictional scenarios describing two plane crashes in this experiment. The crisis reported that a major airplane crash had happened and investigation of the crash indicated that it was caused by engine failure. One of the most popular social media platforms, microblog (Twitter in the U.S. and Sina Weibo in China) was selected as the communication channel.

In the first and second sections, participants were asked about their usage of Twitter/Weibo and their preliminary impressions of the airline companies. The first section consisted of six statements: "I have a Twitter account," "I use Twitter to learn about news," "I have taken flight(s) before," "I think it is safe to travel by plane," "I heard about the airline company before," and "I have taken flights with the airline company before". Participants were asked to respond by "yes" or "no".

The second section aimed to measure participants' preliminary attitudes towards the airline companies. Three items were included: "I think it is safe to travel with this airline company" and "the airline company delivers high quality services," which were measured by the five-point

Likert scale from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree,” and “overall, my impression of the airline company is,” which was rated by the five-point Likert scale from “very favorable” to “very unfavorable”.

After the second section, participants were shown the information of the plane crash and the screenshot of the Tweet/Weibo message containing the airline company’s response to the crash.

In sections following the news brief and the screenshot of the Tweet/Weibo message, participants were asked to answer the manipulation check items and questions about their evaluation of organizational reputation, negative word-of-mouth intention and negative online crisis reaction intention. At the end of the experiment, some demographic information including gender, education and age were asked. In a debrief following completion of the experiment, participants were informed that no such airplane crash had ever happened, and the scenarios were created for the purpose of academic study only.

Independent Variables

The manipulations and questionnaire for the experiment in the U.S. were written in English, and those for the experiment in China were written in Chinese. In each experiment, each participant received a randomly assigned treatment that presents one of the eight variations of the plane crash scenario. To manipulate the social cultural difference, participants in the U.S. were shown a PhotoShopped tweet from the United Airlines’ official Twitter account in English, and participants in China were shown a PhotoShopped Weibo message from the China Southern Airlines’ official Sina Weibo account in Chinese. To manipulate the crisis response strategy, different messages were given according to the excuse, apology, compensation, and excuse plus ingratiation conditions.

Manipulation Checks

Three items were used to check the manipulation of four crisis response strategies immediately following the news brief and microblog message used for manipulation: (a) "the airline company took responsibility for the plane crash" (apology and compensation), (b) "the airline company compensated the victims with money" (compensation), and (c) "the airline company emphasized the quality of its service" (excuse plus ingratiation). Participants were asked to respond using the five-point Likert scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree".

Dependent Measures

Participants were asked to rate items on perceptions of organizational reputation, negative word-of-mouth, and negative online crisis reactions using five-point Likert scales.

Organizational reputation was measured by six items. Five items were developed according to Coombs and Holladay's (2002) Organizational Reputation Scale. In this experiment, the five items were simply modified by replacing the term "organization" with the specific name of the airline company: (a) "The airline company is concerned with the well-being of its publics," (b) "The airline company is basically DISHONEST," (c) "I do NOT trust the airline company to tell the truth about the incident," (d) "Under most circumstances, I would be likely to believe what the airline company says," (e) "The airline company is NOT concerned with the well-being of its publics". A sixth item "my overall opinion of the airline company after hearing the incident" was added. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) in Coombs and Holladay's (2002) study was .87.

Three items were taken to measure negative word-of-mouth intention from Coombs and Holladay (2008): (a) "I would encourage friends or relatives NOT to take flights with this airline company," (b) "I would say negative things about the airline company to other people," and (c)

"I would recommend this airline company to someone who asked my advice". The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) in Coombs and Holladay's (2008) study was .76.

Negative online crisis reaction intention was assessed by three items drawn from Schultz et al.'s (2011) measurement of secondary crisis communication and secondary crisis reaction: (a) "I would ReTweet this message/share this Weibo," (b) "I would write negative comments about this incident online," and (c) "I would sign an online petition to boycott this airline company". The wording was adapted according to the specific social media outlets (Twitter and Weibo). Since no study has measured such sharing behaviors before, the respective items were not combined into a scale in Schultz et al.'s (2011) study.

Pilot Test

The experiment design was pre-tested to test the messages used in the manipulations. Sixteen members of a graduate-level public relations theory course volunteered to participate in the pilot test. Data from the pilot test were analyzed, and the intended effects of the messages were confirmed.

Data Analysis

Frequencies for the six single items in the first section of the questionnaire were run to examine the participants' usage of social media and preliminary knowledge of the airline companies. Three one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were used to test whether there were differences of the participants' preliminary attitudes towards the airline companies across the 8 treatment groups.

To test the reliability of the Organizational Reputation Scale, the negative word-of-mouth intention scale, and the negative online crisis reaction intention scale, a series of reliability

analyses were run using Cronbach's alpha. To test the manipulation check items, three one-way ANOVAs were run to measure the differences between different treatment groups.

To answer RQ1 and test the H1 and H2 sets of hypotheses, a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with post hoc analysis was conducted. To explore RQ2 and test the H2 and H3 sets of hypotheses, a two-way 2 x 4 factorial MANOVA with post hoc analysis was conducted.

The next chapters report the results of the social media usage and preliminary attitudes, reliabilities, manipulation checks, hypotheses, and the research questions.

TABLE 4.1: Experiment Design (4 x 2)

	Apology	Compensation	Excuse	Excuse plus Ingratiation
U.S.				
China				

TABLE 4.2: Experiment Groups

Experiment Groups	**N**
Apology via Twitter (U.S.) (in English)	44
Compensation via Twitter (U.S.) (in English)	44
Excuse via Twitter (U.S.) (in English)	44
Excuse plus Ingratiation via Twitter (U.S.) (in English)	44
Apology via Weibo (China) (in Chinese)	40
Compensation via Weibo (China) (in Chinese)	42
Excuse via Weibo (China) (in Chinese)	42
Excuse plus Ingratiation via Weibo (China) (in Chinese)	37

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

Social Media Usage and Preliminary Attitudes

Among the 337 participants whose answers were analyzed, 85% owned Twitter/Weibo accounts (N = 287) and 15% (N = 50) did not. Fifty-eight percent (N = 194) used Twitter/Weibo to learn about news and 42% (N = 143) did not. Eighty-five percent (N = 286) had taken flights before and 15% (N = 51) had not. Ninety-one percent (N = 307) thought it was safe to travel by plane, while 9% thought this was not safe (N = 30). Ninety-five percent (N = 319) heard of the airline companies used in the experiment before, while 5% (N = 18) did not hear of the airline companies before. Thirty-eight percent (N = 129) of the participants took flights with the airline companies used in the experiment before and 61% did not (N = 207). The information above indicated that most participants were engaged with microblogs, had experience taking flights, and believed it was safe to travel by plane. Although most participants had heard of the airline companies before, most had not taken flights with them.

A series of ANOVA tests were run to test whether there were differences of preliminary attitudes towards the airline companies among the eight experiment groups (see Table 5.1). For the item "I think it is safe to travel with the airline company," the ANOVA was not significant ($F(7, 319) = .82$, $p = .57$, $\eta^2 = .02$). For the item "the airline company delivers high quality services," the ANOVA was not significant ($F(7, 315) = .73$, $p = .64$, $\eta^2 = .02$). For the item measuring the overall impression of the airline company, the ANOVA was not significant (F (7,

318) = 1.67, p = .15, η^2 = .04). The results indicated that preliminary attitudes towards the airline companies being used in the experiment were equal across all treatment groups.

Reliabilities of Dependent Measures

A series of reliability analyses were run to test the reliability coefficients of the Organizational Reputation Scale, the negative word-of-mouth scale, and the negative online crisis reaction scale. In the Organizational Reputation Scale, item b, c, and e were reverse-coded. Internal consistency was acceptable, α = .83.

In the negative word-of-mouth scale, item c was reverse-coded. Reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) was .68.

In the negative online crisis reaction scale, reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) was .73.

Results of Manipulation Checks

Four crisis response strategies were used in this experiment design: apology, compensation, excuse, and excuse plus ingratiation. A series of one-way ANOVAs with post hoc tests were run to check the manipulations (see Table 5.2).

For the item "the airline company took responsibility for the plane crash," the ANOVA was significant (F (3, 333) = 24.03, p < .001, η^2 = .18). Because test of homogeneity of variance was not significant, p = .06, Tukey was chosen as the post hoc test to evaluate pairwise differences among the means. Compensation (M = 3.12, SD = .913) was rated highest and significantly higher than apology (M = 2.57, SD = 1.009), excuse (M = 2.00, SD = 1.006) and excuse plus ingratiation (M = 2.10, SD = .92). Apology was significantly higher than excuse (M = 2.00, SD = 1.006) and excuse plus ingratiation (M = 2.10, SD = .92). Excuse and excuse plus ingratiation showed similar scores. The test shows that the manipulation for mortification strategies (apology

and compensation) was successful because the trait of accepting responsibility was rated higher than non-mortification strategies (excuse and excuse plus ingratiation).

For the item "the airline company compensated the victims with money," the ANOVA was significant ($F (3, 332) = 13.33$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .11$). The test of homogeneity of variance was significant, $p < .001$. Therefore, Dunnett T3 was chosen in the post hoc test to evaluate pairwise differences among the means. Compensation ($M = 3.45$, $SD = .12$) was rated highest, and was significantly higher than apology ($M = 2.48$, $SD = .12$), excuse ($M = 2.70$, $SD = .12$), and excuse plus ingratiation ($M = 2.69$, $SD = .12$). There were no significant differences among apology, excuse, or excuse plus ingratiation scores. This shows that the manipulation for compensation was successful.

For the item "the airline company emphasized the quality of its service," the ANOVA was significant ($F (3, 332) = 23.36$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .18$). The test of homogeneity of variance was significant, $p < .001$. Therefore, Dunnett T3 was chosen in the post hoc test to evaluate pairwise differences among the means. Excuse plus ingratiation ($M = 3.04$, $SD = .11$) was rated highest, and was significantly higher than apology ($M = 2.14$, $SD = .10$), compensation ($M = 2.47$, $SD = .10$), and excuse ($M = 1.86$, $SD = .10$). This shows that the manipulation of excuse plus ingratiation was successful, because it was rated the highest on the airline company's emphasis on quality of service, the trait that defines ingratiation.

Testing Correlations among the Three Scales

The three scales were tested to examine whether the dependent variables were significantly correlated. The results showed that all three scales were significantly correlated (see Table 5.3). The organizational reputation scale and negative word-of-mouth intention scale were negatively correlated with a Pearson correlation score of -.57 ($p < .001$). The negative word-of-mouth

intention scale and negative online crisis reaction intention scale were positively correlated with a Pearson correlation score of .36 ($p < .001$). The organizational reputation scale and negative online crisis reaction intention scale were negatively correlated with a Pearson correlation score of -.28 ($p < .001$).

Testing Effects of Crisis Response Strategy

Because all three dependent variables were significantly correlated, a one-way MANOVA was conducted to assess the effects of the four crisis response strategies (apology, compensation, excuse, and excuse plus ingratiation) on the three dependent variables (organizational reputation, negative word-of-mouth intention, and negative online crisis reaction intention) for RQ1 and the H2 set of hypotheses. The results indicated that there were significant differences among the four crisis response strategies on the dependent variables, ($F (9, 794) = 7.12$, $\Lambda = .83$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .06$).

Follow-up ANOVA tests on the dependent variables were then conducted (see Table 5.4 and Table 5.5). For the organizational reputation scale, the ANOVA was significant, ($F (3, 328) = 18.95$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .15$). Post hoc analyses using the univariate ANOVA were conducted to further examine the effects of different crisis response strategies on organizational reputation. Because a test of homogeneity of variance was not significant, $p = .20$, Bonferroni was chosen in the post hoc test to evaluate pairwise differences among the means. There was no significant difference between the apology group ($M = 3.12$, $SD = .62$) and the compensation group ($M = 3.26$, $SD = .58$), $p = .91$. Perception of organizational reputation was rated more positively among the participants in the compensation group than in the excuse group ($M = 2.60$, $SD = .58$), $p < .001$, and the excuse plus ingratiation group ($M = 2.79$, $SD = .73$), $p < .001$. Similarly, participants in the apology group evaluated organizational reputation more positively than those

in the excuse group, $p < .001$, and those in the excuse plus ingratiation group, $p < .01$. Therefore, mortification strategies (mortification and compensation) generated more positive perceptions of organizational reputation than non-mortification strategies (excuse and excuse plus ingratiation). **H1a was supported.** However, no significant difference was found between the excuse group and the excuse plus ingratiation group, $p = .30$. Therefore, excuse combined with ingratiation did not generate more positive perceptions of organization reputation than excuse being used alone. **H2a was not supported.**

For the negative word-of-mouth intention scale, the ANOVA was significant ($F (3, 328) = 3.28$, $p = .021$, $\eta^2 = .03$). Post hoc analysis was used to further examine the effects of different crisis response strategies on participants' negative word-of-mouth intention through pairwise comparisons. Because test of homogeneity of variance was not significant, $p = .19$, Bonferroni was chosen in the post hoc test to evaluate pairwise differences among the means. No significant difference was found between the apology group ($M = 3.03$, $SD = .71$) and the compensation group ($M = 3.08$, $SD = .66$), $p > .90$. Participants in the apology group were less likely to conduct negative word-of-mouth than those in the excuse group ($M = 3.35$, $SD = .71$), $p < .05$, but no significant difference was found between the apology group and the excuse plus ingratiation group ($M = 3.13$, $SD = .82$), $p > .90$. There was also no significant difference when comparing the compensation group with the excuse group, $p = .08$, or with the excuse plus ingratiation group, $p > .90$. The results indicated that apology generated less negative word-of-mouth intention than excuse, but did not differ from excuse plus ingratiation, and compensation generated neither less negative word-of-mouth intention than excuse nor than excuse plus ingratiation. Therefore, **H1b was only partially supported.** No significant difference was found

in negative word-of-mouth between the excuse group and the excuse plus ingratiation group, p = .27. **H2b was not supported.**

For the negative online crisis reaction scale, the ANOVA was not significant (F (3, 328) = 1.66, p = .175, η^2 = .02), and test of homogeneity of variance was not significant, p = .07. Therefore, no post hoc test was needed. The results indicated that different crisis response strategies did not affect participants' negative online crisis reaction intention. **H1c and H2c were not supported.**

Testing Effects of Crisis Response Strategies in Combination with Countries

To examine RQ2 and the H3 and H4 sets of hypotheses, a 2 x 4 factorial two-way MANOVA was conducted to evaluate the effects of crisis response strategies in combination with countries (see Table 5.6). The two-way MANOVA indicated no significant interaction between crisis response strategies and countries on the dependent variables (F (9, 784) = 1.30, Λ = .97, p = .23, η^2 = .01), but significant main effects were present for crisis response strategy (F (9, 784) = 7.06, Λ = .83, p < .001, η^2 = .06), and country (F (3, 322) = 26.12, Λ = .80, p < .001, η^2 = .20). Therefore, there were no differences among different crisis response strategies on the three dependent variables for publics in the United States and China separately, which means different crisis response strategies did not work differently for the United States and China. The effects of different crisis response strategies from Coombs' (1995) flowchart were consistent between the two countries.

Country Main Effects

Since the effects of crisis response strategy have already been interpreted for RQ1 and the H2 and H2 sets of hypotheses using one-way MANOVA in the previous section, this section will focus on the main effects of country to explore the similarities and differences of evaluation of

organizational reputation, negative word-of-mouth intention, and negative online crisis reaction intention between the two countries.

Follow-up ANOVA tests for countries on the dependent variables were then conducted (see Table 5.7). Results indicated that there were no significant differences between the two countries on organizational reputation ($F (1, 324) = .01$, $p = .91$, $\eta^2 < .001$), or on negative word-of-mouth ($F (1, 324) = 1.59$, $p = .21$, $\eta^2 = .005$). However, the ANOVA on the negative online crisis reaction was significant ($F (1, 324) = 56.20$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .15$). Participants in China ($M = 2.54$, $SD = .75$) were more likely to conduct negative online crisis reaction than participants in the United States ($M = 1.93$, $SD = .73$).

The results indicated that publics in the United States and China tended to have similar perceptions of organizational reputation and likelihood to conduct negative word-of-mouth communication when hearing the same crisis response from the organization, but the public in China was more likely to conduct negative online crisis reaction than the public in the United States.

Therefore, compensation strategy did not generate any differences in evaluation of organizational reputation, negative word-of-mouth intention, or negative online crisis reaction intention for publics in the United States and China. **H3a, H3b, and H3c were not supported.** There were also no differences in evaluation of organizational reputation and negative word-of-mouth intention for publics in the United States and China when excuse strategy was being used. **H4a and H4b were not supported.** Excuse strategy did generate more likelihood to conduct negative online crisis reaction in China than in the United States. **H4c was supported.** However, it is worth noting that such likelihood does not just exist when using excuse strategy. Rather, what was explored for RQ2 was that as long as the crisis response strategy being used by the

organization stays the same across the two countries, the public in China would be more likely to conduct negative online crisis reaction than the public in the United States.

TABLE 5.1: Results of ANOVA of Preliminary Attitudes

Measuring Items	Sum of squares	DF	Mean square	F	Significance	Eta Squared
It is safe to travel with the airline company.	2.93	7	.42	.82	.57	.02
The airline company delivers high quality services	2.14	7	.31	.73	.64	.02
Overall impression of the airline company	4.37	7	.62	1.67	.15	.04

TABLE 5.2: Results of Manipulation Checks

	Stimulus										
	Apology		Compensation		Excuse		Excuse plus Ingratiation				
Measuring Items	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F	df	p
Took Responsibility	2.57	1.01	3.12	.91	2.00	1.01	2.10	.92	24.03	3	.000**
Compensated Victims	2.48	1.10	3.45	.79	2.70	1.23	2.69	1.11	13.33	3	.000**
Emphasized Quality of Service	2.14	.88	2.47	1.01	1.86	.71	3.04	1.15	23.36	3	.000**

**p < .001

TABLE 5.3: Correlations among the Three Scales

	Negative online crisis reaction intention	Organizational reputation
Organizational reputation	-.28** (N = 332)	--
Negative WOM intention	.36** (N = 336)	-.57** (N = 332)

** p < .001

TABLE 5.4: Results of MANOVA of Crisis Response Strategy on Dependent Variables

Dependent Variables	Sum of squares	DF	Mean square	F	Significance	Eta Squared	Multiple R^2 Values
Organizational reputation	22.54	3	7.52	.82	.000**	.15	.148
Negative WOM intention	5.16	3	1.72	.73	.021*	.03	.029
Negative online crisis reaction intention	3.21	3	1.07	1.67	.175	.02	.015

** $p < .001$; * $p < .05$

TABLE 5.5: Means and Standard Deviations of Crisis Response Strategy on Dependent Variables

	Crisis Response Strategies											
	Apology			Compensation			Excuse			Excuse plus ingratiation		
Dependent Variables	n	M	SD	N	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
Organizational reputation	82	3.12	.62	83	3.26	.58	86	2.60	.58	81	2.79	.73
Negative WOM intention		3.03	.71		3.08	.66		3.35	.71		3.13	.82
Negative online crisis reaction intention		2.17	.74		2.22	.78		2.38	.89		2.12	.77

TABLE 5.6: Results of MANOVA of Crisis Response Strategy and Country

Dependent Variables	Sum of squares	DF	Mean square	F	Significance	Eta squared
Strategy						
Organizational reputation	22.44	3	7.48	18.72	.000**	.15
Negative WOM intention	5.25	3	1.75	3.33	.020*	.03
Negative online crisis reaction intention	3.13	3	1.04	1.93	.125	.02
Country						
Organizational reputation	.01	1	.01	.01	.909	.00
Negative WOM intention	.84	1	.84	1.59	.208	.01
Negative online crisis reaction intention	30.41	1	30.41	56.20	.000	.15
Two-way interactions Strategy * Country						
Organizational reputation	.58	3	.19	.48	.696	.004
Negative WOM intention	.62	3	.21	.40	.757	.004
Negative online crisis reaction intention	4.58	3	1.53	2.82	.039*[a]	.03
Multiple R^2 values	R^2					
Organizational reputation	.152					
Negative WOM intention	.037					
Negative online crisis reaction intention	.181					

** $p < .001$; * $p < .05$

a. No significance found in initial MANOVA output, $F (9, 784) = 1.30$, $\Lambda = .97$, $p = .23$, $\eta^2 = .01$

TABLE 5.7: Means and Standard Deviations of Country on Dependent Variables

	Countries					
	The United States			China		
Dependent Variables	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
Organizational Reputation	176	2.95	.66	161	2.94	.70
Negative WOM		3.20	.74		3.09	.72
Negative Online Crisis Reaction		1.93	.73		2.54	.75

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

Summary of Research Findings

This thesis aims to investigate the effects of different crisis response strategies and different social cultural contexts on audiences' responses in a corporate accident. This experiment is the first to test Coombs' (1995, 2012) SCCT in different social cultural contexts via social media. Two sets of research questions and four sets of hypotheses were tested. The research questions and hypotheses explored and examined the effects of (1) crisis response strategy, (2) both crisis response strategy and social cultural context (country), and (3) social cultural context (country) had on three dependent measures. The three dependent measures were (1) evaluation of organizational reputation, (2) negative word-of-mouth intention, and (3) negative online crisis reaction intention. Twelve hypotheses (four sets of three) were analyzed (see Table 6.1) and six research questions (two sets of three) were further explored.

In addition to the tests of hypotheses, the findings also showed that the effects of crisis response strategy did not differ between the two countries. However, when using the same crisis response strategy, participants in China were more likely to conduct negative online crisis reaction than participants in the United States.

In this chapter, I will discuss the key findings of this thesis. Limitations and suggestions for further research will also be addressed.

Examining Effects of Crisis Response Strategy

Results of this study showed that crisis response strategy affected evaluation of organizational reputation and negative word-of-mouth intention, but did not affect negative online crisis reaction intention.

The dependent measure of organizational reputation produced results that further confirmed the findings in previous studies. It is generally believed that mortification strategies would lead to more favorable perceptions of organizational reputation than non-mortification strategies (Coombs, 1999; Lee, 2004, Coombs & Schmidt, 2000; Coombs & Holladay, 2008). Furthermore, when comparing apology to "more equivalent crisis response strategies," Coombs and Holladay (2008) pointed out that victim-centered/accommodative strategies such as apology, compensation, and sympathy generated similar reactions from audiences. In this study, compensation and apology both generated more positive evaluations of organizational reputation than excuse and excuse and ingratiation, while apology and compensation generated similar evaluations of organization reputation.

There was significant difference between apology and excuse on the dependent measure of negative word-of-mouth intentions; however, no significant effects were found among other crisis response strategies on this dependent measure. This is not surprising because Coombs and Holladay (2008) found that accommodative crisis responses (apology, compensation, and sympathy) and information-only responses produced similar effects on anger and negative word-of-mouth intentions. In another study, Coombs and Holladay (2009) also found that different crisis response conditions produced differences in the evaluations of organizational reputation, but did not produce differences in negative word-of-mouth intentions. Since anger serves as a driver to produce negative publicity in a crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2007), it can be inferred

that the difference of anger only exists between the apology condition and the excuse condition, since the organization took full responsibility in the former condition while denying responsibility completely in the latter. However, it is surprising that the anger level and negative word-of-mouth intention did not differentiate between the compensation condition, in which the organization also took responsibility for the incident, and the excuse condition. One possible explanation is that the crisis scenario used in this experiment (a plane crash accident due to engine failure) is more serious than the crisis scenario used in Coombs and Holladay's (2008, 2009) two studies (chemical explosion at an oil company without specific cause being given). However, since an accident is caused by unintentional factors, the anger level in the crisis scenario described in this experiment was still not high enough to generate differences among the four crisis response conditions. Further experiment of research using a crisis scenario that would generate a higher level of anger is needed to determine whether mortification strategy and non-mortification strategy would enlist different negative word-of-mouth intentions.

There was no significant difference on the dependent measure of online crisis reaction intention regarding different crisis response strategies. All four crisis response strategies in this experiment generated the same level of online crisis reaction intention. Negative online crisis reaction such as making negative comments online to the public and signing a boycott petition may need even higher anger levels than negative word-of-mouth communication. It is possible that the anger level in this crisis scenario (an accident) was not high enough to generate any differences in online crisis reaction intention among different crisis response strategies.

The effects of mortification strategy on organizational reputation further confirmed the findings in previous experiment research testing the SCCT. However, while it is proved in this study as well as in previous studies that mortification strategy tends to generate more favorable

evaluations of organizational reputation than non-mortification strategy, it does not necessarily generate less negative word-of-mouth intentions or less negative online crisis communication intentions.

Surprisingly, excuse plus ingratiation strategy was not more effective than excuse strategy alone. In this study, there were no differences between excuse and excuse plus ingratiation on organizational reputation, negative word-of-mouth intentions, or negative online crisis response intentions. In Coombs and Schmidt's (2000) empirical test of the Texaco image restoration case, it was found that corrective action, bolstering, mortification, and separation produced the same effects on organizational reputation and potential supportive behavior, whereas only shifting-blame generated less account honoring. Coombs and Schmidt (2000) pointed out that "shifting blame downplays victim concerns by minimizing organizational responsibility for this crisis," while "all but the blame-shifting scenario were considered equivalent in expressing concern for victims" (p. 174). One explanation for the findings in this study is that excuse being used alone and excuse being accompanied by ingratiation both minimized the organization's responsibility in this crisis scenario, and expressed less concern for victims than apology and compensation. Therefore, even if excuse is accompanied by ingratiation, it does not change its blame-shifting nature, and both excuse and excuse plus ingratiation would lead to less favorable evaluations of organizational reputation than apology and compensation.

Examining Effects of Crisis Response Strategy across Countries

In this study, crisis response strategy and social cultural context did not generate interactive effects on the three dependent measures, which indicated that different crisis response strategies did not affect organizational reputation, negative word-of-mouth intentions, and negative online

crisis reaction intention differently in the United States and China. The effects of crisis response strategy are consistent across these two countries.

In contrast to Lee's (2004) findings, compensation strategy in China did not generate more positive results than apology on dependent measures in this experiment. Apology and compensation generated similar results in both countries. In Lee's (2004) study, it was argued that compensation is more "practical, purpose-specific, and action-specific" while apology is merely a "verbal expression of sorrow" (p. 614) and oftentimes regarded a routine in Asian cultures.

However, even within Asian cultures, the social cultural contexts differ from region to region. In a comparative study of crisis communication strategies between Mainland China and Taiwan, Lyu (2012) found that during two similar crisis events, the two corporations in Mainland China and Taiwan selected different crisis response strategies and used them in different orders. Lyu (2012) pointed out that although Mainland China and Taiwan share identical cultures, the differences in political and media systems should be considered when explaining the differences in crisis communication effects. Lee's (2004) study was conducted in Hong Kong, the special administrative region (SAR) of China, where government has a high degree of autonomy based on the "one country, two systems" principle after returning to China. Even though Mainland China and Hong Kong SAR share the same cultural values, the differences in their political and media systems may generate different results in terms of audience's responses to crisis communication strategies.

Due to political, social, and cultural factors, crisis management in Mainland China tends to focus more on government relationships, cover-ups, and denial, as was reflected in Sanlu Group's crisis management in 2008 (Ye & Pang, 2011). Therefore, the apology strategy in this

experiment, with its sincere expression of sorrow through social media, may be deemed as an act from the airline company that showcases its willingness to take responsibility and openness to communicate with the public, and was as well-received by the Chinese public as the compensation strategy even though no "practical, purpose-specific, and action-specific" (Lee, 2004, p. 614) information was included in the message.

In general, the nonsignificance of the interactive effects of crisis response strategy and country suggested that the crisis response strategy proposed by Coombs (1995, 2000, & 2012) in the SCCT is effective both in the U.S. cultural context and the Chinese cultural context. Mortification strategies (apology and compensation) in this study generated more positive evaluation of organizational reputation than non-mortification strategies (excuse and excuse plus ingratiation) both in the United States and China. The results further proved the effectiveness of crisis response strategies that are incorporated in the SCCT by taking social cultural context into consideration.

Examining Effects of Different Contexts in the United States and China

Due to the unique social media environment in China, it was assumed that there would be a stronger contrast of the public's response towards mortification strategy and excuse strategy in China than in the United States. Results indicated that the public in China tends to have stronger reactions than the public in the United States. However, such a tendency was not illustrated through what was assumed in H4, but was illustrated through the difference in negative online crisis reaction intentions between the two countries. People in China tend to have higher negative online crisis reaction intentions than people in the United States across all crisis response strategy conditions. Negative online crisis reaction is usually associated with the level of anger. The angrier a person is, the more likely that he or she is going to conduct negative online crisis

reaction. However, based on the results that there was no significant difference in negative word-of-mouth intentions between the United States and China, which is also triggered by anger (Coombs and Holladay, 2007), it is unlikely that the varying anger levels is the cause for the difference. There are two possible reasons that may explain the difference.

First, social media in China have encouraged the public's self-expression online in a society where silence is valued traditionally. Because self-expression is usually suppressed by the traditional Chinese culture offline, the public in China tends to have a stronger reaction online than in the United States, where self-expression is encouraged both online and offline. Yu and Wen (2003) pointed out that "Chinese people are socialized to remain silent" because they believe "trouble is born out of the words you speak" (p. 54). Confucianism, as a major Chinese philosophy, values harmonious human relationships in society. Confucius said: "If there is something you don't like in the person to your right, don't pass it on to the person on your left" (Yum, 1997, p. 80). Saving face is also a traditional value held by the Chinese society (Yu & Wen, 2003). In a survey, Chu and Ju (1993) found that an overwhelming majority (93.8%) in China considered face-saving an important value. Chinese people are encouraged not to express their opinions towards an incident in the offline context, and when they do express themselves, they may take the risk of "losing face" fearing that the opinion might not be well-received others. However, social media created a platform for Chinese people to express themselves freely. Since there tend to be not enough space to express their anger in the offline world, Chinese people may seek to vent all of their anger through social media, where they do not have to worry about being too expressive. For people in the United States, self-expression is encouraged both online and offline. Therefore, they are less likely to vent all of their anger through social media.

Second, although Weibo is considered the Chinese equivalent of Twitter, there are still distinctive differences in their features. Weibo has eight features that are not embodied in Twitter: threaded comment, rich media, micro topics, trends categorization, verified account and hall of celebrity, medal reward system, more style templates, and Weibo event (Falcon, 2011). The features of threaded comment, rich media, and medal reward system have made it easier for users to engage in conversations and track progress not only using texts, but also using images, videos, music, and emotion icons (Falcon, 2011). Twitter and Weibo both have restricted the content length to 140 characters. However, in Chinese, a word usually only consists of two to four characters, with two-character words being used the most often, whereas in English, words usually consist of many more characters. Although both having restrictions in length, a text content with 140 characters in Chinese can contain much more information than in English, without considering the additional abundant rich media choices provided by Weibo. Therefore, it is possible that the features of Weibo and the Chinese language have further encouraged the Chinese public to engage in online communications, and have made it easier for them to share information, make comments and express opinions.

Implications for the Use of SCCT across Countries

This study is the first to compare the effects of Coombs's (1995) crisis response strategy of the SCCT via social media in different social cultural contexts. It set out to answer which crisis response strategies are most effective during a corporate crisis event and whether they work differently in the western context and the non-western context via social media. By testing the already established SCCT in different social cultural contexts, this study helps provide scholars and researchers evidence for an extension of the theory and helps public relations practitioners

make more informed decisions when choosing the most effective crisis response strategy in different countries.

This study further advanced Coombs' (1995) crisis response strategy of the SCCT by taking different social cultural contexts into consideration, and showed support for the previous findings regarding the effectiveness of crisis response strategy in non-western cultures through cross-cultural comparisons.

Coombs' (1995) crisis response strategy of the SCCT was found to be effective both in the United States and China. Moreover, effects of different crisis response strategies are consistent between the two countries. In a crisis type of accident, corporations should be willing to take responsibility and express their concerns for the victims. Blame-shifting generally leads to more negative evaluations of organizational reputation. Even if excuse strategy is accompanied by ingratiation, it does not change its blame-shifting effect and would still produce lower scores in the evaluated organizational reputation. This is true both in western cultures and non-western cultures.

Ye and Pang (2011) argued that the traditional Chinese approach of crisis management, which mainly focuses on covering up, saving face, and "taking the upper level line" was "mired in values that differ from the best practices of effective crisis management" (p. 247). Results of this study indicated that practices based on the SCCT are effective both in the United States and China. Effective strategies in the United States can also be applied to the Chinese context. However, Chinese people tend to have more negative online crisis reaction intention during a crisis event. Effective communication via social media, in this situation, is especially important in China, and organizations need to be aware of the negative consequences online during crises.

Moreover, the higher negative online crisis reaction intention in China also indicated that Chinese internet users can be the driving force in future grassroots campaigns.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

It is hoped that future efforts can be made to include the issues that are not addressed in this study. First of all, this study did not take the organization's performance history into consideration. Based on Coombs' (1995) crisis response decision flowchart, an organization's performance history plays an important role in determining the right words to choose during a crisis event. Although results indicated that the preliminary attitudes towards the airline companies were equal across the eight treatment groups, it was only measured by three single items instead of an established scale. Since it was assumed that not all participants would be familiar with the airline companies used in this experiment, the preliminary attitudes were not taken into consideration in the tests for research questions and hypotheses. In fact, a positive performance history may create a halo effect that can protect an organization during crisis events (Coombs & Holladay, 2006). Therefore, it is suggested that future studies test the organization's performance history prior to the manipulations and use the results of performance history test as a covariant when analyzing the effects of crisis response strategy and countries. Also, this research only covered one crisis type—accident, among the four crisis types in the internal-external and intentional-unintentional matrix (Coombs, 1995). An accident is an unintentional action caused by internal factors. Intentional crisis conditions usually generate higher volume of anger than unintentional crisis condition (Coombs, 2004; Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Utz, Schultz, & Glocka, 2013). It is hoped that future research with intentional crisis conditions can be conducted to further test the effects on reputation, negative word-of-mouth intention and negative online crisis reaction intention.

Second, results of the participants' social media usage and preliminary attitudes showed that while a majority of the participants owned Twitter/Weibo accounts (85%, N = 287) and had taken flights before (85%, N = 286), there were still 15% participants (N = 50) that did not own Twitter/Weibo accounts and 15% that had not taken flights before (N = 51). Although the ANOVA tests of the preliminary attitudes showed no significant difference among the eight groups, it is possible that the differences in the social media usage and experience of taking flights might still lead to the differences in the results. Therefore, greater sample size is needed in future research in order to eliminate the potential bias that might be generated by the differences in preliminary media consumption behavior and experience with products/services.

Last but not least, in this study, participants were not asked to report their anger levels after hearing the crisis and the response strategy. This is a flaw considering that the level of anger is positively related to negative word-of-mouth intentions and negative online crisis reaction intentions (Coombs & Holladay, 2008; Coombs & Holladay, 2009; Utz, Schultz, & Glocka, 2013). As shown in the results of the follow-up ANOVAs on dependent variables, the variances that crisis response strategies accounted for organizational reputation, negative word-of-mouth intention, and negative online crisis reaction intention were 15%, 3%, and 2% respectively. Anger level, in this case, might be part of the variances accounted for the dependent variables. Therefore, it is suggested that future research measure the anger level as a covariance.

TABLE 6.1: Summary of Hypotheses Results

Hypotheses	**Findings**	**Statistical Results**
H1a: Mortification strategies (apology and compensation) will generate more positive perceptions of organizational reputation than non-mortification strategies (excuse and excuse plus ingratiation).	Supported	$F(3, 328) = 18.95$, $p < .001$ Apology vs. excuse: $MD = .52$, $p < .001$ Apology vs. excuse plus ingratiation: $MD = .32$, $p < .01$ Compensation vs. excuse: $MD = .66$, $p < .001$ Compensation vs. excuse plus ingratiation: $MD = .46$, $p < .001$
H1b: Mortification strategies (apology and compensation) will generate less likelihood to conduct negative word-of-mouth communication than non-mortification strategies (excuse and excuse plus ingratiation).	Partially supported	$F(3, 328) = 3.28$, $p = .021$ Apology vs. excuse: $MD = -.32$, $p < .05$ Apology vs. excuse plus ingratiation: $MD = -.10$, $p > .90$ Compensation vs. excuse: $MD = -.28$, $p = .08$ Compensation vs. excuse plus ingratiation: $MD = .05$, $p > .90$
H1c: Mortification strategies (apology and compensation) will generate less likelihood to conduct negative online crisis reactions than excuse and ingratiation than non-mortification strategies (excuse and excuse plus ingratiation).	Not supported	$F(3, 328) = 1.66$, $p = .175$
H2a: Excuse combined with ingratiation will generate more positive perceptions of organizational reputation reactions than excuse alone.	Not supported	$F(3, 328) = 18.95$, $p < .001$ Excuse vs. excuse plus ingratiation: $MD = -.19$, $p = .30$
H2b: Excuse combined with ingratiation will generate less likelihood to conduct negative word-of-mouth communication than excuse alone.	Not supported	$F(3, 328) = 3.28$, $p = .021$ Excuse vs. excuse plus ingratiation: $MD = .23$, $p = .27$
H2c: Excuse combined with ingratiation will generate less likelihood to conduct negative online crisis reactions than excuse alone.	Not supported	$F(3, 328) = 1.66$, $p = .175$

Hypotheses	Findings	Statistical Results
H3a: Compensation will generate higher perceptions of organizational reputation in China than in the United States.	Not supported	F (1, 324) = .01, p = .91
H3b: Compensation will generate less likelihood to conduct negative word-of-mouth communication in China than in the United States.	Not supported	F (1, 324) = 1.59, p = .21
H3c: Compensation will generate less likelihood to conduct negative online crisis reaction in China than in the United States.	Not supported	F (1, 324) = 56.20, p < .001 (The opposite direction)
H4a: Excuse strategy will generate less positive perceptions of organizational reputation in China than in the United States.	Not supported	F (1, 324) = .01, p = .91
H4b: Excuse strategy will generate more likelihood to conduct negative word-of-mouth communication in China than in the United States.	Not supported	F (1, 324) = 1.59, p = .21
H4c: Excuse strategy will generate more likelihood to conduct negative online crisis reaction in China than in the United States.	Supported	F (1, 324) = 56.20, p < .001

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

This study is the first to bring in different social cultural contexts when testing the crisis response strategy in SCCT. Findings indicated that the effects of different crisis response strategies on organizational reputation, negative word-of-mouth intention, and negative online crisis reaction intention are consistent in the United States and China. Mortification strategies generated more positive evaluation of organizational reputation than non-mortification strategies. However, the differences between mortification strategies and non-mortification strategies on negative word-of-mouth intention and negative online crisis reaction intention were not as prominent as on organizational reputation. For negative word-of-mouth intention, only apology would produce less likelihood than excuse. For negative online crisis reaction intention, the effects of crisis response strategy were equal across all conditions.

While the effects of crisis response strategy did not differ across countries, there did exist differences between the responses from publics in the United States and China. People in China tended to have higher negative online crisis reactions than people in the United States, regardless of the crisis response strategy being used. The reason for such a phenomenon was explained by the unique social cultural context and social media environment in China.

This study is valuable as it further advanced the SCCT by testing its effectiveness in different social cultural contexts and provided implications for public relations practices across different cultures.

REFERENCES

Avery, E. J., Lariscy, R. W., Kim, S., & Hocke, T. (2010). A quantitative review of crisis communication research in public relations from 1991 to 2009. *Public Relations Review*, *36*, 190-192.

Champoux, V., Durgree, J., & McGlynn, L. (2012). Corporate Facebook pages: When "fans" attack. *Journal of Business Strategy*, *33* (2), 2012, 22-30.

Chiu, C., Ip, C., & Silverman, A. (2012, May). Understanding social media in China. Retrieved from http://www.mckinseyquarterly.com/Understanding_social_media_in_China_2961.

Chu, G. C., & Ju, Y. (1993). *The great wall in ruins: Communication and cultural change in China*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Claeys, A.-S., Cauberghe, V., & Vyncke, P. (2010). Restoring reputations in times of crisis: An experimental study of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory and the moderating effects of locus of control. *Public Relations Review*, *36*, 256-262.

Coombs, W. T. (1995). Choosing the right words: The development of guidelines for the selection of the "appropriate" crisis-response strategies. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *8* (4), 447-476.

Coombs, W. T. (1999). Information and compassion in crisis response: A test of their effects. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *11* (2), 125-142.

Coombs, W. T. (2007). Protecting organization reputation during a crisis: The development and application of situational crisis communication theory. *Corporate Reputation Review*, *10* (3), 163-176.

Coombs, W. T. (2008). *Crisis communication and social media*. Essential Knowledge Project, Institute for Public Relations. Available at: http://www.instituteforpr.org/essential_knowledge/detail/crisis_communication_and_social_media.

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

Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2002). Helping crisis managers protect reputational assets: Initial tests of the situational crisis communication theory. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 16, 165-186.

Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2007). The negative communication dynamic: Exploring the impact of stakeholder affect on behavioral intention. *Journal of Communication Management*, *11* (4), 300-312.

Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2008). Comparing apology to equivalent crisis response strategies: Clarifying apology's role and value in crisis communication. *Public Relations Review*, *34*, 252-257.

Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2009). Further exploration of post-crisis communication: Effects of media and response strategies on perceptions and intentions. *Public Relations Review*, *35*, 1-6.

Coombs, W. T., & Schmidt, L. (2000). An empirical analysis of image restoration: Texaco's racism crisis. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *12*, 163-178.

Dodd, M. D., & Campbell, S. B. (May, 2011). *A Strategic Framework for Targeting Generation Y via Social Media: Public Relations Results and Implications*. Paper presented at the 61st International Communication Association Conference, Boston.

Falcon, A. (2011). Twitter vs. Weibo: 8 things Twitter can learn from the latter. Retrieved from http://www.hongkiat.com/blog/things-twitter-can-learn-from-sina-weibo/.

Gonzalez-Herrero, A., & Smith, S. (2010). Crisis communication management 2.0: Organizational principles to manage crisis in an online world. *Organization Development Journal*, *28* (1), 97-105.

Hewitt, D. (2012, July 31). Weibo brings change to China. Retrived from http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-18887804.

Huang, Y.-H., Lin, Y.-H., & Su, S.-H. (2005). Crisis communicative strategies in Taiwan: Category, continuum, and cultural implication. *Public Relations Review*, *31*, 229-238.

Lee, B. K. (2004) Audience-oriented approach to crisis communication: A study of Hong Kong consumer's evaluation of an organizational crisis. *Communication Research*, *31* (5), 600-618.

Liu, B. F., Austin, L., & Jin, Y. (2011). How publics respond to crisis communication strategies: The interplay of information form and source. *Public Relations Review*, *37*, 345-353.

Liu, X., Chang, Z., & Zhao, P. (2009). Is it simply a matter of managerial competence? Interpreting Chinese executives' perceptions of crisis management. *Public Relations Review*, *35*, 232-239.

Lyu, J. C. (2012). A comparative study of crisis communication strategies between Mainland China and Taiwan: The melamine-tainted milk powder crisis in the Chinese context. *Public Relations Review*, http://dx.dio.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2012.07.003.

Mei, Y. (2012, July 2). 5 Chinese social networks you need to watch. Retrieved from http://mashable.com/2012/07/02/china-social-networks/.

Sallot, L. M. (2002). What the public thinks about public relations: An impression management experiment. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, 79*, 150-171.

Schultz, F., Utz, S. & Goeritz, A. (2011). Is the medium the message? Perceptions of and reactions to crisis communication via twitter, blogs and traditional media. *Public Relations Review*, *37*, 20-27.

Sheldon, C. A., & Sallot, L. M. (2009). Image repair in politics: Testing effects of communication strategy and performance history in a faux pas. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *21* (1), 25-50.

Sisco, H. F. (2012). Nonprofit in crisis: An examination of the applicability of Situational Crisis Communication Theory. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 24, 1-17.

Tapscott, D. (2009). *Growing up digital: How the Net Generation is changing your world*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Taylor, M., & Perry, D. C. (2005). Diffusion of traditional and new media tactics in crisis communication. *Public Relations Review*, *31*, 209-217.

Utz, S., Schultz, F., & Glocka, S. (2013). Crisis communication online: How medium, crisis type and emotion affected public reactions in the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster. *Public Relations Review*, *39* (1), 40-46.

Veil, S. R., Buehner, T., & Palenchar, M. J. (2011). A work-in-process literature review: Incorporating social media in risk and crisis communication. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, *19* (2), 110-122.

Veil, S. R., Sellow, T. L., & Petrun, E. L. (2011). Hoaxes and the paradoxical challenges of restoring legitimacy: Domino's response to its YouTube crisis. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 26 (2), 322-345.

Ye, L., & Pang, A. (2011). Examining the Chinese approach to crisis management: cover-ups, saving face, and taking the "upper level line". *Journal of Marketing Channels*, 18 (4), 247-278.

Young, D. (2012, Nov. 9). Social media both friend and foe for China's new leaders. Retrieved from http://www.cnn.com/2012/11/09/world/asia/china-social-networking-young/index.html.

Yu, T.-H., & Wen, W.-C. (2003). Crisis communication in Chinese culture: A case study in Taiwan. *Asian Journal of Communication*, *13* (2), 50-64.

Yum, J. O. (1997). The impact of Confucianism on interpersonal relationships and communication patterns in East Asia. In L. A. Samovar & R. E. Porter (Eds.) *Intercultural communication: A reader* (8th ed., pp. 78-88). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

APPENDICES

A. Experiment Questionnaire and Stimuli for Participants in the U.S. (Using Online Survey Method)

Crisis Response Strategy Survey

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in the research study about how publics in the United States and in China respond to crisis response strategies. This questionnaire is for the part in the United States. The study is conducted by Zifei (Fay) Chen, an M.A. candidate in the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia, under the direction of Bryan H. Reber, Ph.D., Department of Advertising and Public Relations. This survey is for Ms. Chen's thesis, and results may be published.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You have the option to complete the survey on-line from your home computer. Please note that Internet communications are insecure and there is a limit to the confidentiality that can be guaranteed due to the technology itself. However, once the materials are received by the researcher, standard confidentiality procedures will be employed. For you to get extra credit, some identifiable information will be asked after you complete this survey. However, such information will ONLY be used to give you extra credit, and they will be removed RIGHT AWAY to ensure that they CANNOT be linked to the data.

There are no direct benefits to you from participating in this study but your participation may help to increase our understanding of social media use during corporate crises events. You may experience some minor discomfort during the study. You may withdraw at any time without any consequence to your grade or class standing, and you can refuse to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering. Please answer the questions in the order as the questionnaire indicates.

This survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. In order to make this study a valid one, some information about the study will be withheld until completion of the survey. You may choose to withdraw your data at the end of the survey when the information is revealed. IF YOU DECIDE TO WITHDRAW FROM THE SURVEY IN THE MIDDLE, please check the "I want to withdraw" box at the bottom of the page and proceed BEFORE you close the browser.

If you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to ask them now or later. Thank you for your time and participation!

Sincerely,

Zifei (Fay) Chen
M.A. Candidate, Public Relations
Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication
University of Georgia
Athens, GA 30602
chenzf@uga.edu
706.247.4830

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 629 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602; Telephone (706) 542-3199; Email Address: IRB@uga.edu.

- (●) I AGREE with the statement above and agree to take this survey.
- ( ) I DISAGREE with the statement above and refuse to take this survey.

(Enforced response here to continue)

Please respond to the following statements by selecting either "Yes" or "No".

	Yes	No
I have a Twitter account.	○	○
I use Twitter to learn about news.	○	○
I have taken flight(s) before.	○	○
I think it is safe to travel by plane.	○	○
I heard about United Airlines before.	○	○
I have taken flights with United Airlines before.	○	○

☐ (I want to WITHDRAW from this survey.)
CAUTION: If you check this, you will NO LONGER be participating in this survey.

Please select one answer from the following choices: "Strongly Disagree", "Disagree", "Neutral", "Agree", and "Strongly Agree".

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I think it is safe to travel with United Airlines.	○	○	○	○	○
United Airlines delivers high quality services.	○	○	○	○	○

Overall, my impression of United Airlines is:

Very Unfavorable	Unfavorable	Neutral	Favorable	Very Favorable
○	○	○	○	○

☐ (I want to WITHDRAW from this survey.)
CAUTION: If you check this, you will NO LONGER be participating in this survey.

Please read the following information before you proceed to the NEXT SECTION:

Yesterday morning around 6:10 a.m., United Airlines flight 232 departing from New York to Chicago caught fire while landing at Chicago O'Hare International Airport. Investigations into this plane crash reported that the accident was caused by loss of flight control due to engine failure. 153 passengers and the 11 crew members were injured while evacuating, and 78 of them were in serious condition in area hospitals.

You will be reading United Airlines' response to this plane crash on its official Twitter account.

☐ (I want to WITHDRAW from this survey.)
CAUTION: If you check this, you will NO LONGER be participating in this survey.

Four stimuli of Photoshopped Twitter containing United Airlines' crisis response strategies (apology, compensation, excuse, excuse+ingratiation) are provided in this appendix. In the next section, one of the stimuli will be randomedly selected by system and presented in each questionnaire during research.

Stimulus One: Apology

Below is United Airlines' response to this plane crash on its official Twitter account.
(If the picture doesn't show up, please wait a little bit for loading. Thank you for your patience.)

☐ (I want to WITHDRAW from this survey.)
CAUTION: If you check this, you will NO LONGER be participating in this survey.

Stimulus Two: Compensation

Below is United Airlines' response to this plane crash on its official Twitter account.
(If the picture doesn't show up, please wait a little bit for loading. Thank you for your patience.)

☐ (I want to WITHDRAW from this survey.)
CAUTION: If you check this, you will NO LONGER be participating in this survey.

Stimulus Three: Excuse

Below is United Airlines' response to this plane crash on its official Twitter account.
(If the picture doesn't show up, please wait a little bit for loading. Thank you for your patience.)

☐ (I want to WITHDRAW from this survey.)
CAUTION: If you check this, you will NO LONGER be participating in this survey.

Stimulus Four: Excuse and Ingratiation

Below is United Airlines' response to this plane crash on its official Twitter account.
(If the picture doesn't show up, please wait a little bit for loading. Thank you for your patience.)

☐ (I want to WITHDRAW from this survey.)
CAUTION: If you check this, you will NO LONGER be participating in this survey.

Please select one answer from the following choices: "Strongly Disagree", "Disagree", "Neutral", "Agree", and "Strongly Agree".

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
United Airlines took responsibility for the plane crash.	○	○	○	○	○
United Airlines compensated the victims with money.	○	○	○	○	○
United Airlines emphasized the quality of its service in the response.	○	○	○	○	○
United Airlines is concerned with the well-being of its publics.	○	○	○	○	○
United Airlines is basically DISHONEST.	○	○	○	○	○
I do NOT trust the airline company to tell the truth about the incident.	○	○	○	○	○
Under most circumstances, I would be likely to believe what United Airlines says.	○	○	○	○	○
United Airlines is NOT concerned with the well-being of its publics.	○	○	○	○	○

After hearing the response, my overall opinion of United Airlines is:

Very Unfavorable	Unfavorable	Neutral	Favorable	Very Favorable
○	○	○	○	○

☐ (I want to WITHDRAW from this study.)
CAUTION: If you check this, you will NO LONGER be participating in this survey.

Please select one answer from the following choices: "Very Unlikely", "Unlikely", "Neutral", "Likely", and "Very Likely".

	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Neutral	Likely	Very Likely
I would encourage friends or relative NOT to take flights with United Airlines.	○	○	○	○	○
I would say negative things about United Airlines to other people.	○	○	○	○	○
I would recommend United Airlines to someone who asked my advice.	○	○	○	○	○
I would ReTweet this message.	○	○	○	○	○
I would write negative comments about this incident online.	○	○	○	○	○
I would sign an online petition to boycott United Airlines.	○	○	○	○	○

☐ (I want to WITHDRAW from this study.)
CAUTION: If you check this, you will NO LONGER be participating in this survey.

You are:

○ Male

○ Female

The degree I am pursuing is

○ Bachelor's

○ Master's

○ Doctoral

○ Other (Please specify)

My major area of study is (fill in blank below)

My age in years on my last birthday was (fill in blank below)

Please make sure to PROCEED TO THE NEXT PAGE before you submit the questionnaire.

☐ (I want to WITHDRAW from this study.)
CAUTION: If you check this, you will NO LONGER be participating in this survey.

IMPORTANT
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

Dear Participant:

In this questionnaire, you were asked to give your opinions towards the response from United Airlines after a plane crash. **Please note that the plane crash described in the survey and the Tweet you read, including all details such as the date, casualty and all persons described in it, are ENTIRELY FICTITIOUS**.

You were not told that the plane crash was fictitious during the survey because it is believed that more authentic responses from participants can be generated, which is important for this study to get valid results.

Now that you know the true nature of the study, you have the option to have your data removed from this study. Please check below if you do NOT want your data to be used in this research and it will be withdrawn. Otherwise please proceed to finish this survey.

Study contact for the question about the study or to report a problem: If you have questions, concerns, or complaints: Zifei (Fay) Chen, Graduate Student, Department of Advertising and Public Relations, Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication, chenzf@uga.edu or 706.247.4830, or Dr. Bryan H. Reber, Faculty Advisor, Department of Advertising and Public Relations, Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication, reber@uga.edu or 706.542.3178.

IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint: Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 629 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!

PLEASE PROCEED TO THE NEXT PAGE AND SUBMIT THIS QUESTIONNAIRE AS DIRECTED BY THE SURVEY ADMINISTRATOR.

☐ (I DO NOT want my data to be used and would like to WITHDRAW my answers.)
CAUTION: If you check this, you will NO LONGER be participating in this survey.

B. Experiment Questionnaire and Stimuli for Participants in China
(Using Pen-and-paper Survey Method)

危机反应策略问卷调查

尊敬的调查参与者，

您好！

非常感谢您参与此项关于中美危机反应策略的调查研究。本研究旨在探索中美公众对危机反应策略的态度。本问卷是该研究的中国部分。此项研究由陈子霏（浙江大学 2011 届校友，美国佐治亚大学新闻与传播学院公共关系方向硕士在读）执行，佐治亚大学公共关系学教授 Bryan. H. Reber 博士指导。本问卷是陈子霏同学硕士学位毕业论文的组成部分，研究成果将有可能被发表。

您的参与将基于自愿的基础。您提供的所有答案都将是匿名的，且所有数据均将以整体形式报告，不会涉及到您的任何个人信息。

参与调查不会对您本人带来直接利益，但您的参与将增进我们对企业社会化媒体危机公关的理解。关于危机的报道可能会给您的带来轻微的不适感。您有权在问卷调查的任何阶段终止您的参与，也有权拒绝回答任何您不愿意回答的问题。这些行为都不会对您本门课程的成绩造成任何影响。**请根据问卷顺序回答问题，如您决定在调查当中终止参与，请确保在提交前先阅读最后一页的信息。**

本问卷调查将持续 10 分钟左右。为确保调查结果有效，部分信息将在调查完成后才予以提供。在阅读相关信息后，您有权选择辙销您的所有回答。

完成问卷意味着您同意参与此项研究。如您存有任何疑问，可随时向研究员提出。

衷心感谢您的参与！

此致

敬礼！

陈子霏

浙江大学 2011 届毕业校友
美国佐治亚大学新闻与传播学院 2013 届硕士在读
B.A., Zhejiang University ‘11
M.A. Candidate, Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication
The University of Georgia ‘13
chenzf@uga.edu
+86-134-5678-0012/+1(706)247-4830

第一部分
请根据您的实际情况，就下列陈述选择“是”或“否”，请在最符合您观点的选项上打✓：

1. 我拥有微博帐号。
   是　　否

2. 我通过微博了解时事新闻。
   是　　否

2. 我乘坐过飞机。
   是　　否

4. 我认为飞机是一种安全的交通工具。
   是　　否

5. 我听说过中国南方航空公司。
   是　　否

6. 我曾搭乘过中国南方航空公司的航班。
   是　　否

第二部分
请根据您的个人观点，就下列陈述做出评价，请在最符合您观点的选项上打✓：

1. 我认为中国南方航空公司的航班是安全的。
非常同意　同意　差不多　不同意　非常不同意

2. 中国南方航空公司为乘客提供优质服务。
非常同意　同意　差不多　不同意　非常不同意

2. 总体而言，我对中国南方航空公司的印象：
非常好　比较好　一般　比较差　非常差

请您在回答第三部分问题前先阅读下列新闻：

昨日清晨 6 时 10 分左右，中国南方航空公司从南京飞往广州的 2321 号客机在广州新白云机杨降落时失火。事故调查结果显示，由于引擎失灵，飞机在降落过程中失去控制。机上 153 名乘客与 11 名机组成员在紧急撤离时受伤，其中 78 人伤势严重，目前尚在医院观察中。

接下来，您将会看到中国南方航空公司在新浪微博上对此次空难事件的反应。
（请勿翻回前页）

危机反应策略

策略一：道歉

策略二：赔偿


新浪认证
行业：汽车交通 - 航空公司
自信认证»
1182 关注
463053 粉丝
6906 微博
我们的很关系
www.csair.com
+加关注
发私信 推荐给朋友
主页
投票调研
全部 原创 图片 视频 音乐 标签
搜索他说的话
高级检索
我们将近一切所能，为广州空难事件的受伤人员及家属提供赔偿，帮助他们渡过此次难关。
转发 | 收藏 | 评论

策略三：借口


新浪认证
申请认证»
行业：汽车改造-航空公司
1182 463053 5906
关注 粉丝 微博
我们的关系
全部 | 原创 | 图片 | 视频 | 音乐 | 标签
高级搜索
事故调查表明，此次广州空难源于波音公司所产飞机的引擎故障，波音公司须为此次事故负责。
转发 | 收藏 | 评论
+加关注
首页
投票调研
www.csair.com

策略四：借口+超脱


新浪认证
中国南方航空官方微博
行业：汽车交通 - 航空公司
申请认证»
1182 关注
463053 粉丝
5906 微博
我们的微关系
www.csair.com
+加关注
发私信 | 推荐给朋友
主页
投票调研
全部 | 原创 | 图片 | 视频 | 音乐 | 标签
搜索他说的话
高级搜索
2321号航班机组人员在此次广州空难事故中先人后己，保证了组织紧急撤离的高效率。事故调查表明，此次空难源于波音公司所产飞机的引擎故障，波音公司须为此次事故负责。
24分钟前 来自专业版微博
转发 | 收藏 | 评论

第三部分

（请勿翻回前页）请根据您所读到的新闻报道与微博信息，就下列陈述做出个人评价，请在最符合您观点的选项上打✓：

1. 中国南方航空公司承担了此次空难的责任。
非常同意　同意　差不多　不同意　非常不同意

2. 中国南方航空公司向空难受害人员提供赔偿。
非常同意　同意　差不多　不同意　非常不同意

3. 中国南方航空公司在微博中强调了其服务质量。
非常同意　同意　差不多　不同意　非常不同意

4. 中国南方航空公司关心其乘客的生命安全。
非常同意　同意　差不多　不同意　非常不同意

5. 中国南方航空公司总体上是**不诚信**的。
非常同意　同意　差不多　不同意　非常不同意

6. 我**不相信**中国南方航空公司对此空难的说辞。
非常同意　同意　差不多　不同意　非常不同意

7. 在大部分情况下，我会相信中国南方航空公司的说辞。
非常同意　同意　差不多　不同意　非常不同意

8. 中国南方航空公司**不关心**其乘客的生命安全。
非常同意　同意　差不多　不同意　非常不同意

9. 阅读了此条微博后，我对中国南方航空公司的总体印象：
非常好　比较好　一般　比较差　非常差

第四部分

（请勿翻回前页）请根据您所读到地新闻报道与微博信息，对下列陈述的可能性做出个人选择，请在最符合您观点的选项上打✓：

1. 我会动员亲戚朋友**不去乘坐**中国南方航空公司的航班。
非常可能　可能　一般　不可能　非常不可能

2. 我会在其他人面前对中国南方航空公司做出负面评价。
非常可能　可能　一般　不可能　非常不可能

3. 如有他人向我征询意见，我会推荐中国南方航空公司。
非常可能　可能　一般　不可能　非常不可能

4. 我会转发这条微博。
非常可能　可能　一般　不可能　非常不可能

5. 我会在网上对此事件做出负面评价。
非常可能　可能　一般　不可能　非常不可能

6. 我会在网上参与抵制中国南方航空公司的活动。
非常可能　可能　一般　不可能　非常不可能

第五部分

请打✓选择：
您的性别：男　女

您正在攻读的学位：
本科　硕士　博士　其他（请填写_____）

您的年龄：_____（请在横线上填写）

您的专业：_____

请您在提交问卷前确保阅读下一页上的相关信息。

重要声明

尊敬的调查参与者，

在本调查中，您对中国南方航空公司就其空难事件所发布的微博内容进行了评价。请注意**此问卷中描述的空难事件纯属虚构。您所读到的新闻报道与微博信息，包括其中涉及的日期、伤亡人数以及其它一切信息均系杜撰。**

为了最大程度地真实化危机情境，获得您对微博内容最准确的评价，以上信息在调查结束之后才予以公布。

现在您获知了关于此项调研的真实情况。您有权在此辙销您在问卷中的所有回答。如您决定辙销您的回答，请在以下选项前打✓。

☐ 我决定辙销我的所有回答，这些数据将不再被采用。

如您存有任何疑问或不满，请联系：陈子霏，美国佐治亚大学新闻传播学院公关广告系硕士研究生，邮件 chenzf@uga.edu，电话+1-706-247-4830 或+86-134-5678-0012。Bryan H. Reber 博士，硕士论文导师，美国佐治亚大学新闻与传播学院公关广告系教授，邮件 reber@uga.edu，电话+1-706-542-3178。

如您认为本调研对您的个人权益造成损害，可向佐治亚大学 Institutional Review Board 投诉。地址：Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 629 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602， 电话+1-706-542-3199， 邮件 IRB@uga.edu。

非常感谢您的参与！

请根据指示提交问卷。