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Never Easy to Say "Sorry": Exploring the Interplay of Crisis Involvement, Brand Image and Message Framing in Developing Effective Crisis Responses

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Never Easy to Say "Sorry": Exploring the Interplay of Crisis Involvement, Brand Image and Message Framing in Developing Effective Crisis Responses

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Abstract

Never Easy to Say "Sorry": Exploring the Interplay of Crisis Involvement, Brand Image and Message Framing in Developing Effective Crisis Responses

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Planning and executing a crisis response strategy that includes successful and effective communication with stakeholders are essential for companies, organizations and governments in order to maintain their reputations and sustain brands following a crisis. To determine the effectiveness of crisis response communication in terms of consumers' evaluation and information processing, this study experimentally examined the impact of crisis involvement and brand image and interaction effect in a corporate product harm crisis. Using fictitious scenarios to manipulate crisis involvement, brand image, and message framing, this study examines the effect of crisis response strategies (i.e., apology) on post-crisis attitudes toward a crisis brand and apology message, future purchase intention, and intention to engage in negative eWOM. Specifically, the study attempts to identify whether the interplay between these factors would increase the effectiveness of a company's crisis response regarding consumers' favorable attitudes and behavioral intentions.

The results of the present research showed that the overall three-way interaction between crisis involvement, brand image, and message framing is significant. First, in the case of high crisis involvement, the combination of rational framing and symbolic brand image increases the effectiveness of the apology message, while the combination of emotional framing of crisis communication and functional brand image increases the effectiveness of the apology message. In contrast, in the case of low crisis involvement, the combination of rational framing and functional brand image increases the effectiveness of the apology message, while the combination of emotional framing and symbolic brand image increases the effectiveness of the apology message. In addition, the study suggests that crisis involvement and brand image have a primary effect on the efficacy of the apology message from the crisis company in terms of attitude towards the crisis brand and purchase intention. The study has significant practical implications in that the results indicate that practitioners can alleviate the consequences suffered in a crisis by employing a crisis response strategy that properly aligns crisis type with level of involvement. Following a crisis, it is necessary to communicate with consumers using proper response messaging that takes into consideration consumers' crisis involvement, brand image and message framing.

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I. INTRODUCTION

From controversial car recalls at G.M. and Toyota to battery fire problems plaguing Sony Vaio laptops, a number of high-profile crises have challenged corporations in recent years. Corporations are increasingly turning to apologies as part of their crisis responses, and in the case of GM, are relying heavily on social media to open channels of communication with their customers. The prevalence of corporate crises prompts the need for practical research into examining the efficacy of crisis response strategies with regards to influencing customers' evaluation of the brands and companies in crisis.

Corporations in crisis situations face significant consequences such as reputational, financial, and physical harm (Coombs 2007a). As a response to these crises, organizations should try to communicate with stakeholders in the most appropriate way to minimize the damage and to restore their organizational reputation and relationship with their stakeholders (Coombs 2004; Claeys and Cauberghe 2014). Crisis response strategy must be fundamentally communicative, persuasive and effectual. A crisis response can either alleviate the consequences suffered with regards to the crisis or aggravate the crisis situation to make it worse for the corporation and its stakeholders.

Case studies were the main focus of early crisis communication research with the goal of developing typologies of crisis response strategies to be used in practical situations (e.g., Benoit 1995). More recently however, experiments have been more prevalent since it is easier to control and manipulate several factors that researchers want to examine. In terms of topics, previous experimental research has examined which kinds of crisis response strategies would be the most effective for restoring the damages that resulted from a crisis such as organizational reputation damage depending on the crisis conditions (Coombs 2007b). And, earlier experimental research focused on the influence of specific factors such as type of crisis and the severity of the crisis on strategy effectiveness (Avery et al. 2010; Coombs and Holladay 1996).

Also, sender-oriented research, what the organization communicates, has received greater attention from researchers than receiver-oriented research, how

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stakeholders perceive the messages (Coombs and Holladay 2012). Because the appropriateness of the crisis response is determined by the nature of the crisis, it is essential to deliberate on both the type of crisis and the crisis response simultaneously (e.g. Coombs 1995; Coombs and Holladay 1996; 2002; 2006; 2012). In that sense, this study focuses on how consumers process and react to crisis response strategies. Focusing on consumer-oriented responses to a crisis, this study attempts to identify the most effective crisis communication framework that focuses on an apology strategy by using the following influential factors: crisis involvement, brand image and message framing in the social media context.

Even though previous crisis-related research focused on crisis response strategies (Ki and Brown, 2013), few studies have attempted to investigate the relationship between crisis involvement, brand image and message framing regarding effectiveness of a company's crisis response. Understanding this is critical for attaining positive outcomes for a brand after crisis in the social media context.

In terms of a brand crisis, this type of crisis can often lead to a negative effect which considerably affects consumers' attitude and behavioral intention (e.g., purchase intention) (Dahlén and Lange 2006), and even cause negative word of mouth especially in an online environment. Another important aspect of brand crises is that they can have a negative influence on other brands in the same brand category. Hence greater engagement in brand management is required, along with close monitoring of the brand equity and communication of the brand category involved with the crisis. Therefore, this study attempts to examine the effectiveness of an apology strategy on attitude toward brand and apology message, purchase intention and intention to partake in eWOM after a brand crisis occurs. Since few studies have examined the role of situational factors and brand crisis in regards to the efficacy of crisis communication, this study adds value by investigating the role of situational factors (crisis involvement, brand image) and message framing that may moderate the efficacy of crisis communication (crisis response strategy) in the context of a brand crisis in the social media environment.

The level of consumers' crisis involvement is the first variable examined. The effectiveness of a company's crisis response could be differentiated by the level of consumers' crisis involvement. Based on this logic, the current study explores this premise for crisis communication experimentally, to demonstrate that organizations should consider what kind of involvement consumers have with a particular crisis when shaping their crisis communication strategy (Coombs and Holladay 2005).

Brand image is the second variable being investigated. Most previous research tended to focus on how crisis communication affects brands in the areas such as brand reputation in order to minimize the damage. However, the present study focuses on the role of brand image in the effectiveness of crisis communication. Brand image can elicit a positive effect on consumers' attitudes, purchase intentions, and influence a consumers' willingness to recommend a brand since brand concept (or image) can play a crucial role in stimulating a consumers' motivation to consume the brand. Based on this, the present study investigates the influence of brand image on the effect of a company's apology message.

The last variable under investigation is the message framing. The present study explores if the framing of crisis communication has an impact on the consumers' evaluations of the organizational communication and, more specifically, when it is accompanied with crisis involvement or/and brand image. As guidelines, this study uses the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) (Coombs), and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM).

The paper is organized as follows: This study begins by providing an overview of crisis communication research, concepts and theories then provides a review of existing work. Next, the study explains the research methods employed for testing the main and interaction effects of factors that are used in this study and presents the results of this experiment. The results revealed that crisis involvement and brand image have a significant effect on the effectiveness of a company's response strategy regarding consumers' evaluation. Also, there is a significant interaction effect among crisis involvement, brand image and message framing. Based on the importance of the results,

finally, this study offers discussions of theoretical and practical implications, limitations and directions for future research.

Lastly, the current study has several purposes from both a theoretical and managerial perspective: (1) to develop a preliminary understanding of the impact of a crisis response on consumers' evaluation about a company or brand after a crisis based on SCCT guidance and the ELM model, and (2) to study consumers' information processing in regards to a company's apology message after a crisis, and (3) to examine the importance of each factor used in this study in organizational crises, and (4) to explore variations in the consumers' evaluation in terms of attitudinal and behavioral aspects depending on each factor. In order to investigate the interactions and the relative importance of these factors, ANOVA analysis is used.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The recall crisis faced by GM in early 2014 is an example of a corporation successfully formulating an apology response strategy. A faulty ignition switch in GM cars resulted in multiple deaths, prompting the company to issue a massive recall. GM chief executive officer Mary Barra issued a series of apologies where she acknowledged that mistakes were made and she personally met with the families of some of the victims. Concurrently, GM launched a comprehensive social media effort to communicate recall information to its customers. Early indications were that the damage to GM's brand has been minimal.

In this way, a well-crafted crisis response strategy can benefit from the public's reevaluation of the company (Benoit and Pang 2008) and elicit favorable attitudes and behaviors among consumers (Coombs 2011; Park and Reber 2011). Most notably, apology, a primary aspect of a reputation repair strategy, is essential to study in order to assess how crisis communication is deployed strategically to manage and protect corporate reputations in a crisis situation (Coombs et al. 2010).

Since deploying an effective crisis response strategy lets a company mitigate damage to its image and influence public perception (Claeys, Cauberghe, and Vyncke 2010; Coombs 1995; 1998; Coombs and Holladay 1996; Lee 2004; Park and Reber 2011), Coombs (2004, 2007b) clearly defined what a company needs to do (Ki and Brown 2013) by classifying three constituents of an effective crisis response strategy based on SCCT; first, instructing information, second, adjusting information, and third, corrective action (Coombs 2007b; Ki and Brown 2013).

In addition, the SCCT model posits that the attribution of crisis responsibility is influenced by the choice of the most proper crisis response strategy (Coombs 2011). As part of this, Sisco, Collins, and Zoch (2010) found that the more specific a crisis response strategy is, the more likely it could solve the crisis effectively. In particular, the effective use of crisis-response strategies can change the stakeholders' judgment of crisis responsibility, as well as their emotions, attitudes and behavior intentions toward an organization (Claeys et al. 2010; Lee 2004; Park and Reber 2011). Based on this, this

study examines the effectiveness of crisis response strategy in terms of apology strategy with situational factors and message framing.

CRISIS COMMUNICATION (OVERVIEW AND TRENDS)

In the areas of crisis communication, over the past 15 years, there have been many attempts to determine the most effective crisis response strategy. Researchers have used a variety of theories to try to find out how organizations can best respond to crises involving allegations of wrongdoing. Early research tended to pay much attention to case studies in order to develop typologies of the crisis response strategies practitioners use (e.g., Benoit 1995). More recently, however, scholars have focused on experimental research study that examines which conditions crisis response strategies are most effective in restoring the image of a company and its brands. (Coombs 2007b).

In the initial stages of crisis communication, in terms of organizational self-defense, four major strategies and four different postures which were developed by Ware and Linkugel (1973). Following this, organizational crisis responses have evolved in various ways over time. Typically, image repair theory (Benoit 1995) and situational crisis communication theory (Coombs 1995) identified main categories and 12 subcategories of image repair strategies and five main categories and 17 subcategories of crisis response strategies respectively.

In addition, Hearit (e.g., 1994, 1997) created specific case study strategies in regards to organizational re-legitimization. Hearit posited that organizations need to undergo the re-legitimization process for corrective action and "a form of epideictic, value oriented discourse in which they praise the very values they are reputed to have transgressed" (Hearit, 1995, p. 11). Also, other researchers have developed alternative approaches. This variety of approaches is indispensable in the field of crisis communication.

By using a variety of approaches, for instance, apologia theory (Ware and Linkugel 1973), categoria-based apologia theory (Hearit 1995; Ryan 1982), corporate social legitimacy crisis theory (Hearit 1995; 1997), account theory (Scott and Lyman

1968), crisis communication research (Coombs 1995) and situational crisis communication theory(Coombs 2007a), attribution theory (Coombs 1995), and impression management (Leary and Kowalski 1990), among others, these researchers have developed a variety of schemes for explaining organizational responses to a crisis. Because there are many different objectives for crisis communication and crisis situations vary, researchers should look at the big picture to develop best practices for crisis communications.

Coombs (2007b) categorizes crisis communication processes into four stages: prevention, preparation, response, and revision. Ulmer, Seeger, and Sellnow (2007) also divided crisis communication process into four stages: managing uncertainty, responding to a crisis, resolving a crisis, and learning from a crisis. The crisis-response stage of crisis communication (e.g., response stages, responding to a crisis steps) is examined in this study. Crisis response-related theory has its foundations in apologia theory, which was developed by Benoit (1995) via creating image restoration theory first, and then Coombs (2007b) developed SCCT. The two lines of crisis communication research were combined by Coombs (1995), who assimilated attribution theory from a rhetorical perspective. In addition, SCCT lays the theoretical foundation for a number of crisis communication research studies.

To date, with that being said, the case study method has been the most common for post-crisis communication research. However, the limitation of these case studies is that only limited insight about actual responses of stakeholders could be offered, despite the fact that they provided data that reflected a real-world situation. Also, case studies offer a minimum of theoretical insight into crisis communication (Dawar and Pillutla 2000; Dean 2004). In recent years, one of the attention-grabbing tendencies of crisis communication research is that it is evolving from case studies to experimental research in which studies explore in a methodical approach how people perceive crisis strategies. To study how stakeholder perceptions about a crisis would be affected by crisis response strategies and to make contributions to crisis communication theory, scholars have engaged in experimental research (e.g., Coombs and Holladay 1996; Dean 2004).

Also, owing to the influence of attribution theory, SCCT employs a research method grounded in social science instead of a rhetorical method. Experimental design is the focus of SCCT research instead of utilizing case studies. That is, experimental research has been gaining great notice as the necessary study method in the crisis communication area since it is critical to increase evidence-based knowledge in this field. Because evidence-based management that originates from science fields can demonstrate scientifically the results that should be employed to guide actions, it is expected that this method can eventually be extended to crisis communication management (Rousseau 2006).

THE SITUATIONAL CRISIS COMMUNICATION THEORY (SCCT)

In a crisis situation, a company or brand comes up against several visible and invisible threats such as financial repercussions or damage to an organization's reputation (Coombs 2007b). As a countermeasure of crises, companies have to communicate and respond in the most effective way in order to minimize damage and to restore their reputation (Coombs 2004). Thus, public relations scholars and crisis managers are deeply concerned about how the public responds to crisis communications from an organization. A broad range of research studies on the topic of crisis communications assists communication managers in knowing how to deal with a crisis. Based on these fundamentals, Coombs has developed the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). SCCT is one of the main theoretical approaches for proving guidance on how a crisis situation affects response strategies and how the strategies ultimately effect crisis outcomes, such as restoring an organization's image (Coombs and Holladay 2002) and reputation (Claeys, Cauberghe, and Vyncke 2010; Coombs 2007b), declining negative word-of-mouth intentions (Coombs and Holladay 2007), and improving customers' purchase intentions (Coombs and Holladay 2008). In this way, crisis communication can protect not only stakeholders but also corporations and brands during or after a crisis.

SCCT asserts that the top priority in crisis management and crisis communication is public safety. Thus, only after measures have been taken regarding

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public safety can communication be deployed for reputation management. Crisis communication research has mainly centered on reputation management efforts (Coombs et al. 2010). Even as this is only one aspect of entire crisis communication management, it is very prominent and has significant consequences for crisis managers. Crisis communication serves many purposes, first to dampen the negative emotions and attitudes the crisis caused among stakeholders, and ultimately to lessen the likelihood of negative word-of-mouth and restore consumers' intention to purchase the products or services of the company engaged in the crisis (Coombs and Holladay 2007). That is, the main goal of Coombs's SCCT is to give practitioners guidance for developing effective crisis response strategies and successful crisis communications.

Via a number of SCCT research studies, SCCT has given crisis managers guidelines for effective crisis response strategies based on different crisis types, which are separated into three main categories by amount of responsibility (Coombs 2004; 2007b). In this way, SCCT has provided a theoretical framework for effective crisis communication strategy. In crisis communication research, SCCT is the most commonly used theory. According to SCCT, a crisis situation consists of four elements that can be utilized to evaluate its potential threat to the organization's reputation: crisis type, damage severity, crisis history, and relationship history (Choi and Chung 2013). And SCCT suggests, to protect an organization's reputation, crisis managers should select the most appropriate crisis-response strategy or strategies depending on the crisis type (Coombs 2007b; 2007c; Coombs and Holladay 2002; 2007; 2008; 2009).

As discussed, SCCT separates crisis types into three clusters (i.e., victim cluster, accident cluster, and preventable cluster) based on perceived amount of responsibility attributions of individuals within an organization during a crisis (Coombs 2007b; Coombs and Holladay 2002; 2009). First, the victim cluster is made up of crises with the weakest attributions of organizational responsibility (e.g., product tampering). Second, the accidental cluster is related to crises characterized by certain, but low level of responsibility attribution to the organization (e.g., technical-error product harm). Third, the preventable cluster relates to crises with high perceptions of crisis responsibility (e.g.,

organizational misdeeds with injuries). Thus, different types of crises cause different amounts of reputational damage. For example, a victim crisis may cause the smallest damage to the organization's reputation, an accidental crisis may cause a moderate amount of damage, and a preventable crisis may cause the largest amount of damage to the organization's reputation (Coombs and Holladay 2002; 2009). The present study deals only with a single crisis type, a preventable crisis; one of which is a product harm incident.

As mentioned above, SCCT theory suggests that the more responsibility consumers attribute to the organization in regards to the crisis, the more the organization's reputation suffers (Coombs 1998). Effective crisis response strategy is more highly required in situations of higher responsibility crises and severe crises. SCCT indicates it is more effective for organizations to differentiate crisis responses based on which type of crisis has occurred among the three crisis types (Coombs 2007b; 2007c). Just as there are three cluster types of crises, there are also three main strategies that could be used in post-crisis communication depending on crisis types; 1) deny, 2) diminish, 3) rebuild. These strategies are based on the amount of responsibility associated with the crisis. More specifically, deny strategies assert that there is no crisis or the organization takes no responsibility for the crisis (Claeys et al. 2010; Coombs 2007b). Diminish strategies are implemented to position a crisis as not serious as perceived by the public in order to minimize the organization's responsibility. Rebuild crisis strategies are characterized by offering compensation or apologies to the victims of the crisis. Hence, studies have posited that based on the crisis type, managers should choose the most appropriate crisis-response strategy (Coombs and Holladay 2002; 2009). Briefly stated, SCCT suggests organizations deploy deny strategies in the case of a victim crisis, that they use diminish strategies in an accidental crisis, and that they use rebuild strategies in a preventable crisis (Coombs 2007b; 2007c). SCCT posits that crisis practitioners should opt for crisis response strategies depending on the specific crisis situations types (Coombs and Holladay 2002). Results from previous studies have indicated that deny strategies are best aligned with victim crises and that diminish strategies are most

appropriate for accidental crises whereas preventable crises are best responded to with rebuild strategies (Claeys et al. 2010; Coombs; 2007b; 2007c). That is, SCCT suggests that organizations need to employ a rebuild strategy (e.g., apology) in the case of a preventable crisis (Coombs 2007b).

However, experimental research conducted previously on crisis communication has largely examined the impact of a limited range of variables, such as crisis type and severity, as well as the effectiveness of crisis response strategies (e.g., denial and apology) in restoring the reputation of an organization (Avery et al. 2010; Coombs and Holladay 1996). Thus, the present study examines the effectiveness of a rebuild strategy (i.e., apology) with different variables.

ORGANIZATIONAL CRISIS AND PRODUCT HARM CRISIS

According to Coombs, an organizational crisis can be defined as a specific, unexpected and non-routine event or series of events that result in high levels of uncertainty and threaten, or are perceived to threaten to cause damage to the organization (Coombs 2011). Moreover, Coombs (2011) added an essential element to his definition of a crisis: "The perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization's performance and generate negative outcomes'' (p. 2–3). An organizational crisis can occur unexpectedly and have negative repercussions (Coombs 2011) and be seen as an event that brings, or has the potential for bringing, an organization into disrepute, imperiling its future profitability, growth, and, possibly, its survival (Coombs 2007b). Typically, an organization tries to defend itself during and after a crisis, while the media attempts to place blame on the organization for the crisis (Coombs and Holladay 2002).

And, one of the most common organizational crises is a 'product-harm crisis'. Product-harm crises are prevalent in the marketplace. Recent notable examples include Toyota's worldwide recall, Taco Bell food poisoning, Chobani's false nutrition information, Subway's yoga mat chemical in the bread, and Dell's laptop battery combustion problems in all places and at all times (Cleeren, Heerde, and Dekimpe 2013).

Since products are becoming increasingly complicated, regulations for product safety have become increasingly rigorous while customers' expectations are higher as their demands increase, and as consumers' demands grow, product-harm crises are even more likely to occur (Dawar and Pillutla 2000).

These types of crises can cause major profit and market-share losses and damage carefully nurtured brand equity (Chen, Ganesan, and Liu 2009). Moreover, a product-harm crisis not only may be destructive to the affected brand but can also affect the entire category (Roehm and Tybout 2006). Namely, aside from the obvious impact on the affected brand, the entire category may be affected when the inadequacy of the production process is perceived as an industrywide problem (Roehm and Tybout 2006).

That is, a product harm crisis can perpetrate serious damage to a company's performance (Cleeren, Dekimpe, and Helsen 2008) not only reputational losses but potentially large financial losses as well. Following a crisis, customers could switch to a competitor brand, or even decide to stop buying the organization's products. This highlights the need for an effective management strategy in a product harm crisis.

Moreover, after a product harm crisis, the bad publicity surrounding the crisis tends to be weighed heavily when consumers make decisions regarding the product — which is referred to as negativity bias—as it is perceived as both diagnostic and surprising (Herr, Kardes, and Kim 1991) and is regarded to be more credible than positive news communicated by the company (Ahluwalia et al. 2000).

However, the negativity effect can be moderated by different factors (e.g. consumer-related factors, situational factors, consumer behavior, consumer psychology, etc. (Cleeren, Dekimpe, and Helsen 2008). Therefore, when being encountered with a product-harm crisis, PR practitioners and managers need to make informed decisions on their marketing variables to attenuate the negative impact of the crisis (Cleeren, Heerde, and Dekimpe 2013).

APOLOGY AS CRISIS RESPONSE STRATEGY

Along with SCCT, attribution theory, which is the foundation of SCCT, states that when a crisis occurs, the public (consumers, opinion leaders, stakeholders, media, etc.) will determine who is responsible for it and frequently attribute blame to the organization (Wiener 1985). Thus, if an organization is considered to be responsible for a crisis, the public's judgment regarding responsibility for the crisis can result in negative attitudinal and behavioral consequences for the organization (Coombs 2007b). In addition, research has shown that crisis response strategies – how an organization acts and communicates following a crisis – are designed to protect an organization's reputation (e.g., Coombs and Holladay 1996). Thus, it has become commonplace that a company needs to deliver a response message to stakeholders (e.g., consumers) after a crisis occurs. Post crisis messages usually include information such as what the company will do to protect customers, and how the company will cope both operationally and psychologically with the crisis (Coombs and Holladay 2008). And, apologies, one of primary crisis response strategies, have become routine as part of crisis communication strategies (Wooten 2009). The role of apology has been examined in three of the primary streams of crisis communication research: image restoration (Benoit 1995), corporate apologia (Hearit 1994), and SCCT (Coombs 2007b).

In recent years, apologies have become commonplace and can take shape in a variety of forms and serve different functions. Also, apology research spans a wide array of scholarly discourse. In addition, apologies are a significant type of crisis response strategy (Coombs et al. 2010; Coombs and Holladay 2012). This study also focuses on the application of an apology to crisis communication.

Researchers have emphasized the use of an apology as the ''best'' crisis response when an organization faces blame, specifically for a preventable crises (Benoit 1995; Benoit and Drew 1997). At its core, an apology is characterized by the organization accepting responsibility for the crisis and asking for forgiveness (Benoit and Drew 1997; Coombs and Holladay 2008). An apology can be is defined as a communicative expression of regret, remorse/sympathy, or sorrow for a wrongdoing, and can also include information

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regarding preventative measures and reparation (Benoit 1995; Benoit and Drew 1997; Patel and Reinsch 2003; Coombs and Holladay 2008). This phenomenon, the increase in apologies, indicates a change from past practices when experts discouraged apologies as being an admission of guilt or signal of an organizations' weakness (Wooten 2006). Also, some studies (Bradford and Garrett 1995; Dean 2004) mentioned that the apology strategy had the strongest positive effect on perceptions of an organization's reputation.

During a crisis, the organization that is accepting responsibility can adopt an apology response strategy by asking for forgiveness (Benoit and Drew 1997). For instance, if a company faces a crisis that directly resulted from its actions, it should deliver an apology for the actions (Benoit 1995). In a crisis situation, the public could express disappointment and demand a full explanation if the company does not completely apologize (Fearn-Banks 2011). Thus, when a crisis occurs, the company must communicate an actual apology to the public. If the company expresses a sincere apology to the public and spells out what steps will be taken to prevent a reoccurrence the public could perhaps forgive the company (Coombs and Holladay 2008; Fearn- Banks 2011). Thus, the apology response strategy is a critical element of crisis communication strategy that an organization can use for defending its reputation and protecting its image (Choi and Chung 2013). A company can also use apology as a critical crisis communication strategy in order to separate itself from the negative impact of a crisis (Choi and Chung 2013). While apologizing, the company may communicate to its public that it did not intend to make the mistake and that the crisis was unpredicted (Fearn-Banks 2011). The public is more likely to forgive the company because the apology and the claim that the happening was unforeseen influence the public to redefine the crisis as an unintentional mistake.

Although the importance and effectiveness of apologies have been explored, the effectiveness regarding when apologies work has been rarely examined. To establish a more realistic valuation of apologies in crisis communication, the use of apologies should be studied in greater depth. SCCT research has provided analysis of crisis strategies what an organization says and does after a crisis (e.g., Coombs and Holladay 1996).

Researchers have emphasized the use of apology/mortification as the "best" crisis response (e.g., Benoit 1995; Benoit and Drew 1997) and have widely employed varying definitions of an apology (Patel and Reinsch 2003). In addition, apologies have been defined by applying a variety of components including not only expression of various emotions such as sorrow, sympathy/compassion and regret, but also expression of preventative measures, and compensation (Benoit and Drew 1997; Patel and Reinsch 2003). However, some researchers still have argued that this strategy is the most expensive response financially for an organization (Patel and Reinsch 2003; Tyler 1997) since acknowledging a company's fault and admitting responsibility are the main features of an apology. Some apology-related research has posited that an apology could be more effective when deployed in tandem with other crisis response strategies (e.g. Bradford and Garrett 1995; Wooten 2006). Bradford and Garrett (1995) reported that deploying an apology strategy in conjunction with corrective action and compensation strategies such as providing victims with compensation, could be more effective. Thus, in this study, the apology message consists of not only information regarding the crisis and an expression of the company's feelings, but also information on their planned actions, especially related to compensation.

Based on this, to provide a clearer picture of apology effectiveness in a crisis response, this study examines apology strategies in an effort to elicit a richer and more empirical view of the use of an apology in crisis communication by utilizing more situational variables that include crisis involvement, brand type, and message framing in the social media context. Furthermore, this study expects to make the following contributions: (1) provide an empirical test of alternative processes through which apologies have been hypothesized to produce their effects, (2) test a useful moderator of various processes and effects, and (3) shed light on consumers' responses and evaluations as an important element of crisis communications in the relatively recent communication environment, which is the social media context.

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SOCIAL MEDIA IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION

New media provides organizations with a more interactive, dynamic and expressive two-way communication within public relations than classic media or simple websites. In the present study, as other researchers have done, social media has been operationalized to study a variety of digital tools and applications that are used to facilitate interactive communications and exchange content among organizations and the public (e.g., Jin, Liu, and Austin 2014). Marketers, advertisers, and PR managers have used social network sites commonly and broadly, particularly Facebook, since consumers can easily become a brand page's members. Also, it is easier to add new members than other media because options for joining and inviting friends are presented automatically on users' profile pages and their SNS friends' News Feeds (Jeong, Paek and Lee 2013). The public nature of SNSs also encourages consumers to join brand pages or invite their friends to join brand pages that a consumer easily sees and feels brand equity such as brand image (Ellison 2007)

In this way, in the crisis communication domain as well, the use of social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) has become increasingly important (Page 2014). With the considerable increase in the use of social media as a corporate communication vehicle, there has been a significant increase in the number of practitioners and crisis communication managers that are active online, prompting the need for increased empirical research that examines the role of social media in crisis communications.

Organizations also regard social media to be an efficient and effective tool for crisis communication (Page 2014). This is because it allows for the 'repairing' of an organization's reputation and helps prevent product boycotts (Schultz, Utz, and Göritz 2011). Moreover, it has become more convenient for people to write, respond or comment on messages in the social media context during a crisis.

Thus, messages emanating from social media that are propagated to a growing range of people carry a strong influence (Coombs and Holladay 2012). In a crisis situation, there is an increase in the public's social media usage, prompting some experts to surmise that public participation is now a common facet of crisis management (Baron

2010; Jin, Liu, and Austin 2014). For instance, an American Red Cross survey showed that 69% of adults think "emergency first-responders should refer to social media sites in order to provide assistance in a timely manner", and 74% said that "response agencies should be expected to answer social media calls for assistance within one hour" (American Red Cross 2010). Also, online engagement by active social media users increases the credibility of social media coverage as compared to traditional news media's crisis coverage (Sweetser and Metzgar 2007). Furthermore, emotional support is enabled by social media by providing an avenue for people to meet online, share information, bond with one another and collectively pursue a solution to the crisis (Choi and Lin 2009; Stephens and Malone 2009; Jin, Liu, and Austin 2014). Research findings indicate that it is imperative for companies to incorporate social media strategies as part of their crisis response strategies, with the key question being how to go about it to achieve effective outcomes. As Coombs (2008) stated, "The rapid evolution of new media often results in the practice of public relations getting ahead of research. The practice of crisis communication is ahead of research in terms of social media" (p. 1).

For one, Facebook is frequently used to post comments and could be deployed in crisis situations to provide rapid communication. (Schultz, Utz, and Göritz 2011). Thus, social media can blend effective interpersonal and mass communication more easily than traditional media. SNSs are also seen as dialogic, interactive and faster instruments for building relations (e.g., Kent, Taylor, and White 2003; Schultz, Utz, and Göritz 2011) than traditional media. These and several other examples demonstrate the publics' growing interest in using social media during and after crises, and, accordingly, crisis managers' need to comprehend how to best strategically optimize the use of these tools with crisis response strategy (Jin, Liu, and Austin 2014). Consequently, there is growing need to understand how to strategically optimize the use of these tools for crisis communication professionals to increase effectiveness of communication.

While incorporating the online and social media environments into crisis communication has been researched expansively (e.g., Liu 2010) and crisis communication via social media has become more and more important for organizations

and brands, the effects of those media on recipients in crisis situations are still understudied. That is, past research was largely biased in traditional media framing such as television news and newspaper articles. These traditional mass media vehicles are more easily controlled and managed by PR managers. Conversely, in crisis situations that unfold in new media environments, consumers can quickly and easily express their opinions and even spread rumors. Issues emerging online can be more unpredictable than issues that emerge offline, given the rapid evolution of different types of social media available for a vast spectrum of publics to express their opinions and emotions, which results in unprecedented challenges for crisis managers to deal with in regards to how to monitor social media activity and manage issues related to the dissemination of information via social media (Coombs 2008; Jin, Liu, and Austin 2014). Thus, some researchers (e.g., Schultz and Raupp 2010) have argued that crisis communication studies should focus on recipients' responses and evaluations about corporations' crisis responses in more realistic conditions. In an attempt to research more realistic situations, researchers have recently started conducting studies that look at the interplay between new media and crisis communication with a sharper focus on behavioral intentions (e.g., purchase intentions) and negative word-of-mouth intentions (Coombs and Holladay 2007; 2008; 2009; Schultz, Utz, and Göritz 2011). And there also exists the notion that crisis communication strategies effect secondary crisis communications, such as negative word-of-mouth (Coombs and Holladay 2008; 2009) via online and social media means such as blogging, posting and writing review. Based on Coombs and Holladay's studies (2008, 2009), secondary crisis (e.g., negative electronic word of mouth) can be defined as the willingness to forward a (negative) message' and leave a negative comment or reaction. Specifically, on the Internet or in social media, negative word-of-mouth can readily damage an organization's reputation and image as well as consumers' views toward the company (Laczniak, DeCarlo, and Ramaswami 2001; Tucker and Melewar 2005). Also, spreading unfavorable information from person-to-person with such ease might affect present and future purchasing decisions (Coombs and Holladay 2007). Additionally, in new media conditions, there are various kinds of consumers such as past,

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current, and potential consumers, and national, international consumers. Thus, there are people who have various levels of crisis involvement because of the global usage of social media. Thus, it is necessary to examine not only consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions towards a company but also the recipients' intent to inform friends about the crisis and share information with others as well as leave comments (Schultz, Utz, and Göritz 2011) as secondary crisis reactions.

Therefore, this study expects to shed light on the importance of crisis communication in the context of social media. This study posits that a company's (brand's) apology message could mitigate not only consumers' negative thoughts, responses, evaluations, and purchase intentions towards brands and message but also consumers' feelings to affect a decrease in secondary crisis responses (e.g. negative eWOM). It is expected that responding to a crisis via social media results in a different degree of intention to undertake a secondary crisis reaction depending on crisis involvement, brand image and message framing. Since Facebook allows immediate reactions and posts can be easily "shared" and "liked", this study assumes that crisis communication via Facebook (i.e., the Brand page) can be even more effective than crisis communication via other media. The empirical evidence for the effects of crisis response strategies needs to be further examined. In the relatively new context of social media, there is potential for growth in understanding the effects of different crisis response strategies utilized in the crisis. Such comparisons can assist crisis managers in making strategic decisions in the social media context when they face specific crises.

This study seeks to understand the influence of these factors, focusing specifically on message frames, and the influence of crisis involvement and brand image. These three different factors are explored more fully below.

MESSAGE FRAMING STRATEGY

First, this study examines the moderating impact of message framing on the effect of crisis response strategies on post-crisis attitude toward the company (or brand). In terms of crisis responses strategy research, the tendency has been to emphasize the

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'what to say' aspects rather than the 'how to say' aspects. 'What to say' is, of course, an important aspect of message framing in crisis responses. However, the 'how to say' aspects are also very valuable and practical for effective crisis communication. So, it would be very noteworthy to identify the effective message strategy in terms of 'how to say' for effective crisis communication in a social media context.

Regarding the message contents, experts in the public relations field have believed that the crisis related information communicated to target audiences should demonstrate the emotions that they want to relay to consumers such as dejection or regret. Yet, it is rare that studies have assessed which of the two approaches between information and emotions is more appropriate for varying brand types and varying levels of involvement. In this regard, the present study examines how different types of message appeals used in crisis communication influence the public's responses and evaluation.

The public's acceptance of messages and perceptions of organizational reputation before and after a crisis were regularly put forward as outcome variables influenced by crisis communication messages in past research studies. Outcome variables have commonly been used for measuring changes in the target public's cognition levels. Researchers have suggested for theoretical development in crisis management, it is required to examine the affective, behavioral and cognitive changes in target audiences. Thus, this study examines the interaction between crisis involvement, brand image, and message framing in the social media context to suggest more effective crisis communication to minimize the post-crisis damage as measuring attitude toward apology message, brand, future purchase intention, and intention to negative electronic Word-Of-Mouth (eWOM) to examine the post-crisis affective, behavioral and cognitive changes in target audiences.

MESSAGE FRAMING IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Examining persuasive message framing (or message strategy) has been one of the most frequently researched topics in the strategic communication area. It can be said

that these research streams have indicated that effective message framing is the one of the most important concepts in effective strategic communication for its effectiveness.

Especially, in crisis communication, this is the factor that is considered first to restore damage brought about from a crisis. Pace, Fediuk, and Botero (2010) revealed that the careful designing of a message from the company is very important in crisis communication in both the practical and the academic world.

Marketing and advertising research has largely focused on the persuasive impact of emotions in communication (Coombs and Holladay 2005; Geuens, De Pelsmacker, and Faseur 2011). Coombs and Holladay (2005) claim that it is necessary for the crisis communication research to concentrate on the importance of affect and emotion itself. To date, the emotional responses of consumers have been the center of attention in crisis research (Jin 2009). Some research studies, for instance have looked at the impact of attributions of responsibility on a person's emotions (e.g., anger and sadness) that consumers feel in a crisis (Choi and Lin 2009; Coombs and Holladay 2005). Some of these emotions are negatively related to the reputation of an organization (Choi and Lin 2009). Although crisis communication research typically focuses on the emotions experienced by consumers during a crisis (Choi and Lin 2009; Jin 2009; Jin and Hong 2010), few studies have focused on the influence of the emotional framing on the message's effectiveness (Claeys and Cauberghe 2014).

In message framing of an apology, the dominant crisis communication strategies include information and emotion (Coombs 2011). Considering that crisis messages should not only include crisis-related information, but also express the corporation's emotion and compassion towards damages, discovering the effect of both information and emotion on the consumers' response toward a company is indispensable.

Thus, the present study uses information and emotion as major factors in crisis message strategies and examines their effectiveness. That is, this study selects rational and emotional framing as a message framing factor since these are one of the most widely used framing strategies. Recently, Moon and Rhee (2012) also used rational and emotional message framing in terms of crisis messages. Albers-Miller and Stafford

(1999) stated that rational framing focuses on precise and solid information about the given topic, whereas emotional framing concentrates more on communicating a variety of images and messages that elicit positive or negative emotions and feelings in regards to the given topic. To be more concrete, in a crisis situation, informational framing is seen as offering accurate information on a crisis situation and a company's actions, and emotional framing is viewed as expressing concern, regret and remorse to people who experienced harm during the crisis (Moon and Rhee 2012). Up to now, several research studies gave more attention to emotion rather than information. (Allen and Caillouet 1994; Coombs and Holladay 1996)

Ascertaining the influencing factors in message framing is practical for both academics and real-world organizations since the findings can serve as the foundation for changing the focus of organizations' communication in a crisis from 'what to say' to 'how to say' (Moon and Rhee 2012). Thus, the current study demonstrates the importance of message framing as a crisis communication strategy and the potential moderating impact of message framing on the effectiveness of an apology message. In addition, this study also demonstrates the interaction with crisis involvement and brand image on the different message framing (i.e., emotional vs. rational) in crisis communication in the following sections.

To summarize, in crisis communication, an informational approach can be defined as a rational appeal that "focuses more on providing factual and concrete information on a crisis event itself and describing the steps the organization is taking to manage the crisis situation." (Moon and Rhee 2012). On the other hand, an emotional approach can be depicted as an emotional appeal that "focuses more on expressing the organization's emotions like sorrow, regret, and concern for those affected by a crisis in describing how the organization is managing the crisis situation." (Moon and Rhee 2012).

And, in terms of effectiveness of message framing (i.e., rational vs. emotional), it is difficult to assess which framing is more effective. An ongoing debate exists in regards to the relative power of rational and emotional appeals through advertising.

In this sense, this study expects that the public's responses to crisis message strategies may vary according to a variety of situational factors such as crisis involvement, brand image to identify effective crisis response strategy, and message framing for the organization after crisis. The present study examines if the message framing in crisis communication situations influences how consumers evaluate the communication. In particular, the study investigates if message framing has an impact on the importance of using an apology, an increasingly common strategy for organizations responding to a crisis. The study also focuses on situational factors and the context of social media.

THE INFLUENCE OF CRISIS INVOLVEMENT IN CRISIS RESPONSES

To date, a large number of studies have focused on which response strategies organizations should pursue (i.e., involvement, brand image, emotion). Yet how those variables can affect the dynamics of SCCT has not been explored. Thus, it would be meaningful to examine the role of situational factors such as involvement for effective crisis response strategy. Many studies have examined how an organization should craft strategic responses, yet scant research been conducted on looking at consumer variables (e.g., emotion, involvement) and how they can influence SCCT.

Prior research stressed the role of consumer involvement with a company or its products and showed that high involvement with an organization or with the organization's products leads to lower levels of perceived severity of the crisis (Arpan and Roskos-Ewoldsen 2005). And, it is a common notion in communication studies that involvement also affects the amount of attention and elaboration in message processing (Celsi and Olson 1988).

In the last few years, the concept of consumers' crisis involvement has attracted attention in the crisis communication domain (Arpan and Roskos-Ewoldsen 2005; Choi and Lin 2009; Coombs and Holladay 2005). Several research studies suggested that consumer involvement may play an important role in the crisis response communication. These studies demonstrate that crisis involvement influences consumers' cognitive and

affective processes, which might result in a modification of SCCT (Arpan and Roskos-Ewoldsen 2005; Coombs and Holladay 2005; Choi and Lin 2009; Claeys and Cauberghe 2014)

Crisis involvement is a determinant of the outcome of a crisis, some studies have concluded (McDonald and Hartel 2000), because consumer involvement will influence crisis information processing and behaviors (Celsi and Olson 1988). Based on this background, the first variable under investigation is consumers' crisis involvement.

THE DEFINITION & CONCEPTYALIZATION OF CRISIS INVOVLEMENT

Involvement is one of most studied concepts in various research areas such as marketing, communication, and consumer research. The concept of involvement can be explained as "the degree which personal interest serves as a motivation to obtain new information, which is then compared to previously received information that has elicited an opinion toward an object, situation, or issue" (Petty and Cacioppo 1981; 1986a). The chief tenet of involvement theory states that individuals strive to seek more information regarding topics that they have a personal connection with. Other studies have found that relevant thoughts regarding a topic increases as personal interest in that topic increases (Heath and Douglas 1991; Petty and Cacioppo 1981; 1986a). The concept of involvement has received great attention in many academic areas (Grunig 1997; Heath and Douglas 1991). Also, in their elaboration likelihood model (ELM), Petty and Cacioppo (1986b) focused on involvement, or personal relevance, which they defined as ''intrinsic importance, personal meaning, and consequences'' (p. 82–83). Similarly, heuristic systematic model research has dealt with response involvement and personal relevance as the concepts related to involvement.

Based on this, it could be said that involvement is well worth careful study and is an important concept in communication-related research. Of more relevance to our study, public relations research has highlighted the critical role that involvement plays in audience receptiveness to messages and issues (Heath and Douglas 1991). Involvement is also a central construct of situational theory (Grunig 1997), and in this theory, and this

theory focuses on what level that people are "connected" to an issue as a predictor of if they will be actively concerned with such issues. Other more recent studies have broadly applied the notion of involvement to crisis communication (McDonald and Ha˙rtel 2000; Choi and Lin 2009).

In regards to the crisis communication area, McDonald and Hartel (2000) introduced the notion of 'felt involvement' and applied that concept to organizational crises. Felt involvement can be defined as the degree to which consumers perceive an issue (i.e., crisis) to be personally relevant to them will determine their level of involvement with the issue and can serve as a motivator that controls consumer cognition and overt behavior (Celsi and Olson 1988).

However, crisis communication researchers additionally stress the importance of consumers' involvement with the crisis (Choi and Lin 2009; Coombs and Holladay 2005). These authors introduce crisis involvement as a potential moderating variable of the effectiveness of the crisis response strategies for effective crisis communication. For instance, Choi and Lin (2009) researched how consumers with high crisis involvement (i.e., parents) received crisis information on the 2007 Mattel product recalls online as opposed to getting the information from newspapers. And, the results showed that both parties had strongly different perceptions and views about that crisis. The authors proposed that the difference was caused because high crisis involvement makes people process information (or messages) more actively and accurately. In this study, however, the authors did not compare the differences in response and evaluation between high involvement and low involvement consumers. The study only demonstrated that the impact of crisis involvement on the extent to which the consumer processes crisis information is derived from consumer behavior research.

More recently, Claeys and Cauberghe (2014) examined the role of crisis involvement on the effectiveness of crisis response strategies depending on whether the crisis response strategy matches the crisis type or not. In terms of the relationship between crisis involvement and message framing, the results indicated that consumers with low crisis involvement have a tendency to focus on the non-content elements of a

message such as emotional message framing. Respondents with high involvement, however, tend to focus more on the content itself, which means people with high involvement prefer rational framing of the crisis response over emotional framing since rational framing focuses more directly on the content of the message itself (Yoo and MacInnis 2005). However, they conducted research only in the traditional media context (i.e., newspapers) and they focused more on the match and mismatch of crisis type and crisis response strategy. That is, little attention has been given to the investigation of how the level of crisis involvement influences toward the effectiveness of certain crisis-response strategies regarding consumers' evaluations.

In terms of the operationalization of crisis involvement, this study uses the tenets put forth by Houston and Rothschild (1977, 1978), who classified three forms of involvement: situational, enduring and response. First, enduring involvement is somewhat more consistent than situational involvement. While conceptualizing involvement, Zaichkowsky (1986) and Bloch and Richins (1983), viewed it as having three primary antecedent factors: the characteristics of the person, the characteristics of the stimulus, and the characteristics of the situation. Based on this, the current study operationalized crisis involvement as a type of situational involvement (by using spatial (or geographical) distances) as follow-on factors that are generated after a specific crisis (e.g., characteristics of the situation).

Thus, this study utilizes crisis involvement levels as situational factors to suggest effective crisis communication in the latest condition (i.e., social media context) by company's (brand's) image and message framing as well. And, since previous literature suggests that perceived involvement can influence one's information processing (message elaboration system), this study first examines the main effect of crisis involvement. That is, this study suggests that the effectiveness of a crisis response (apology) could be differentiated depending on the level of the crisis involvement since the apology message would be processed differently by the level of crisis involvement.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CRISIS INVOLVEMENT & INFORMATION PROCESSING IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION

This study adopts the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) as theoretical backgrounds to explain the relationship of crisis involvement and the way people process a company's message after crisis. In regards to the relationship between crisis involvement and its influence on information processing, prior studies have examined the role of involvement on cognitive process. For instance, Heath and Douglas (1991) proposed that a post-crisis response, such as an apology, is likely to have a greater effect on peoples' attitude and behavior under a high involvement condition than under a low involvement condition. That is, people in a state of high involvement are more likely to follow a company's post-crisis responses than those with little involvement, so the organization's responses are, in turn, more likely to exert a stronger influence on their post-crisis attitudes toward the company and their behavior (e.g., purchasing behavior). Also, McDonald and Hartel (2000) proposed that felt involvement influences attribution and changes the level of emotion, which then affects behaviors.

The ELM created by Petty and Cacioppo supports this logic. The ELM states that regarding persuasion and persuasive messages, there are two ways consumers process information: they thoroughly consider the message's information in a message (message elaboration via the central/systematic route, requiring much cognitive effort), or, they focus more on positive or negative cues rather than argument strength (peripheral/heuristic route) to direct their response to the message. ELM also posits that the degree of personal involvement is a moderator between the message and the response to the message/persuasiveness by shaping the route taking place in information processing (Petty and Cacioppo 1979; Petty and Cacioppo 1981). A message will be processed via the central pathway when an individual is highly involved with the product. In contrast, a person with low involvement will be less motivated to dwell on the message and the message content itself will be less likely to have a significant impact on persuasion and they will focus more on peripheral cues such as emotions if the recipient has low involvement. Gurhan-Canli and Maheswarana (2000) reported that product

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evaluation is also moderated by situational involvement. ELM further indicates message processing and attitude or behavior formation may occur to varying degrees, based on different levels of involvement that are relevant when the post-crisis response occurs. Thus, involvement will have a primary effect on the dependent variables

Petty and Cacioppo (1986) posit that involvement interacts with the message's characteristics, which means that highly involved consumers will tend to process information that is central to the message (e.g., rational information/quality of the arguments). It can be said the people with high involvement are likely to focus more on the message itself rather than other factors. Similarly, models of persuasion in marketing and consumer literature demonstrated that people who are highly involved with an issue are inclined to scrutinize relevant messages in detail (Chaiken 1980; Petty et al. 1983). On the other hand, consumers with low involvement will process information peripheral to the message (e.g., emotion/emotional message) (Chaiken 1980; Petty et al. 1983), and people are likely to form their attitudes by making simpler inferences from peripheral cues (Petty et al 1983, p. 135), resulting in different message processing outcomes from highly involved people.

That is, higher felt involvement compels consumers to put more cognitive effort into understanding the message, generating more elaborate meanings (Petty and Cacioppo 1981) and forming more inferences about the message (Celsi and Olson 1988). It is important to note that different features of communication are more or less effective in influencing consumers' attitudes depending on their level of involvement (Petty et al. 1983). Issue involvement increases a person's motivation to engage in a thorough consideration of issue-relevant information that an organization presents, in order to form an attitude about a product (Petty et al. 1983). Another study also demonstrated that the degree of involvement makes a significant difference in the focus of cognitive processing and influences the interpreted meanings (Celsi and Olson 1988). And, it can be applied to a crisis situation, which is called 'crisis involvement'

In terms of crisis involvement, it has been explained that consumers with high crisis involvement process crisis information messages more deeply and actively through the 2007 Mattel product recall case study (Choi and Lin 2009)

McDonald and Ha˙rtel (2000) also state that involvement could be a decisive factor of the outcome of a crisis. This is because it can reshape the effectiveness of crisis-communication strategies due to the fact Zaichkowsky (1986) and Bloch and Richins (1983) discussed that individuals with high level of personal involvement with a certain product should be more risk-averse since they will count more on factual and important information. Conversely, subjects with a low level of personal involvement with a certain product tend to be less risk-averse. Thus, people with high involvement are more likely to carefully analyze a crisis strategy and form different perceptions of it (Choi and Lin 2009; Choi and Chung 2013). Additionally, Claeys and Cauberghe (2014) examined the role of crisis involvement on the effectiveness of crisis response strategies depending on whether the crisis response strategy matches the crisis type or not. The results showed that consumers with low crisis involvement tend to focus on non-content elements of a message such as emotional message framing (Petty et al. 1983; Stafford and Day 1995; Yoo and MacInnis 2005) while respondents with high involvement focus more directly on the content of the message (Stafford and Day 1995; Yoo and MacInnis 2005). And this result is similar to previous involvement and information processing related research. However, there is relatively little research that compares the level of crisis involvement of consumers (i.e., high vs. low). Also, Claeys and Cauberghe (2014) examined the role of crisis involvement on the effectiveness of crisis response strategies depending on whether the crisis response strategy matches the crisis type or not. The results showed that consumers with low crisis involvement tend to focus on non-content elements of a message such as emotional message framing (Petty et al. 1983; Stafford and Day 1995; Yoo and MacInnis 2005) while respondents with high involvement focus more directly on the content of the message (Stafford and Day 1995; Yoo and MacInnis 2005). And this result is similar to previous involvement and information processing related research.

However, there is relatively little research that compares the level of crisis involvement of consumers (i.e., high vs. low).

Additionally, crisis involvement can be different based on a variety of situational conditions such as spatial (geographical), temporal, and so on (Houston and Rothschild 1977; 1978; Bloch and Richins 1983; Zaichkowsky 1986). Especially, in spatial conditions, in a social media context, various levels of crisis involvement may exist because there are various kinds of consumers such national, international consumers. Thus, there are people who have various levels of crisis involvement.

Kruke et al. (2010) discussed a 'psychologically distant issue' to delineate "consumers' response and behavior toward an environmental crisis (i.e., climate change)". They state that when individuals' in close proximity to a crisis are impacted more by the crisis (Rathzel and Uzzell 2009), and they place a higher focus on it. The close proximity of a person's location will make the issue more salient (Lorenzoni and Pidgeon 2006) and be more likely to encourage emotional and cognitive engagement with the issue (Lorenzoni, Nicholson-Cole, and Whitmarsh 2007). Namely, the 'psychologically distant issue' could impact involvement with the issue or crisis. Grau and Folse (2007) also state that local events would indicate a more concrete or tangible value. They concluded locally directed campaigns were seen as more relevant, eliciting more attention. This enhanced relevancy indicates people will be motivated to more process local information more intensely as opposed to non-local information (Chaiken 1980; Petty and Cacioppo 1979). Cahyanto and Pennington-Gray (2014) also show that proximity to crisis areas influences risk appraisal in that the location of a person's residence affects information search behaviors. Thus, people near the crisis area utilize different search strategies with those far from the crisis area.

Based on this, the current study utilizes spatial (geographical) factors for differentiating the level of crisis involvement. Therefore, it is meaningful to conduct research to examine how the level of crisis involvement can influence the persuasive effect of message framing in the social media context because social media has global usage.

As followed from this concept and idea, this study posits that in the social media context, consumers' crisis involvement can make a significant difference in the perceived effectiveness of the crisis response. The current study examines crisis involvement as a potential moderating variable in regards to the effectiveness of crisis response (crisis communication) in minimizing crisis damage. The results of this study will provide predictions regarding the effect of involvement on the effectiveness of crisis response strategy. This study expects that if organizations offer consumers high crisis involvement using a rationally framed crisis response strategy, they may consider the crisis response convincing and subsequently form a more favorable post-crisis attitude toward the company in the latest condition.

Therefore, this research expects to extend SCCT by testing the interaction between crisis involvement and apology as a crisis-response strategy in product harm crises in order to better understand public responses to crisis communication. Specifically, this research focuses on the interaction between different levels of crisis involvement and message framing reactions in terms of consumers' attitudes toward brand and apology messages, their future purchase intentions and intention to engage in negative eWOM. This study contributes to the expansion of SCCT and serves as a foundation for future empirical studies that examine the effect of the interaction between involvement and crisis-response strategy on crisis communication.

THE INTERACTION RELATIONSHIP OF CRISIS INVOLVEMENT AND MESSGAE FRAMING (RATOINAL VS. EMOTIONAL)

As mentioned, the present study proposes that crisis message appeals may be moderated by crisis involvement. Several studies in the marketing domain have showed that the effectiveness of message framing might be influenced by issue involvement. That is, it can be said involvement might have a moderating effect on the persuasive effects of message framing (Maheswaran and Meyers-Levy 1990).

Spence and Pidgeon (2010) posit the extent to which people process communications is a significant factor that also impacts framing effects; if they do not focus on

communications, they are not likely to be affected by message framing. Personal relevance also influences how information is processed. A highly personally relevant message could prompt a more highly systematic processing of a message and research confirms this (Petty and Cacioppo 1979). Additionally, research on persuasion demonstrates personal relevance has a moderating effect on framing.

Applying Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann (1983) s' theoretical backgrounds to crisis communication, it could be predicted that people with low involvement are likely to expend little effort to think about issue-relevant information (i.e., crisis response strategies) while, people with high involvement are likely to expend lots of effort to scrutinize issue-relevant information message in more detail. Based on this relationship, it can be surmised that when crisis involvement is low, consumers base their attitudes on simple inferences (Maheswaran and Meyers-Levy 1990) and they tend to focus on the emotional framing of a message (Petty et al. 1983; Yoo and MacInnis 2005). Conversely, for individuals in a state of high involvement, the messages with rational framing are more persuasive, as they focus on the content itself (i.e., the crisis response strategy) (Stafford and Day 1995; Yoo and MacInnis 2005).

Therefore, this study also predicts the interaction impact of consumers' crisis involvement on organizational message framing. In other words, depending on consumers' level of crisis involvement, consumers react differently to the message framing.

Reflecting on the current state of the world, in a crisis situation, it becomes more necessary to communicate with not only stakeholders who are in the region the crisis occurred but also a wider range of stakeholders through online and social media. Thus, it would be useful to suggest more effective crisis communication strategy by using crisis involvement as a moderating factor. In light of recent circumstances, the present study examines how the level of consumers' crisis involvement affect response evaluations of the brand's apology message in a product-harm crisis situation in the social media context. The current study experimentally examines this in the context of crisis

communication, to show that organizations should consider consumers' involvement with a certain crisis when setting crisis communication strategy (Coombs and Holladay 2005).

As mentioned above, this study would conceptualize crisis involvement by using spatial concepts. It would be useful and practical since social media (e.g., Facebook) is used globally, and so, there are various social media users with different backgrounds and nationalities, who might perceive psychological (i.e., geographical) distance differently. When organizations are able to establish if a crisis evokes a high or low level of involvement with certain stakeholder groups, they can use the results of this study to tailor their crisis communication.

In sum, this study examines the main effect of crisis involvement and the interaction effect between crisis involvement and message framing regarding the effectiveness of apology message. To be more concrete, based on previous research, the current study proposes that the effectiveness of a crisis response (apology) could be differentiated depending on the level of the crisis involvement since the apology message would be processed differently by consumers with different level of crisis involvement. And, in regards to interaction with message framing, if people are under a high crisis involvement condition, subsequently, the apology message can be processed more carefully and thoroughly, which means stronger message elaboration will occur. Accordingly, a rationally framed message, which contains more precise and factual information and a company's specific actions, would be more effective than an emotional framed message. On the other hand, under a low crisis involvement condition, people tend to process the message heuristically or skim over the message, which means lighter message elaboration will occur. Hence, an emotionally framed message, which focuses more on the non-content elements and arouses emotions rather than providing information, would be more effective than a rational framed message since it would facilitate peripheral elaboration. In that sense, the level of crisis involvement will lead to different types of message elaboration. Subsequently, consumers will form a more favorable attitude and higher behavioral intention toward the brand and message. Thus, the following hypotheses are developed:

H1A: Crisis involvement will significantly affect (a) attitudes towards apology message and the crisis brand, (b) intentions to purchased, and (c) intentions to share negative eWOM depending on crisis involvement.

Crisis involvement will interact with message framing in its effect on effectiveness of apology message. In particular:

H1B: When exposed to a rationally framed message, people will report (a) a more favorable attitude toward the apology and the crisis brand, (b) a higher purchase intention, and (c) a lower intention to share negative eWOM in a high crisis involvement condition rather than low crisis involvement.

H1C: When exposed to an emotionally framed message, people will report (a) a more favorable attitude toward the apology and the crisis brand, (b) a higher purchase intention, and (c) a lower intention to share negative eWOM in a low crisis involvement condition rather than high crisis involvement.

THE INFLUENCE OF BRAND IMAGE IN CRISIS REPONSES

This study adopts two situational factors that may moderate the proposed effect of an apology. The two factors are crisis involvement and brand image (e.g., symbolic vs. functional). This study also expects that brand image could be a critical factor that influences consumers' responses to apology message framing (rational vs. emotional). Brand image, which includes brand personality, is seen as an important element of company (or brand) reputation.

Brand image plays an important role that enables consumers to recognize and remember companies and their brands. Thus, to examine brand image's main role and its interaction impact with message framing in a crisis situation would be valuable to manage the company and brand and minimize damages. In this way, brand image could be considered as one of the significant elements in the marketing and strategic communication areas.

THE TWO TYPES OF BRAND IMAGE (FUNCTIOANL & SYMBOLIC)

This study posits that the type of brand image may also be critical in understanding consumer responses to crisis responses. There have been various ways used to classify brand images. Generally, brands can be separated into two symbolic and functional types and thus comprise one aspect of a brand's image (Jeong, Paek, and Lee 2013)

Symbolic brands tend to influence consumers' needs related to 'self-expression' and are characterized by "desires for products that fulfill internally generated needs for self-enhancement, role position, group membership, or ego-identification" (Park, Jaworski, and Maclnnis 1986, p. 136; Jeong et al. 2013). Thus, these types of brands can stimulate, which differentiates these consumers from others as they feel like they belong to an exclusive group (Jeong et al. 2013), and they motivate consumers to accept a message claim from the brands (Aggarwal, Sung, and Huh 2011; Jeong et al. 2013). It is generally noted that symbolic brands' self-expressive nature expresses consumers' own images (Bhat and Reddy 1998; Jeong et al. 2013). For example, Nike, Calvin Klein, BMW, and Volkswagen Beetle can be examples of symbolic brands.

On the other hand, functional brands tend to meet consumers' practical needs that "motivate the search for products that solve consumption-related problems" (Park et al. 1986, p. 136; Jeong et al. 2013). For instance, Timex, Ford, and Sony can be examples of functional brands.

Moreover, according to Bhat and Reddy (1998), brands could be positioned to satisfy either of these two types of needs. Thus, for consumers who have functional or utilitarian needs, their needs could be satisfied with a "functional" brand, which is positioned with a functional brand concept or meaning. Similarly, a symbolic brand could meet the needs of those who want to show, develop and strengthen their self-image or their social status image since the symbolic brand itself possesses strong self-expressive value.

Generally, a symbolic brand is closely related to perceptions such as usefulness, competence, practically, and utilitarian that are mainly exhibited in its ability. In contrast, a functional brand is commonly related to concepts such as self-expression, self-

enhancement, prestige and uniqueness, differentiating from others in that it is used primarily for its status appeal (Jeong et al. 2013). Park, Jaworski and MacInnis (1986) also argued that functional/utilitarian needs are highly related to specific and practical consumption issues whereas symbolic needs are closely related to self-image and social identification. That is, motivation for consumption and motive for usage could be varying up to a specific brand image.

In sum, functional brands are apt to satisfy immediate and practical/utilitarian needs, while symbolic brands are inclined to meet symbolic needs such as those for self-expression and prestige, and their practical usage is only subsidiary.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BRAND IMAGE AND INFORMATION PROCESSING IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION

As described, according to Bhat and Reddy (1998), two different brand concepts have different needs, motivation, and processing in the area of consumer behavior. Studies have demonstrated that these two types of motivation exist and varying product attribute categories are related to these motivations (Mittal et al. 1990; Johar and Sirgy 1991). It has been demonstrated in both theory and research that consumers' needs are driven by functional/utilitarian means as well as by symbolic/expressive motivations.

In regards to the relationship between brand image and information processing, for the functional brand image, since functional brand image is related concepts such as functional, use, practical and utilitarian values (Sheth, Newman, and Gross 1991; Woodall 2003) and this image have emphasized on appropriate performances, correct/accurate attributes, excellence (Holbrook 1999) and Product, performance quality (Woodall 2003). Based on this, it can be said that it is closely related to functional/utilitarian motivations and rational and informational processing. On the other hand, Symbolic brand image is associated with concepts with sensory and emotional value, self-expression (Sheth, Newman, and Gross 1991; Holbrook 1999) and have emphasized on sensory and emotional elements (Holbrook 1999; Woodall 2003). Thus, a

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symbolic image is highly associated with symbolic/expressive motivations and emotional and hedonic processing (Bhat and Reddy 1998).

Researchers have argued that the probable explanation for this finding is that, because the functional brand has weak self-expressive value, on the contrary, the symbolic brand has strong self-expressive value. Park et al (1986) also suggest that the hedonic, functional, and/or symbolic benefits of a brand can assist consumers in attaining their self-related goals, thus bringing a brand nearer to a person.

Based on their own perceptions of each brand image (i.e., symbolic and functional) and their related information processing, this study expects that consumers would respond to a message crisis differently depending on brand images. First, this study hypothesizes the predictive main role of brand image in a company's apology message persuasion effectiveness. As mentioned above, each brand image has its own traits. Thus, this study suggests that the effectiveness of a crisis response (apology) could change depending on the brand image since the apology message would be processed differently based on the crisis brand image. Second, this study also expects the interaction effect between brand image and message framing. In the functional brand condition, owing to such characteristics of functional brands, rational message framing would be more successful than emotional framing on SNSs. Functional brand image is closely associated with tangible and utilitarian benefits (Bhat and Reddy 1998) and functional/ utilitarian motivation and rational information processing. In contrast, symbolic brand image is closely related to prestige and personality expression and symbolic/expressive motivation and hedonic processing (Bhat and Reddy 1998). And, people tend to consume these types of products to satisfy related wants (i.e., emotional wants) (Levy 1959). Therefore, in a symbolic brand condition, because of the characteristics of symbolic brands, emotional framing would be more successful than rational framing on SNSs.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BRAND IMAGE FOR EFFECTIVE CRISIS COMMUNICATION

According to brand concept management (BCM) proposed by Park et al. (1986), brand images need to be based on a concept of a brand or carry a brand-specific abstract meaning. And it has been commonly known that managing brand image is essential for its long-term success (Park et al. 1986). Thus, researchers recommended that brand managers try to position their brand's image properly and set it up appropriately. Regarding symbolic and functional brand images, Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis (1986) posited that brand concept is the "overall abstract meaning" and it could identify a brand. Thus, every brand ought to have its own brand concept. Researchers have also suggested that a brand concept be either symbolic or functional, which accesses consumers' symbolic and functional needs.

Brands' success emanate from their practical problem-solving features and the image they impart upon their users offers further evidence that such a strategy works. This is the case if the associations representing the different brand concepts do not fit well, and the confusion that results among consumers can cause a brand to be perceived as neither functional nor symbolic and thus not really useful to consumers. Expanding this from a theoretical background to a crisis situation, this could be a case that message framing does not fit with an existing brand image. Thus, the current study expects that brand image could play a moderating role in the brand crisis situation. That is, the different outcomes of crisis communication can be caused by different brand images. It would be worthwhile to develop crisis communication strategy in accordance with the brand image. By doing so, companies and their brands can minimize damage through more effective crisis management. In a crisis situation, in terms of brand reputation including brand image, there has been a bias towards the case that brand reputation involving brand image is damaged, and inversely, the current study proposes that brand image would be a valuable factor that can help to develop more effective communication by using brand image. Vigsø, and von Stedingk Wigren (2010) posit that, to achieve effective crisis communication, it is beneficial to utilize the characteristics of an

organization. Jeong, Paek and Lee (2013) also suggested that the type of brand may also be critical in understanding consumer responses. Due to such characteristics of brand images (i.e., symbolic vs. functional), this study proposes that consumers would respond to a product-harm crisis differently.

With this background, first, as mentioned above, this study hypothesizes the predictive role of brand image in a company's apology message persuasion effectiveness. Applying this logic to a crisis situation, this study suggests that the effectiveness of a crisis response (apology) could change depending on the brand image since the apology message would be processed differently based on the crisis brand image. Second, in regards to interaction with message framing, the current study also proposes that a company's crisis responses would be more successful using rational framing, which contains more precise and factual information and information regarding the company's specific actions rather than emotional framing on SNSs in the case of functional brand image. Since functional brand image is closely associated with tangible and utilitarian benefits (Bhat and Reddy 1998) and functional/utilitarian motivation and is also more closely related with capability, functional aspects, which means stronger message elaboration would occur in a product harm crisis situation. In contrast, for symbolic brands, a company's crisis responses would be more successful using emotional framing than rational framing on SNSs since symbolic brand image is closely related to prestige and personality expression and symbolic/expressive motivation (Bhat and Reddy 1998). Namely, under the symbolic brand image condition, people tend to process the message heuristically or skim over the message, which means lighter message elaboration would occur since a symbolic image has a lower association with functionality and capability traits. Hence, an emotional framed message, which emphasizes non-content elements and arouses emotions rather than providing information, would be more effective than a rational framed message since it could be easy to facilitate peripheral elaboration. Subsequently, they will form a more favorable attitude and higher behavioral intention toward the brand and message. Based on the above theoretical backgrounds, this study suggests the following hypotheses:

H2A: Brand image will significantly affect (a) attitudes towards apology message and the crisis brand, (b) intentions to purchased, and (c) intentions to share negative eWOM depending on crisis involvement.

Brand image will interact with message framing in its effect on effectiveness of apology message.

H2B: When exposed to a rationally framed message, people will report (a) a more favorable attitude toward the apology and the crisis brand, (b) a higher purchase intention, and (c) a lower intention to share negative eWOM for a functional brand than for a symbolic brand.

H2C: When exposed to an emotional framed message, people will report (a) a more favorable attitude toward the apology and the crisis brand, (b) a higher purchase intention, and (c) a lower intention to share negative eWOM for a symbolic brand than for a functional brand.

As mentioned above, the current study proposes that crisis involvement and brand image would affect the effectiveness of crisis response strategy/message framing. In turn, the current study will examine the relationship of crisis involvement and brand image with message framing strategy, and how the relationship can have an impact on the effectiveness of an apology message (e.g., consumers' attitude toward the brand and apology message and behavioral intentions).

Based on the inter-relationship described above, this study also predicts there would be three-way interaction effects among crisis involvement, brand image and message framing on the effectiveness of an apology by leading to more favorable post-crisis attitudes toward the organization (apology message attitude, brand attitude and future purchase intention, lower intention to share negative eWOM) in the social media context.

This study expects that individuals with low crisis involvement expend little effort to think about issue-relevant information (i.e., crisis response strategies) as the ELM model demonstrated (Petty et al. 1983). When crisis involvement is low, consumers tend to base their attitudes on simple inferences (Maheswaran and Meyers-Levy 1990)

and, the crisis brand image. Rather, they focus more on non-content elements such as the emotional framing of a message (Petty et al. 1983; Yoo and MacInnis 2005) or the crisis brand image. In contrast, under high involvement, however, message content determines persuasion (Petty and Cacioppo 1981), and therefore, the messages with rational framing are more persuasive (Stafford and Day 1995; Yoo and MacInnis 2005) rather than an emotional message or relying on the crisis brand image. In the high crisis involvement condition, this study expects that the impact of crisis involvement would be stronger than the influence of brand image resulting in different outcomes from a low crisis involvement condition.

Since emotional message framing succeeds in appealing to receivers' emotions (Petty et al. 1983; Yoo and MacInnis 2005) and rational message framing attracts attention to the content (Stafford and Day 1995; Yoo and MacInnis 2005), making consumers realize that the response is satisfying or appropriate to the crisis as a response depends on the combination of involvement, brand image and message framing under a low involvement condition. The persuasion of consumers with high involvement, on the other hand, would be more likely to focus more on the message contents (e.g., information and facts) (Petty and Cacioppo 1981). Since rational message frames focus on this content (e.g., crisis information, facts, and company's action), consumers with high crisis involvement will have a better post-crisis attitude toward the organization if that organization adopts message framing in a rational manner rather than in an emotional manner.

Namely, the current study predicts that crisis involvement, brand image and message framing would interact with each other in a low involvement condition, contrarily, crisis involvement would have a stronger effect than brand image leading to more favorable attitudes and behavioral intentions towards a rational message. Thus, it is expected that consumers would react differently to the apology message depending on each condition.

Based on the above discussion, this study suggests the following hypotheses. We do not anticipate a significant interaction between brand image and message framing in

the high involvement condition and so do not frame a hypothesis for this condition. However, we do anticipate an interaction between brand image and message framing in the low involvement condition and make the following hypotheses:

H3A. In a low crisis involvement condition, when the brand image is functional, rational message framing will lead to more positive post-crisis attitudes toward the organization (apology message attitude, brand attitude, purchase intention, lower intention to negative eWOM) than emotional message framing.

H3B. In a low crisis involvement condition, when the brand image is symbolic, emotional message framing will lead to more positive post-crisis attitudes toward the organization (apology message attitude, brand attitude, purchase intention, lower intention to negative eWOM) than rational message framing

III. METHOD

OVERVIEW AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This study uses a 2 (Crisis Involvement: High vs. Low) × 2 (Brand Image: Functional vs. Symbolic) × 2 (Message Framing: Rational vs. Emotional) between-subjects experimental factorial design to examine the proposed hypotheses. The main purpose of this study was to identify the factors that influence consumers' responses and evaluations of a company's apology advertising in a crisis situation by using crisis involvement (i.e., high vs. low), brand images (i.e., functional vs. symbolic), and message framing (i.e., rational vs. emotional) as variables in a social media context for effective crisis communication by the manipulated experimental setting. Eight fictitious scenarios manipulate brand image, crisis involvement, and message framing.

STIMULI DEVELOPMENT

SELECTION OF THE BRAND CATEGORY AND BRANDS

A pre-test was conducted to select the product category and brands for the main study by using an online survey of 41 Americans (convenience sample) (not part of the main study).

First, to select the product category, the first set of questions was designated to determine participants' importance (not important/important) and perceived relevance (not relevant/relevant) for three products (i.e., bottled water, laptop, and sporting goods) on a seven-point scale. The pre-test showed the laptop to have the highest percentage score (Importance=70.3%; Relevance=75.7%). Based on these results, the laptop category was chosen to be the product for the main study because the category is one of the most familiar and relevant categories for typical Americans, the sample of this study. Also, the category is also appropriate from the standpoint that it is generally gender neutral.

Second, to find a symbolic brand and a functional brand of laptop, a second set of questions was created to determine the symbolic image perceptions the participants

had among several brands (Do you think people use the following laptop brands as a way of expressing their personality?; Do you think the following laptop brands say something about the kind of person you are?; inter-item r=.84, pb.001) and also measure perceived functional image for a specific item (Do you think the following laptop brands are practical?) on a seven-point Likert scale (Bhat & Reddy, 1998). The results showed that Apple (M=5.88), is perceived as the most symbolic brand, whereas HP (M=5.24) is perceived as the most functional brand. Based on this, Apple was chosen as the symbolic brand and HP as the functional brand. This study also tries to enhance brand image for the participants through showing some related images consisting of the brand logo, product images and a short explanation, such as brand vision.

MANIPULATION OF CRISIS SITUATION

The scenarios describe a fictitious crisis event (i.e., product-harm crisis; laptop battery explosion) to avoid confounding effects related to the company's pre-crisis reputation (Laufer and Jung 2010).

We developed four scenarios by considering different combinations of causal attributions and crisis message appeals (See the Appendix). Each respondent was randomly assigned to conditions describing one of the four scenarios. The crisis scenario represents a preventable crisis –product harm crisis, which is the crisis type that has potentially the most threatening for organizations and their reputations (Coombs 2007b). In the newspaper article, by emphasizing the culpability of the organization responsible for using problematic laptop batteries during the last four years, the crisis type is manipulated. The article also states that the company had received adequate warnings and could have avoided the crisis, but they failed to take the necessary action.

The manipulation of crisis involvement in the scenarios follows Petty et al.'s (1983) approach. That is, high involvement subjects are made to believe that certain issues affect them personally, while the issue carries no personal impact among low involvement subjects by using spatial distance (distance from the region that the crisis occurred). The high involvement scenario was regarding a laptop battery explosion in the

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U.S. And, U.S. was selected for the high involvement condition to increase involvement based on geographical location due to the nature of the participants who are all recruited from the U.S. On the other hand, the low involvement scenario was about the same product-harm crisis occurring in Korea, and there is mention about the no possibility for the same crisis to occur in the U.S. In regards to other conditions such as responsibility, severity of crisis, etc., all of the scenarios had the same conditions to prevent a compounding effect. Moreover, to increase validity, reality and practicality, images of the exploded laptop and the witness are used in the article.

MANIPULATION OF APOLOGY

After reading the crisis news article, the participants read the apology message on a Facebook page that served as a response to the product–harm crisis offered by the company of the crisis brand responsible for the laptop battery explosion. Four Facebook brand pages (2 brand images × 2 message framing) for the manipulations of the apology message were employed, by creating new brand page screens on Facebook (see the Appendix).

For the manipulation of the apology message, each brand (HP and Apple) includes two versions of an apology message. And, the brand page displayed brief information about the brand through related images and a concise statement. Also, two of the brand pages included in the apology advertisement displayed rational message framing, and the other two brand pages involved an apology advertisement that showed emotional message framing that placed an emphasis on their emotions such as sadness, regret, compassion and the brand's support for the cause associated with the consumers' joining activities. Rational framing focused on the delivery of facts and information about crisis and company (brand)'s actions after crisis, and on the other hand, emotional framing appealed to emotion using various emotional words to express company's emotions (e.g., sadness, regret, compassion) to maximize the effect of message framing.

Following Stafford and Day (1995), the emotional message framing consists of subjective, evaluative properties and emotional adjectives (e.g., "I find it horrible that

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such a tragedy happened"). Conversely, the rational message framing is more direct and displays the same information in a more forthright and unbiased manner (e.g., "We regret that this incident occurred"). Except for the different message framing (emotional and rational) and brand image, other factors comprising the overall advertisement were identical within each version of the message framing and brand image. Two brands and four full color Facebook brand page were created.

PARTICIAPNTS AND PROCEDURE

SAMPLE

A total of 338 Americans were recruited from MTurk, provided by Amazon, to conduct online research. The gender ratio of this experiment was 55 percent female (186 females) and 45 percent male (152 males). Participants' household income ranged from below $20,000 to more than $ 90,000 on an annual basis, and 57.4 percent of total participants were from the relatively lower income level (below $20,000 to $49,999), and 42.6 percent of total participants were from the relatively higher income level ($50,000 to more than $ 90,000). The education status of the respondents were 30.5% high school degree (n = 103), 13% (n = 44) junior college degree, 43.8% (n = 148) Bachelor's degree, 12.1% (n = 41) Advanced degree, such as PhD, MD or JD, and 0.6% (n = 2) Less than high school. A majority of (81.4%) of the participants indicated that they were Caucasian (n = 275), 18.6% responded others. The average age of the participants was 33.16 years, ranging from 18 to 63 years.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

Those respondents from MTurk were exposed a notice to inform them of the study and were told they could participate voluntarily. They were then directed to the Qualtrics web site where prospective respondents could voluntarily participate in the study. Compensation payment was given as a reward for completing the study.

The website randomly divided the respondents into one of eight experimental conditions and the website was designed to allocate similar number of participants to

each condition. Participants who took part in the survey received a brief introduction for the study. Then, participants instructed them to read a scenario (i.e., crisis news article) and apology message on Facebook brand page. Before reading the first scenario (news article), participants were required to fill in a questionnaire containing some screening questions to prompt the participants to concentrate more on the survey since this survey required to read a news article and an apology message, and thus, a high degree of concentration was required.

Then, the scenario first depicts a news article that was published in the U.S. on the laptop battery explosion, which manipulates the crisis involvement using spatially distance (region that crisis occurred). Then, respondents saw the Facebook brand page (i.e., HP vs. Apple) including each company's reaction (i.e., apology) responsible for the battery explosion crisis, manipulating the message framing (i.e., rational vs. emotional).

After reading the all scenarios (i.e., newspaper and apology message), participants filled in a questionnaire containing the manipulation checks, measures of the dependent variables and demographic variables. The approximate time to complete the survey was 15-20 minutes. The entire data collection period was about two weeks from Mar. 5th to Mar. 18th, 2014.

MEASURES

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

After participants viewed the article and apology advertisement, they were asked about their involvement in the crisis event and message framing (rational and emotional framing) for independent variable (manipulation) check.

Crisis Involvement. This measure used an established scale (Kopalle and Lehmann 2001) and was tapped with four questions ("This crisis is relevant to me," "This crisis is important to me," "I worry about this crisis happening to me," "This crisis concerns me," "I am interested in this crisis") on a seven-point agree-disagree scale (M=3.90, SD=1.32; α=.81).

Message Framing. This measure used a newly constructed scale that included four questions ("The apology message could best be characterized as an emotional approach," "The apology message included language that emphasized emotional aspects," "The apology message was designed to appeal to the audience emotionally," "The focus of the apology message can be considered emotional") on a seven-point agree-disagree scale (M=4.96, SD=1.42; α=.96).

And, in terms of brand image, this study use Apple and HP as the symbolic and functional brand image.

DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Next, four dependent variables were used to assess the effectiveness of the apology message as a crisis response through four dependent variables; 1) Attitude towards the crisis brand 2) Attitude towards the apology message 3) Purchase Intention 4) Intention to engage negative eWOM.

Attitude towards the crisis brand. This measure used an established scale (Lee and Aaker 2004) and consisted of with four questions (7-point scale: 1=bad, negative, unfavorable, unpleasant; 7=good, positive, favorable, pleasant) on a seven-point semantic differential scale (M=4.73, SD=1.62; α=.97).

Attitude towards apology message. This measure used an established scale (Lee and Aaker 2004) and was made up of four questions (7-point scale: 1=bad, negative, unfavorable, unpleasant; 7=good, positive, favorable, pleasant) on a seven-point disagree-agree scale (M=5.07, SD=1.44; α=.95).

Purchase Intention. This measure used an established scale (Lee and Aaker 2004) and was comprised of two questions ("I would purchase the products of the brand if I have the opportunity in the future," "It is possible that I would purchase the crisis brand if I have the opportunity in the future.") on a seven-point Likert disagree-agree scale (M=4.36, SD=1.62; α=.93).

Intention to engage negative eWOM. This measure used an existing scale (Coombs and Holladay 2008) and was tapped with three questions ("I would encourage

friends or relatives NOT to buy products from the brand," "I would say negative things about the brand and its products to other people," and "I would recommend the brand's products to someone who asked my advice") on a seven-point Likert disagree-agree scale (M=3.18, SD=1.37; α=.88).

COVARIATES

Demographics. This study included ethnicity, gender, and education level as control variables. Demographic information was collected in the final section of questionnaire. Participants were asked their gender (Modal response=55% female), ethnicity (Modal response=81.4% white), and education level (Modal response= 43.8% Bachelor's degree).

IV. RESULTS

MANIPULATION CHECK

To estimate the efficacy of the manipulation of the two independent variables (crisis involvement and message framing), a series of independent sample t tests were operated. The results showed that both of the independent variables were manipulated effectively. For reference, brand image was not checked since this factor was examined through the pre-test and this study used real brands (Apple and HP).

First, crisis involvement was investigated in order to confirm that the news article stimuli manipulated crisis involvement properly. In the high crisis involvement condition (i.e., crisis in the U.S.), crisis involvement is higher for respondents in the high crisis involvement condition than for those in the low crisis involvement condition (i.e., crisis in the South Korea) ($M_{low\ involvement}$=3.7 SD=1.27 vs. $M_{high\ involvement}$=4.04, SD=1.33; t (336) =2.234, p<.05). That is, the results show the effective manipulation of crisis involvement. Hence, the crisis (in a near region; the U.S.) was described as a high-involvement crisis in the high involvement condition, whereas the crisis (in a distant region; South Korea) is described as a low-involvement crisis.

Second, higher scores of the message appeal variable reflected a greater degree of perceived emotional appeal, and lower scores indicated a greater degree of perceived rational appeal. As expected, the mean for the manipulation check variable was higher in the emotional condition than in the rational condition, and the results show significant differences in the means. ($M_{emotional}$=5.7, SD=1.0 vs. $M_{rational}$=4.3, SD=1.4; t (300) =10.24, p<.01). It can be said that the independent sample t-test showed that respondents in the emotional framing condition consider the company's apology message more emotional than respondents in the rational framing condition.

HYPOTHESES TESTING

To examine the hypothesis, a 2 (emotional message framing vs. rational message framing) $\times$ 2 (high crisis involvement vs. low crisis involvement) $\times$ 2 (symbolic brand image vs. functional brand image) between-subjects analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs)

was performed for the four dependent variables (i.e., attitude toward apology message, attitude toward brand, future purchase intention and intention to share negative eWOM) and three covariates (i.e., ethnicity (white vs. nonwhite), gender, and education level).

To be more specific, a series of four distinct ANCOVAs (including main effects and interactions) were used to test the hypotheses of the main effects and interaction effects in regards to crisis involvement, brand image and message framing on the crisis response strategy (i.e., apology) effect on post-crisis attitudes. These include attitudes toward brand and apology message, future purchase intention, and intention to share negative eWOM. See Table 1 for the result of ANCOVA.

First, H1A posited that crisis involvement will moderate the effectiveness of the apology message. The effectiveness of the crisis involvement on consumers' 1) attitudes towards apology message and 2) the crisis brand, 3) intentions to purchase, and 4) intentions to share negative eWOM was examined by ANCOVA. The results showed that the main effect of crisis involvement was partially significant. More specifically, the results indicated that a high crisis involvement condition resulted in a more effective crisis response, (i.e. apology). That is, consumers' level of crisis involvement significantly influences their post-crisis purchase intentions and attitude towards the crisis brand (M purchase intention = 4.55 vs. 4.10, F purchase intention $(1, 337) = 7.299$, p $< .01$; M brand attitude = 4.87 vs. 4.56, F brand attitude $(1, 337) = 4.354$, p $< .05$), and intention to engage negative eWOM partially (M negative eWOM = 3.39 vs. 3.63, F negative eWOM $(1, 337) = 3.363$. p $= .068$). However, there were no significant main effects regarding attitude towards the apology message (M apology message attitude = 5.16 vs. 4.97, F apology message attitude $(1, 337) = 1.994$, p $> .05$). These results partially supported hypothesis 1A.

Also, to investigate the interaction effect (H1B and H1C) between crisis involvement and message framing on the efficacy of the apology message (attitude towards apology and the crisis brand, purchase intention, intention to share negative eWOM.), a two-way ANCOVA analyses provide insight to the interaction effects. However, the results indicated that there were no interactions between crisis involvement

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and message framing (F brand attitude (1, 337) =. 155, p > .05; F apology message attitude (1, 337) = 2.540, p > .05; F purchase intention (1, 337) =. 351, p > .05, F negative eWOM (1,337) = .005, p > .05). The results also showed that previous product involvement and brand attitude did not meaningfully impact the interaction. Thus, hypothesis 1B and 1C were not supported. That is, it can be said that there was no significant interaction relationship between crisis involvement and message framing regarding effectiveness of apology message.

Secondly, H2A posited that brand image will moderate the effectiveness of the apology message. The effectiveness of the brand image on consumers' 1) attitudes towards apology message and 2) the crisis brand, 3) intention to purchase, and 4) intention to share negative eWOM was examined by ANCOVA. The results showed that there was a significant main effect of brand image in regards to consumers' attitude towards the crisis brand, purchase intention and their intention to engage in negative eWOM. (M brand attitude = 5.13 vs. 4.33, F brand attitude (1, 377) = 23.022, p < .00; M purchase intention= 4.54 vs. 4.17, F purchase intention (1, 377) = 5.715, p < .05; M negative eWOM= 3.22 vs. 3.76, F negative eWOM (1, 377) = 10.447, p <.00). However, there was no significant main effects regarding attitude towards the apology message (M apology message attitude= 5.19 vs. 4.96, F apology message attitude (1, 377) = 2.887, p >.05). Specifically, the brand image of a symbolic brand led to more effective crisis communication than that of a functional brand. Therefore, the results confirmed the hypotheses 2A partially.

To test H2B and H2C, a two-way ANCOVA was conducted to examine the interplay of the brand image and message framing on the effectiveness of the crisis response message (apology). However, the results showed that the interaction effect was not significant (F brand attitude (1, 337) =. 771, p > .05; F apology message attitude (1, 337) = .167, p > .05; F purchase intention (1, 337) = .232, p > .05, F negative eWOM (1,337) = .378, p > .05). Thus, the two way interaction between the brand image and message framing on the effects of the apology message was not moderated as hypothesized (H2B and H2C). That is, it can be said that there is no significant

interaction relationship between crisis involvement and message framing regarding effectiveness of apology message.

The last hypothesis presumes that crisis involvement, brand image and message framing will interact leading to more favorable post-crisis attitudes and behavioral intention toward the crisis brand under only low crisis involvement condition. Namely, the effect of the three independent variables on the effectiveness of the apology message (attitudes towards apology message and the crisis brand, intention to purchase, and, intention to share negative eWOM) were examined. A three-way ANCOVA tested this assumption. The results showed that the overall three-way interaction between crisis involvement, brand image, and message framing is significant. The ANCOVA showed that there was a significant crisis involvement × brand image × message framing of apology message interaction effects (significant: brand attitude, apology message attitude and intention to engage negative eWOM; partially significant: purchase intention; F brand attitude $(1, 377) = 5.332$, $p < .05$; F apology message attitude $(1, 377) = 4.579$, $p < .05$; F negative eWOM $(1,377) = 4.152$, $p < .05$; F purchase intention $(1, 377) = 2.967$, $p = .086$). That is, the results of four separate univariate three-way ANOVAs suggested that the impact of crisis involvement on the efficacy of message framing on the effectiveness of the apology message may differentiate based on the crisis brand image.

The results illustrate that, in the case of low crisis involvement, a more favorable post-crisis attitude toward the crisis brand, a higher purchase intention, and a lower intention to share negative eWOM were demonstrated in the case of emotional message framing, rather than in the case of rational message framing for consumers in a symbolic brand image condition. In contrast, the results demonstrated that a more favorable post-crisis attitude toward the crisis brand, a higher purchase intention, and a lower intention to share negative eWOM were demonstrated in the case of rational message framing, rather than in the case of emotional message framing for consumers in a functional brand image condition Therefore, these results support H3A and H3B (Figure 1).

Additionally, the findings indicated that there also exists three-way interaction under the high crisis involvement condition. The result showed that more favorable post-

crisis attitude toward the crisis brand and apology message, and lower intention to engage

negative eWOM and partly higher purchase intention were demonstrated in the cases of

the matching of the rational framing and symbolic brand and emotional framing and

functional brand image. That is, a significant three-way interaction existed under both of

high and low crisis involvement condition and the direction of the interaction was the

opposite between high and low condition. Thus, the results showed additional three way

interactions (Figure 2).
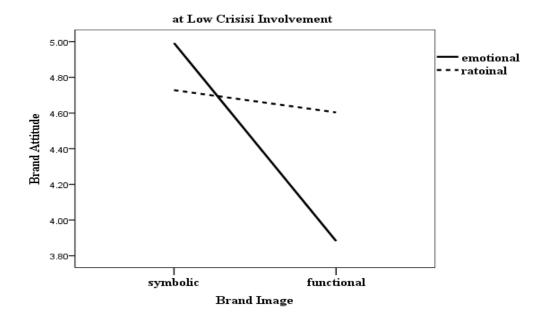
TABLE 1
Summary of ANCOVA

Note. CI = Crisis Involvement; BI = Brand Image; MF = Message Framing

	df	Attitude towards crisis Brand		Attitude towards Apology Message		Purchase Intention		Intention to engage Negative eWOM	
		MS	F	MS	F	MS	F	MS	F
Corrected Model	10	10.16	4.25***	3.02	1.47	5.33	2.09	5.23	2.94**
Intercept	1	183.55	76.83***	358.85	174.37***	176.02	68.93***	295.37	165.98**
White	1	6.03	2.52	3.48	1.69	3.72	1.46	9.37	5.26*
Gender	1	4.34	1.82	.99	.48	3.38	1.32	6.98	3.92*
Education	1	10.21	4.27*	1.91	.93	3.93	1.54	6.89	3.87
CI	1	10.40	4.35*	4.10	1.99	18.64	7.29**	5.98	3.36
BI	1	54.99	23.02***	5.94	2.89	14.59	5.72	18.59	10.45*
MF	1	1.57	.66	2.74	1.33	1.83	.72	.14	.08
CI × MF	1	.37	.16	5.23	2.54	.89	.35	.008	.005
BI × MF	1	1.84	.77	.34	.17	3.67	1.44	1.39	.78
CI × BI × MF	1	12.74	5.33*	9.42	4.58	7.58	2.97	7.39	4.15*

∗p < .05; ∗∗p < .01; ∗∗∗p < .001.

FIGURE 1
Three-way Interaction in Low Crisis Involvement Condition

DV1: Attitude toward the Crisis Brand
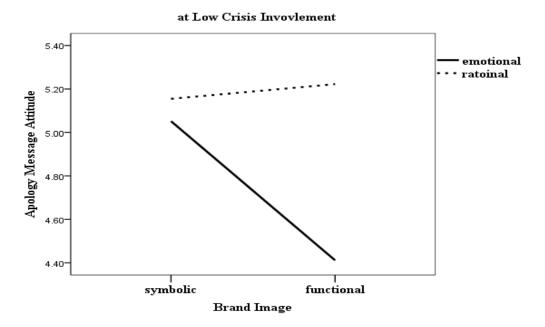

DV2: Attitude toward the Apology Message

FIGURE 1 Continued

DV3: Purchase Intention

DV4: Intention to engage negative eWOM

FIGURE 2
Three way Interaction In high Crisis Involvement Condition

DV1: Attitude toward the Crisis Brand
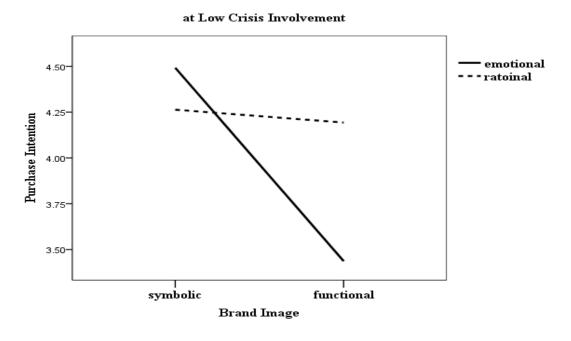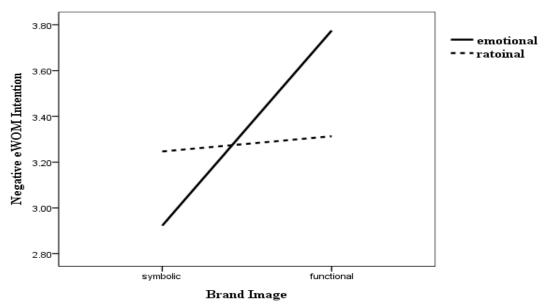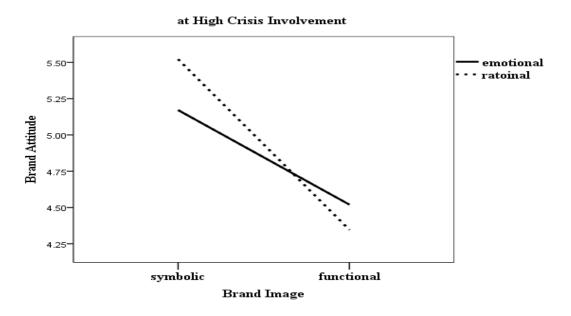

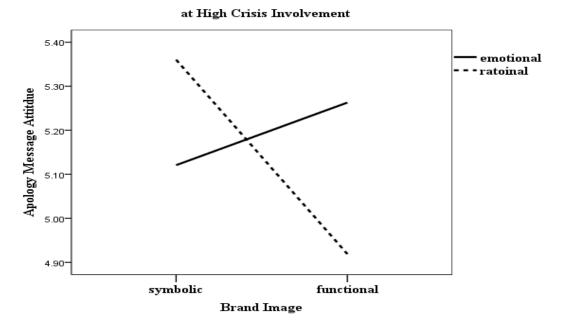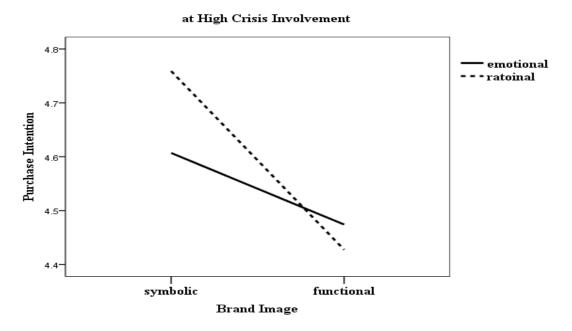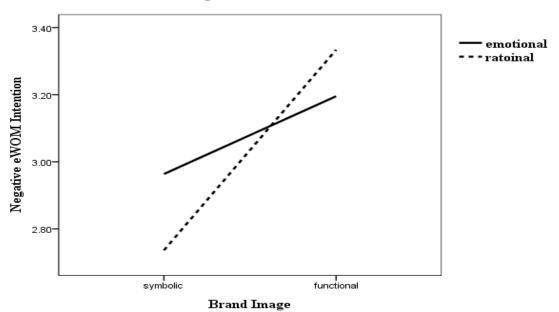
DV2: Attitude toward the Apology Message

FIGURE 2 Continued
DV3: Purchase Intention

at High Crisis Involvement

DV4: Intention to engage negative eWOM

at High Crisis Involvement

V. DISCUSSION

Crisis management practitioners and brand and PR managers have always been interested in how customers react to a company's crisis response. Although there have been many studies that have examined the crisis response of companies, limited studies have utilized brand crisis and situational factors. To fill this gap, this study looked at the role of situational factors on crisis response strategy effectiveness in a brand-product harm crisis context and examined the main role of situational factors and interplay between these factors and the most common message strategies used in persuasive communication. Specifically, the purpose of the present research was to examine the role of crisis involvement, brand image, and message framing based on the elaboration likelihood model and information processing, as well as the guidelines of SCCT (Coombs) in the social media context. The findings offer valuable insights into crisis response strategy and help broaden the understanding of effective crisis response strategies. The findings suggest that crisis involvement and crisis brand image do influence consumers' attitudes and behavioral intentions in a crisis situation. And, there exists significant certain combinations of crisis involvement, brand image, and message framing that interact and affect the type of apology message that will be effective.

THE ROLE OF "CRISIS INVOLVEMENT"

The first set of hypotheses (H1A, H1B, H1C) predicts the main effect of crisis involvement and the interaction effect of crisis involvement and message framing (i.e., emotional vs. rational) on the effectiveness of crisis response strategy (i.e., apology), based on SCCT guidelines (Coombs).

In terms of the role of crisis involvement, the results partly supported its influence on the effectiveness apology messages. The results show that consumers' crisis involvement impacts consumers' attitude and behavioral intention after crisis. Specifically, the findings indicated that participants with a higher level of crisis involvement showed a more favorable attitude towards the crisis brand and higher purchase intention (partly supported). It can be inferred that consumers with high crisis

involvement tend to pay more attention to the company's apology message (i.e., content of relevant messages) than those with low crisis involvement (Yoo and MacInnis 2005; Petty et al. 1983). On the other hand, consumers with low crisis involvement tend to pay more attention to the non-content elements while those with high crisis involvement tend to pay more attention to information and facts (Yoo and MacInnis 2005; Petty et al. 1983).

Thus, the findings indicate that the level of relevance of the crisis to consumers could influence apology message processing regarding the effect in a crisis communication situation. Consumers with high crisis involvement might consider a crisis response (apology message) as more persuasive resulting in more positive attitudes toward the organization. That is, it can be inferred that the apology message would be more effective and persuasive for people with high crisis involvement since participants with high involvement paid greater attention and perused the company's apology message more judiciously than low involvement participants resulting in more favorable attitudes and behavioral intentions than low crisis involvement condition.

Moreover, since an organization's 'apology' response might be viewed as accepting responsibility for the crisis while asking for forgiveness (Benoit and Drew 1997; Fuchs-Burnett 2002), this could mollify and placate high involvement consumers, and in turn, more favorable attitudes and behavior could be elicited from them. Thus, the results show that post-crisis brand attitude and purchase intention could be different contingent on the level of crisis involvement and company's apology message would positively influences the post-crisis attitudes toward the crisis brand and consumers' purchase intention with high crisis involvement as compared to a low crisis involvement.

Therefore, crisis involvement can be used to understand the crisis communication target audience more deeply and make it possible to design a more effective crisis response strategy. Thus, this study would be very useful for PR managers and practitioners.

INTERACTION OF "CRISIS INVOLVEMENT AND MESSAGE FRAMING"

In contrast to our expectations, there were not significant differences in the effectiveness of an apology message by interactions between the crisis involvement and message framing. Accordingly, there were no differences in participants' attitudes toward the crisis brand and apology message, purchase intention and intention to share negative eWOM.

First, the findings can pose the question as to whether this manipulation elicited elaboration processing appropriately or not. One probable reason could be the lessening of a realistic threat and negative consequences to the participant in a fictitious product harm crisis situation. In turn, it is possible that people perceive the crisis to be harsh and impactful or the level of threat based on distance was not as threatening as expected, so it was more difficult to prompt elaboration processing not resulting in the interaction of crisis involvement and message framing for participants. Also, the contrived laptop battery explosion story involving two of the most popular and established brands in America, the crisis stimuli for this experiment, might not appear to be realistic for consumers or this crisis.

Furthermore, this study did not divide participants into groups separated into user/non-user or purchaser/non-purchaser categories. These differences could also be more influential than distance-based crisis involvement since these are closely related to prior experience and knowledge about brands, which can have a big influence on forming a brand attitude. Future research could place a sharper focus on the relevance of the crisis among the participants.

THE MAIN ROLE OF "BRAND IMAGE"

The second premise expects that there are main effects of the brand image and the interaction effect of brand image and message framing on the effectiveness of the brand's apology message after a product harm crisis. The results partially supported the influence of brand image to affect an apology message.

In regards of the brand image's main effect, this was empirically substantiated via the experiment. The results showed that the crisis brand image has an impact on the effectiveness of apology message by company, influencing consumers' evaluation of organizational messages. The current study suggested that brand image influenced the effect of the apology message from the brand in terms of attitude towards the crisis brand, purchase intention and intention to engage in negative eWOM. The results showed that the symbolic brand resulted in more favorable attitudes towards the crisis brand, higher purchase intention and lower intention to partake in negative eWOM after the product harm crisis than the functional brand. With regard to brand image effect, one possible explanation is that the relevance of a crisis to a brand could impact consumers' perceived seriousness of the crisis (Dawar and Lei 2009). This could be a reason why a symbolic brand image had more a favorable attitude, higher purchase intention, and lower intention to share negative eWOM than a functional brand. Dawar and Lei (2009) indicated that the more closely a crisis is related to a brand's main attributes, the more serious the crisis is perceived to be. Since a functional brand is more closely associated with its function and ability, a product-harm crisis is more relevant to a functional image than a symbolic image, especially in the consumer electronics category, such as laptop computers, where function is highly meaningful. In this sense, a functional brand would be likely to be more vulnerable in a product-harm crisis than a symbolic brand.

THE INTERACTION WITH "BRAND IMAGE AND MESSAGE FRAMING"

Contrary to hypothesis 2B and 2C, there were not significant interaction effects between the brand image and message framing on the effectiveness of the apology message. That is, it can be said that the efficacy of the crisis response strategy could not be differentiated through the interaction between crisis brand image and message framing.

One possible explanation is the influence of brand familiarity and previous attitude towards a brand. They could have an influence on the relationship between brand image and message framing. First, brand familiarity could have influenced information

processing in a crisis situation because this study used real and popular brands, Apple and HP. Dawar and Lei (2009) found that in a familiar brand's crisis situation, consumers' experiences with the brand lets them easily access the pro-attitudinal information. Consistent with this logic, it can be said that brand familiarity could help lessen the negative impact on consumers' brand evaluations. Also, this could be explained by consumers' brand expectations. According to Dawar and Pillutla (2000), consumers' expectations, which originate from previous experience or exposure to information (e.g., advertising), could cause selective choice and biased processing. Dawar and Pillutla (2000) also posited that prior expectations can be referenced to the anticipated crisis response. Thus, it can be inferred that the effectiveness of a company's crisis response could be differentiated via selective information processing based on their expectations.

To sum up, since both Apple and HP are among the most popular brands and have deep familiarity with American consumers, they can affect not only the brand image but also people's prior attitudes and expectations, as well as brand familiarity. And this could exert a stronger influence as a buffer leading to a biased elaboration or selective information processing. However, this study did not check prior experience or expectations, so future research can measure people's prior expectations and familiarity.

THE INTERACTION WITH "CRISIS INVOLVEMENT, BRAND IMAGE, AND MESSAGE FRAMING"

The most interesting aspects are, in regards to the third hypotheses, the results indicated that the impact of individuals' crisis involvement on the effectiveness of the apology message may depend on the crisis response message framing and crisis brand image. That is, there exists three way interactions in both high and low crisis involvement conditions.

First, interestingly, in the low crisis involvement condition, the hypotheses regarding three-way interaction (H3A and B) were supported through the experiment. Therefore, in a low crisis involvement condition, individuals process a company's crisis response (apology) as ELM since low crisis involvement would not cause selective or

biased information processing. Namely, consumers with low crisis involvement tend to process message elaboration generally as ELM suggested, while consumers with high involvement tend to process selectively or biased when the brand image is functional or the message is framed rationally.

In detail, when the crisis brand is functional, consumers with low crisis involvement will have a more favorable post-crisis attitude toward the brand and apology message, and higher purchase intention in the case of rational message framing than in the case of an emotional message. When the crisis brand is symbolic, in contrast, consumers with low crisis involvement prefer emotional message framing rather than a rational message framing by the same token above. Consequently, they will be more likely to have favorable attitudes and higher purchase intention, and lower intention to engage in negative eWOM. Therefore, the results illustrate that the post-crisis attitude toward the organization does differ when the crisis involvement, brand image and message framing all work together under a low crisis involvement condition.

This interaction impact of crisis involvement, brand image and message framing on the efficacy of the crisis response is noteworthy because this finding can explain why a company would need to consider the situational factors for effective crisis communication during or after crisis. Although consumers with low crisis involvement are less relevant to the crisis than high involved consumers, it is also very important to communicate effectively with low involved consumers since they not only can affect brand's reputational and financial damages but can also spread word of mouth to various people through online and social media. Thus, the results would be useful for effective crisis communication in the online and social media context, where there exists not only high involvement consumers but also low involvement consumers.

On the other hand, we did not anticipate the interaction effect under the high crisis involvement condition since we predicted high crisis involvement would have a stronger influence than brand image. However, in the high crisis involvement condition, there also exists a three-way interaction. The findings showed that a rationally framed

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message makes the match with the symbolic brands and an emotionally framed apology message aligned with functional brand.

Cognitive dissonance can account for the results. Based on Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory, consumers would experience cognitive dissonance when the new information is in contrast to their prior beliefs. Then, to alleviate cognitive dissonance, people undergo biased cognitive processing to sustain their prior beliefs. (Dawar and Pillutla 2000; Dowling 2004). Sohn and Lariscy (2012) also demonstrated that cognitive dissonance is more activated in a corporate ability (CA) case, which is defined as "expertise in producing and delivering product and/or service offerings" (Brown and Dacin 1997, p. 70). Based on this, a functional brand, which has overlaps in image and characteristics with CA, could cause cognitive dissonance rather than a symbolic brand and this could be a reason why an emotional framed apology message is more effective rather than information-focused message in a functional brand condition.

Another possible explanation is the influence of emotions and perceived uncertainty that can be induced by a crisis situation. In most crisis situations, negative emotions might be aroused and some previous research found differences in processing among negative affective states (Bodenhausen, Sheppard, and Kramer 1994; Tiedens and Linton 2001). In addition, Tiedens and Linton (2001) demonstrated that the depth of processing can be affected by the degree of certainty even if people maintain similar emotional states. More specifically, several studies affirmed that certainty-associated emotions (e.g., anger) result in more heuristic processing than do uncertainty-associated emotions (e.g., sadness), which promote systematic processing (e.g., Bodenhausen, Sheppard, and Kramer 1994; Tiedens and Linton 2001). Based on this, it is possible that consumers' negative emotions and perceived uncertainty, which could be aroused by a brand's crisis situation, would affect this three-way interaction effect.

As the results showed, since developing an effective crisis response is as complicated as the crisis itself, it requires substantial consideration and effort for developing effective crisis communication among practitioners and professionals. Thus,

this study provides a foundation to develop an effective crisis response strategy during and after a crisis by using situational factors especially in the social media context.

OVERALL DISCUSSION

To summarize, the findings from the current study proposed a new moderator of efficacy of in crisis response (i.e. apology) in a social media context – crisis involvement, brand image, and message framing. That is, the results propose the application of a crisis involvement, brand image with message framing strategy for effective crisis communication.

Although there have been numerous research studies that identify the factors that affect the effectiveness of crisis response and apology, little research has examined these relatively situational concepts: crisis involvement and brand image in a brand crisis context. Therefore, the finding of a relationship between crisis involvement, brand image, and message framing can provide an opportunity to expand the scope of understanding of crisis communication effects. Especially, the effects of crisis involvement would be useful in a social media context, where there are a diversity of people with various degrees of crisis involvement. In addition, this study showed the effects of brand image can also apply to crisis communication.

Also, this study is meaningful in the way that it examined how consumers interpret company's crisis response message from the consumer-oriented approach. The findings showed that people perceive and assess a company's crisis response differently depending on situational variables.

Regarding interaction effects, to date, few studies have investigated how crisis involvement and brand image influences the formation of a persuasive crisis response message (i.e., apology) with message framing. And the findings also showed that the interaction among those three factors could have a strong effect on the efficacy of the crisis response strategy (e.g., apology). Although this experiment uses only limited manipulations for each factors, the results show that the interaction among these three

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factors can create different consumer evaluations regarding an apology, accordingly influencing its effectiveness.

These findings also offer important practical implications for professionals. Monitoring how consumers are involved in a crisis in the social media context and considering the crisis brand's image could be a key factor of crisis response strategy with a message framing strategy. These results are noteworthy and have great value to crisis communication research in that the roles of crisis involvement, brand image, and message framing can provide new guidelines for framing persuasion crisis response messages, such as an apology message in the social media context. Therefore, PR and brand professionals should pay great attention to not only online and social media itself but also to users' involvement and to crisis brand's image or personality and proper message strategy at the same time to tailor their crisis response strategies.

VI. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Like most research studies, this one has several limitations. First, this study used a specific product category, a laptop, which might restrict the generalizability of the findings. The laptop product category provided a number of benefits to this research, such as it is one of most common and popular product categories among consumers, regardless of gender and age, but general validity is hard to achieve by examining only one product category. Also, this study used only specific crisis types (a preventable crisis and a product harm crisis), which also might reduce the generalizability of the results. Although this type of crisis provides value in that it is one of most common crisis types in the marketplace, since only one crisis type was examined, general validity is difficult to accomplish. Future research should examine different types of product categories and crisis types. In addition, the limited crisis response type, only apology, needs to be augmented. That is, this study focuses on the match between a preventable crisis type and a crisis response strategy (i.e., rebuild). However, according to SCCT tenets, there are a variety of crisis responses such as denial and victim strategies. Whereas an apology strategy has been known to be one of the most common and effective strategies for crisis communication, examining only one type of strategy seems to be inadequate for validity. In particular, this study focuses on a preventable crisis because this type of crisis could result in the most damaging reputational loss and thus poses one of the biggest threats to organizations (Claeys et al. 2010; Coombs 2007a). Additional research needs to replicate these effects by utilizing a variety of types of crises in the future (Coombs 2007a) and a wider range of organizations as well. Also, the attributions of responsibility in this research are only moderately high with regards to a preventable crisis type; future research that emphasizes a preventable crisis can investigate a crisis scenario for which the attributions of responsibility are more diverse (i.e., higher, lower, or moderate).

Second, this study used a sample of Americans, which may also result in a validity problem in regards to generalization in the present context of globalization. Thus, cross-cultural replication studies are suggested in order to achieve more generalizable results. The external validity of future study would be increased if the research includes a

more representative sample, a wider variety of product categories, different crisis types, and more diverse crisis response formats, as well as a larger variety of brand images. Moreover, the sample was not representative of all users of the crisis brand's laptop, and the results are based on various types of people who are not only the target audience but also just a Facebook user. So it needs to be considered to divide people into target/observer and user/nonuser groups since different groups have different constraints (Risen and Gilovich 2007). In spite of some limitations, the significant findings of this study could be expounded by the relationship among the factors and samples tested here.

This study also has several directions of future research. First, the results show the importance of consumers' crisis involvement on the effectiveness of crisis communication. Additional research could look at what characterizes a low or high involvement crisis by deploying a different way to manipulate crisis involvement, not just spatial distance.

Second, with regards to message framing strategy, future studies could examine the interaction relationship using a variety of factors. One could be to look into timing as an interaction effect to assess the most appropriate timing for each framing strategy (rational and emotional). Future research could employ a range of time conditions to observe emotional vs. rational framing's impact (Coombs and Holladay 2005).

Third, since among the various types of brand images and personality dimensions, only two (functional and symbolic) were examined for the relationship between message framing and brand image, a closer examination of the other types needs to be conducted. Also, the brands used in study are leading American technology brands. Thus, Americans might have greater loyalty to these brands and be less likely to choose another company after a crisis. Even as people may blame the brand for a particular crisis situation such as product harm, they are more likely to retain a positive relationship with the brand. Thus, this study should have measured more brand-related dimensions to prevent confounding effects.

Also, future studies can assess what impact a consumer's emotional state has on the perception of an organizations' crisis response, since it can influence one's view of an

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organizations' reputation after a crisis as a significant mediating variable (Choi and Lin 2009; Tiedens and Linton 2001). In addition, as Tiedens and Linton (2001) mentioned, since negative emotions and uncertainty are some of the primary traits associated with a crisis, it is possible that consumers' negative emotions and perceived uncertainty, which are aroused by a crisis situation could affect the information processing and their evaluation including change of attitudes and behavioral intentions. Thus, it might be helpful to understand the resulting relationship by using emotion and perceived uncertainty. In addition, it would be beneficial to more broadly study emotion's role in crisis communication such as what emotions are relevant to crisis communication, and more deeply assess how they affect the process.

In addition, the format in which the stimuli regarding the crisis news article was displayed might not have been appropriate considering the characteristics of the present generation. As noted by An and Cheng (2010), a majority of the studies that evaluated crisis response strategies used the print version of a news article that had been published on the news providers' Web site. Considering people's current media usage style and media habits, the news article format might not be suitable for examining crisis response strategies, due to the fact that the current generation has a more visual culture and, nowadays, a majority of people use various online sources to view or listen to the news (McDougall, 2007). In a real-world situation, people tend to receive information about a crisis from a variety of sources, from traditional media to online and social media including by WOM. Thus, it could be more realistic to adopt more fitting stimuli formats, such as video, an audio recording, or a mobile app, and also use multiple source types to research crisis information and response strategies.

Finally, current crises are becoming more global because corporations sell products around the world. However, few studies have researched the effects of the international context on crisis communication (Coombs et al. 2010). The impact of an international context on the crisis in crisis communication needs to be addressed in present global era.

VII. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

From a managerial perspective, this research can offer valuable implications for PR practitioners and brand managers. Crisis involvement is operationalized as an influential factor that has a strong influence on consumers' information processing and evaluation. In addition, a brand is conceptualized "making information related to the brand be seen as 'anchored' to it" (Aaker 1991). Thus, when individuals get an apology message from a particular brand after a crisis, their involvement in the crisis will dictate their response and affect their existing memory in regards to the crisis brand (e.g., brand image).

If PR and brand practitioners can utilize crisis involvement and their brand image in an effective way, it will be very beneficial to them after the crisis. This study can also illuminate how crisis involvement and brand image can be used properly in crisis communication in tandem with message framing in a social media context, which is essential for developing an effective crisis response strategy in the current era of pervasive online media. Developing effective crisis response strategies that properly align crisis type with level of involvement is one of the most essential undertakings in crisis communication. Moreover, regardless of the various types of crisis response strategies, in most cases, developing effective messages could determine the success or failure of the crisis communication. Since developing an effective crisis response is as complicated as the crisis itself, it requires substantial consideration and effort. From this standpoint, these findings regarding the role of crisis involvement, brand image, and message framing can provide a valuable opportunity for practitioners to develop effective crisis response strategies.

In addition, in terms of the social media context, this study is valuable because it examined intention to partake in negative eWOM after receiving an apology message since online comments about brand crisis can impact a company's reputation (Baksky et al. 2011). Moreover, since not only current customers but also potential customers would participate in Facebook, it is noteworthy to conduct research that examines various kinds of stakeholders as a target. Also, this research enabled us to examine people's direct and

indirect responses to the apology. By exposure to unsought posts, this study can examine consumers' attitudes towards the apology and crisis brand as well as future purchase intention and intention to engage in negative eWOM in the social media context. The study gave insights into the reactions associated with crisis communication, attitudes and behavioral intentions. Assessing online reactions may allow marketers to gauge the effectiveness of the crisis response, and determine if additional crisis responses are needed.

Finally, the current study showed that message framing that is consistent with the crisis involvement and brand image enhances the effectiveness of crisis communication. Based on these findings, guidelines for developing new crisis response messages can be suggested. If an apology message can be created based on the level of crisis involvement and the brand image, it would not only be a more streamlined way to create the apology message, but it would also result in maintaining the effectiveness of the crisis communication. In conclusion, the findings from this study can help practitioners and academics improve their understanding of effective crisis communication.

These findings give validation to the role of crisis involvement, brand image and message framing and their three-way interaction, providing a useful starting point for further research. This indicates that in order to elicit a favorable attitude and evaluation from the consumers after a crisis, it is important to communicate with them using proper message framing considering that their crisis involvement and the crisis brand's image.

With these findings, this research makes significant contributions to the field by providing practical guidelines with regards to understanding valuable factors related to crisis communication, and it also provides a theoretical background that can serve as a foundation for organizations to shape effective crisis response strategies.

VIII. Appendices

A. Crisis News Article

A Crisis News Article Stimuli for explanation about brand-product harm crisis
(Symbolic (Apple) - U.S.)

NEWS

Apple Laptop Battery Explodes, Fire Threat Seen Nationwide

Apple has been plagued by reports of burning laptops in recent months throughout the United States. The latest incident involved an Apple MacBook Air that suddenly exploded during a business conference in San Francisco, Calif. No injuries occurred in the incident .

A spokesperson for the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) said there is a possibility similar incidents could occur throughout the U.S. and advised consumers with MacBook Airs to be extra cautious when using them.

According to witness Ethan Williams, a senior executive at Spotlight Marketing Inc., the laptop explosion was so intense that it was hot enough to burn the conference table it was on. "That MacBook was really flaming," he said. "It was almost a miracle nobody got hurt."

According to Apple, this incident was caused by the batteries overheating. Apple said the problematic lithium-ion batteries affect laptops manufactured in the last four years and sold in the U.S. As required by law, Apple has reported 38 other similar instances that have occurred in the U.S.to the CPSC in which laptops overheated and caught fire.

Witness Ethan Williams, a senior executive at Spotlight Marketing Inc.

"This is one of the largest product harm crises in the history of the consumer electronics industry," according to Scott Wolfson, a representative of the consumer electronics division of the CPSC.

Sources state that Apple has experienced more battery explosion incidents in the U.S. than they have reported. "The damage has been much more common than Apple is letting on," said former Apple technician Robert Day. "I'd say as many as several hundred a year were returned. I'd see so many pallets of stuff coming in that they had to use my lab for overflow storage."

A Crisis News Article Stimuli for explanation about brand-product harm crisis
(Symbolic (Apple) – Korea)

NEWS

Apple Laptop Battery Explodes in Seoul, Fire Threat Seen in Korea

Apple has been plagued by reports of burning laptops in recent months in South Korea. The latest incident involved an Apple MacBook Air that suddenly exploded during a business conference in Seoul, Korea. No injuries were reported and a spokesperson for the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) said there is no possibility similar incidents could occur in the U.S.

According to witness Min Lee, a senior executive at Spotlight Marketing Inc., the laptop explosion was so intense that it was hot enough to burn the conference table it was on. "That MacBook was really flaming," he said. "It was almost a miracle nobody got hurt."

According to Apple's South Korean operations, this incident was caused by the batteries overheating. Apple said the problematic lithium-ion batteries affect laptops manufactured in the last four years and sold in South Korea. As required by law, Apple has reported 38 other similar instances that occurred in Asia to the Korean CPSC in which laptops overheated and caught fire

Witness Min Lee, a senior executive at Spotlight Marketing Inc.

"This is one of the largest product harm crises in the history of the consumer electronics industry," according to Jun Kim, with the Korean CPSC.

Sources state that Apple has experienced more battery explosion incidents in South Korea than they have reported. "The damage has been much more common than Apple is letting on," said former Apple technician Jin Park. "I'd say as many as several hundred a year were returned. I'd see so many pallets of stuff coming in that they had to use my lab for overflow storage."

A Crisis News Article Stimuli for explanation about brand-product harm crisis
(Functional (HP) – U.S.)

HP Laptop Battery Explodes, Fire Threat Seen Nationwide

HP has been plagued by reports of burning laptops in recent months throughout the United States. The latest incident involved a HP Pavilion Chromebook that suddenly exploded during a business conference in San Francisco, Calif. No injuries occurred in the incident .

A spokesperson for the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) said there is a possibility similar incidents could occur throughout the U.S. and advised consumers with HP Pavilion Chromebooks to be extra cautious when using them.

According to witness Ethan Williams, a senior executive at Spotlight Marketing Inc., the laptop explosion was so intense that it was hot enough to burn the conference table it was on. "That Chromebook was really flaming," he said. "It was almost a miracle nobody got hurt."

According to HP, this incident was caused by the batteries overheating. HP said the problematic lithium-ion batteries affect laptops manufactured in the last four years and sold in the U.S. As required by law, HP has reported 38 other similar instances that have occurred in the U.S.to the CPSC in which laptops overheated and caught fire.

Witness Ethan Williams, a senior executive at Spotlight Marketing Inc.

"This is one of the largest product harm crises in the history of the consumer electronics industry," according to Scott Wolfson, a representative of the Texas division of the CPSC.

Sources state that HP has experienced more battery explosion incidents in the southwest region than they have reported "The damage has been much more common than HP is letting on," said former HP technician Robert Day. "I'd say as many as several hundred a year were returned. I'd see so many pallets of stuff coming in that they had to use my lab for overflow storage."

A Crisis News Article Stimuli for explanation about brand-product harm crisis
(Functional (HP) – Korea)

NEWS

HP Laptop Battery Explodes in Seoul, Fire Threat Seen in Korea

HP has been plagued by reports of burning laptops in recent months in South Korea. The latest incident involved a HP Pavilion Chromebook that suddenly exploded during a business conference in Seoul, Korea. No injuries were reported and a spokesperson for the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) said there is no possibility similar incidents could occur in the U.S.

According to witness Min Lee, a senior executive at Spotlight Marketing Inc., the laptop explosion was so intense that it was hot enough to burn the conference table it was on. "That Chromebook was really flaming," he said. "It was almost a miracle nobody got hurt."

According to HP's South Korean operations, this incident was caused by the batteries overheating. HP said the problematic lithium-ion batteries affect laptops manufactured in the last four years and sold in South Korea. As required by law, HP has reported 38 other similar instances that occurred in Asia to the Korean CPSC in which laptops overheated and caught fire.

Witness Min Lee, a senior executive at Spotlight Marketing Inc.

"This is one of the largest product harm crises in the history of the consumer electronics industry," according to Jun Kim, with the Korean CPSC.

Sources state that HP has experienced more battery explosion incidents in South Korea than they have reported. "The damage has been much more common than HP is letting on," said former HP technician Jin Park. "I'd say as many as several hundred a year were returned. I'd see so many pallets of stuff coming in that they had to use my lab for overflow storage."

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B. Apology Message in Facebook

A Company (Brand)'s Apology Message Stimuli in Facebook Page
(Symbolic (Apple) – Emotional Framing)

A Company (Brand)'s Apology Message Stimuli in Facebook Page
(Symbolic (Apple) – Rational Framing)

A Company (Brand)'s Apology Message Stimuli in Facebook Page
(Functional (HP) – Emotional Framing)

A Company (Brand)'s Apology Message Stimuli in Facebook Page
(Functional (HP) – Rational Framing)

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