



Journal of Communication Management

Cultural issues in crisis communication: A comparative study of messages chosen by South Korean and US print media

Emma K. Wertz, Sora Kim,

Article information:

To cite this document:

Emma K. Wertz, Sora Kim, (2010) "Cultural issues in crisis communication: A comparative study of messages chosen by South Korean and US print media", Journal of Communication Management, Vol. 14 Issue: 1, pp.81-94, <https://doi.org/10.1108/13632541011017825>

Permanent link to this document:

<https://doi.org/10.1108/13632541011017825>

Downloaded on: 21 March 2018, At: 02:11 (PT)

References: this document contains references to 42 other documents.

To copy this document: permissions@emeraldinsight.com

The fulltext of this document has been downloaded 2760 times since 2010*

Users who downloaded this article also downloaded:

(2014), "Developing internal crisis communication: New roles and practices of communication professionals", Corporate Communications: An International Journal, Vol. 19 Iss 2 pp. 128-146 https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-09-2012-0063

(2011), "The study of internal crisis communication: towards an integrative framework", Corporate Communications: An International Journal, Vol. 16 Iss 4 pp. 347-361 https://doi.org/10.1108/13563281111186977



Access to this document was granted through an Emerald subscription provided by emerald-srm:149425 []

For Authors

If you would like to write for this, or any other Emerald publication, then please use our Emerald for Authors service information about how to choose which publication to write for and submission guidelines are available for all. Please visit www.emeraldinsight.com/authors for more information.

About Emerald www.emeraldinsight.com

Emerald is a global publisher linking research and practice to the benefit of society. The company manages a portfolio of more than 290 journals and over 2,350 books and book series volumes, as well as providing an extensive range of online products and additional customer resources and services.

Emerald is both COUNTER 4 and TRANSFER compliant. The organization is a partner of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and also works with Portico and the LOCKSS initiative for digital archive preservation.

*Related content and download information correct at time of download.



Cultural issues in crisis communication

Cultural issues in
crisis
communication

A comparative study of messages chosen by South Korean and US print media

81

Emma K. Wertz

*School of Communication, East Carolina University, Greenville,
North Carolina, USA, and*

Sora Kim

College of Communication, DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois, USA

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to analyse the crisis messages framed by the media coverage and the message strategies during the US E. coli spinach crisis and Korea's rotten dumpling crisis.

Design/methodology/approach – A content analysis was used to extend a cultural analysis of the crisis messages framed by the media coverage regarding the sources of information and the message strategies used by these sources.

Findings – Korea used a more aggressive message strategy than was expected.

Practical implications – Conscientious public relations practitioners can use this kind of information as they work to better understand how culture affects the way the media frame issues, through the messages they present to publics, and the effect these frames have on an organization's key stakeholders and publics.

Originality/value – Situations like this allow crisis communicators and public relations professionals to investigate messages created during a crisis situation and messages that are conveyed – through the media – to key stakeholders. Doing so allows for a better understanding of where information and communication gaps occur during a crisis – providing an opportunity for public relations practitioners to assist in filling them.

Keywords Public relations, Communication, Information media, Food poisoning, United States of America, South Korea

Paper type Research paper

The United States' spinach crisis

On September, 14, 2006 (FDA News, 2006a), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) alerted the public of a food borne illness related to E. coli O157:H7. E. Coli is the common name for the bacteria *Escherichia coli*, which is found in the intestines of animals and humans. While there are hundreds of E. coli strands – most of which are harmless – E. coli O157:H7 generates a powerful toxin that causes severe illness or death (*News in Review*, 2000).

When a recall for spinach was issued on September 15, 2006, (FDA News, 2006b) distributors had already shipped the tainted product—containing the harmful strand of E. coli—to restaurants and grocery stores across the country. The primary dates for the illnesses were reported between August 19 and September 5 with 102 individuals hospitalized and 31 developing some type of kidney failure. In its last official report about those affected by the E. coli, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



(2006) reported that spinach was responsible for making 199 persons ill in 26 states across the USA. The *E. coli* outbreak also resulted in three confirmed deaths including an elderly woman from Wisconsin, a two-year-old child in Idaho, and another elderly woman in Nebraska. Other deaths are being investigated, including a woman who died in Maryland on September 13 after consuming fresh spinach.

Preliminary investigations isolated *E. coli* O157:H7 in 13 packages of spinach, provided by ill patients living in ten states. Further investigations traced the bacteria to fields in the Salinas Valley, California, and found Natural Selection Foods, LLC to be the main supplier of the contaminated spinach. Natural Selection Foods supplies many companies, including Dole Food Company, Inc., with fresh lettuce and spinach. As a result, the CDC suggested consumers should not eat, retailers should not sell, and restaurants should not serve spinach that was implicated in the *E. coli* outbreak (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2006).

South Korea's dumpling crisis

On June 6, 2004, the Korea Food and Drug Administration (KFDA) publicly announced that frozen dumpling producing companies sold dumplings with tainted ingredients: dumpling fillings containing rotten scraps of Chinese-made pickled radish. Dumplings, a popular dish called "mandu" in Korean, are usually made of about 11 kinds of ingredients, with radish taking up 30 percent. The radish scraps were deemed unfit for consumption and should have been disposed of. Instead the manufacturer rinsed them, chopped them up, and desalted them by soaking them in germ-infested water. The radishes were then sold to large food companies to be used in the making of dumplings. The crisis that followed, dubbed the "Garbage Dumpling Scandal," was heavily covered by the media and shocked the entire nation (Chung Ang Ilbo, 2004).

On June 11, the KFDA disclosed the names of 12 major food companies – Kohyang Frozen Foods, Vision Foods, Chinyong Foods (Seoul factory), Chinyong Foods (Paju factory), Sam Lip General Foods, Chunil Foods, Urimat Foods, Sofiff E&T, Shinhan Foods, Woojong Foods, Chamjoun Foods and Kirin Foods – responsible for making dumplings from spoiled pickled radishes as it urged consumers to be aware that some of the spoiled products were still in circulation (*Korea Herald*, 2004).

While there were no reports of death or injury directly related to the dumplings, the incident had a direct impact on South Korean society. South Korean consumers demanded that the government enhance Korea's food laws and regulations, and the consumption of dumplings drastically decreased following the KFDA announcement – resulting in the closure of many dumpling manufacturers (*Korea Herald*, 2004).

Situations such as these allow crisis communicators and public relations professionals to investigate the messages that are created during a crisis situation and the messages that are conveyed – through the media – to key stakeholders during the crisis. The purpose of this paper is to extend a cultural analysis of the crisis messages framed by the media coverage regarding the sources of information and the message strategies used by these sources during the *E. coli* spinach and dumpling crises.

Theoretical foundations

Crisis communication

Crisis may be defined differently depending on the source. Guth (1995, p. 125) stated:

Crisis has, in many respects, been subject to the level of same ambiguity as the term *art*. While one person's trash may be viewed as another person's treasure, one person's incident is often viewed as another's crisis.

Coombs (1999) addressed different organizations having different ideas about what constitutes a crisis, as he differentiated between less significant incidents, which do not severely threaten organizational values, and crises, which do. Fearn-Banks (2001, p. 480) incorporated threat in her definition of crisis when she defined it as a "major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting an organization as well as its publics, services, products, and/or good name. It interrupts normal business transactions and can, at its worst, threaten the existence of the organization". Similarly, Pearson and Clair (1998, p. 60) addressed the frequency and impact of the event as they defined a crisis as "a low-probability, high-impact event that threatens the viability of the organization and is characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect, and means of resolution, as well as by a belief that decisions must be made swiftly".

Coombs (2005) summarized these elements when he stated that while a crisis is unpredictable it can often be expected, has the ability to disrupt an organization's operations, and can threaten the organization, industry, or stakeholder. As such, when crisis is assessed from an organizational perspective, as with crisis management, the primary goal is to decrease damage inflicted by the crisis and those who are harmed economically and physically, by the crisis.

As such, both the E. coli-contaminated spinach and tainted dumplings and their production and distribution to an unknowing public could be considered a crisis. Responsible organizations should have expected such a crisis (i.e. possible food contamination) and had crisis communication plans in place. However, in both cases, the contamination had the ability to and did disrupt their operations as they attempted to locate the source of the contamination. Additionally, the organization's reputation and the wellbeing of its stakeholders were threatened. All of which, for the purpose of this study, assist in classifying this incident as a crisis.

Coombs' crisis response strategies

The symbolic approach to crisis communication is based on the assumption that crises are threats to an organization's image (Allen and Caillouet, 1994) and that the elements involved in a crisis influence the communication choices and strategies selected during those crises (Coombs, 1995; Hobbs, 1995). Coombs (1998, p. 178) posited that these communication strategies are, in fact, "symbolic resources crisis managers employ in hope of protecting or repairing the organizational image". He investigated crisis responsibility or the degree to which stakeholders blame an organization for a crisis. As a result, Coombs found that perceived personal control over a crisis (organization has control over crisis) was related to crisis responsibility and organizational image while external control (external agents could control the crisis) was not. Performance history, having been involved in one or more crises, was also found to increase perception of crisis responsibility – meaning that each new accident should be treated

as a transgression. It is interesting that crisis damage, or the severity of the crisis, did not intensify the perception of crisis responsibility or damage to image.

Coombs (1998) organized crisis response strategies into seven categories. He then placed them on a scale from defensive to accommodative continuum. Defensive strategies were used to protect the organization while accommodative responses address concerns of the victims. Listed from defensive to accommodative the strategies include:

- (1) Attack the accuser – aggressively deny claims of crisis and punish the accuser.
- (2) Denial – claim there is no crisis or that the organization is uninvolved.
- (3) Excuse – admit there is a crisis but minimize organizational responsibility.
- (4) Justification – admit a crisis exists but downplay its severity.
- (5) Ingratiation – create positive impressions of the organization by reminding stakeholders of past good works, associate the organization with positive qualities, or both.
- (6) Corrective action – attempt to repair crisis damage, prevent a repeat of the crisis, or both.
- (7) Full apology – take responsibility for the crisis.

Understanding stakeholder perception of crisis responsibility can assist one in selecting crisis communication strategies. Accommodative strategies are usually preferable when an organization has committed a wrongdoing (Coombs, 1999). Benoit (1997, 2000) argued organizations at fault during a crisis situation are best served by admitting fault, apologizing, and employing corrective action as part of their crisis communication plan. Benoit (1997) posited organizations should communicate their plans to correct or prevent the problems that led to the crisis, thus assisting to avoid future crisis.

While organizations sometimes fear legal ramifications from expressing a full apology, Fitzpatrick (1995) argues it is possible to take responsibility for negative actions without facing litigation. She suggested those responsible for crisis communication work closely with an organization's legal representatives.

Crisis communicators also face challenges during crises situations as, from a legal standpoint, it is often thought an organization should never admit liability or speculate about the cause of what happened. This is in direct conflict with the questions that are usually asked by media representatives immediately following a crisis situation as they attempt to gather information for affected publics (Regester and Larkin, 1997).

Fitzpatrick (1995) suggested being familiar with the legal issues facing the organization when planning and implementing crisis communication strategies. She stated that before making statements an organization should consider the potential for legal liability. However, she acknowledged regret could be expressed without accepting responsibility for causing a crisis. This can allow an organization to exhibit concern for those affected by the crisis while avoiding speculation about the actual cause, consequences, or liability.

Hofstede's cultural dimensions

Culture is an intricate concept that scholars in disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, business management, and communication have attempted to define. Hofstede (1980, p. 25) defined culture as the "collective programming of the mind which

distinguishes the members of one human group from another". According to Hofstede, the word culture is usually reserved for societies, which he equated with "nations" (Hofstede, 1980, p. 26). In this study, Hofstede's (1980) definition of culture was adopted and his dimensions of culture were employed.

Awareness of cultural differences was also emphasized for the public relations practitioners (Gabriel and Taylor, 1999). Ithator (2000, p. 38) asserts:

Globalization of business has created the need for international public relations practitioners to identify, study and understand the world views, mindsets, and habits of their global publics in order to effectively communicate.

Also, he believed that communication styles and meaning, as well as realities, as perceived by individuals are culturally induced.

According to Hofstede (1980, 1991), there are five dimensions of culture: individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity-femininity, power distance, and long-term orientation (LTO or also known as the dimension of Confucian dynamism). Korea was categorized as a society with high power distance, a collectivist culture, high in uncertainty avoidance, moderate masculine characteristics, and high long-term orientation, while the USA belonged to a society with low power distance, individual culture, low uncertainty avoidance, low masculine characteristics, and low long-term orientation.

A collectivist views him/herself as part of a group, and thus places group interests first, whereas an individualist puts one's interest first—over a group. In individualistic countries, such as the USA, Australia, and much of Europe, "the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself" (Hofstede, 1991, p. 51). Social ties are tighter in collectivistic countries, such as Colombia, Pakistan and most of Asia, where "one owes lifelong loyalty to one's in-group, and breaking this loyalty is one of the worst things a person can do" (Hofstede, 1991, p. 50). According to Hofstede's (1991) study, the USA ranked 1st in this category, indicating high individualism, while Korea ranked 43rd, suggesting a highly collectivistic culture.

Uncertainty avoidance is defined as the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations. Strong uncertainty-avoiding cultures try to avoid ambiguous situations, often looking for a structure in their organizations, institutions, and relationships that makes events clearly interpretable and predictable. These cultures are also more dependent on the expertise of the government (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). Therefore, a culture of strong uncertainty avoidance tends to have more precise laws than one with a weak level of cultural uncertainty avoidance. According to the Hofstede's (1991) study, South Korea shows stronger scores on uncertainty avoidance (ranked 16th) compared to the USA (ranked 43rd).

Power distance dimension refers to the degree to which wealth, power, and prestige are distributed disproportionately among people of different social classes. In cultures with high power distance, people tend to accept unequal power distribution and the hierarchical relationships between superiors and subordinates. In contrast, people in low power distance are likely to believe the superior-subordinate relationships should be considered an equal and willing to challenge any unequal relationships. In Hofstede's (1991) study, Korea showed relatively high power distance when compared to the USA: Korea ranked 27th among 50 countries, whereas the USA ranked 38th in terms of high power distance dimension.

Previous studies recognized that western and eastern cultures have differences in types of orientation. Long-term orientation (LTO), also known as Confucian dynamism, has influenced eastern countries, whereas western countries are more likely to show short-term orientation (Hofstede and Bond, 1984). Long-term oriented cultural members value thrift, perseverance, and willingness to subordinate one's self for the purpose of harmony and cooperation. Korea had relatively high scores in this dimension (75) and ranked 5th among 23 countries, whereas the USA had low scores (29) and ranked 17th in Hofstede and Bond's (1984) study.

Framing

Media framing occurs when journalists or editors "select some aspects of a perceived reality and make [it] more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Entman stated that a frame is something that defines a problem, meaning that when a journalist frames an issue, they are, in turn, elevating that bit of information in salience. Salience is defined as making a piece of information more noticeable and meaningful, or memorable to an audience.

According to framing theory, communicators, such as journalists, make judgments about what messages to send. As a result, the messages they send are frames which are manifested by the presence or absence of key words, phrases, images or sources of information (Entman, 1993). Framing researchers have used various methods to document media frames ranging from words used news stories and press releases (Miller *et al.*, 1998) to actual message content (Ashley and Olson, 1998).

Einsiedel and Thorne (1999) stated a significant source of public information is mass media. As such, understanding framing can be beneficial to public relations practitioners by helping them as they try to better understand the ways that key stakeholders seek and process information during a crisis situation.

Gamson and Modigliani (1987) further defined the tie between the media and frames as they coined the term "media frames". The researchers claimed that as the media create story lines, they organize and provide meaning to an unfolding strip of events. In other words, the researchers argue that the media frame suggests and drives the content of the news story or issue at-hand (Gamson and Modigliani, 1987). While the intent of media framing is questionable, researchers recognize that it may be an unconscious action (Gamson, 1989; Parenti, 1993). It is also necessary to note that media frames could be a necessary part of how news is processed. As Gitlin (1980) notes, the nature of news reporting requires that small portions of each day's larger events must be quickly identified, classified, and packaged on a regular basis for presentation to the media's select audiences.

Entman (1993) identified frames in four locations within the communication process: communicators, text, receivers and culture:

The text contains frames, which are manifested by the presence or absence of certain key words, stock phrases, stereotypical images, source of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments (Entman, 1993, p. 52).

Research questions and expectations

Food contaminations and the resulting crises force the associated organizations to deal with internal and external concerns—many of which may have cultural implications. When considering research questions, Coombs' crisis communication strategies were paired with Hofstede's cultural dimensions. According to Hofstede's study (Hofstede, 1980, 1991) in a culture that exhibits high uncertainty avoidance and Confucian dynamism, such as South Korea, people will avoid ambiguity. As such, it could be suggested that during a crisis South Korean companies would be highly likely to claim responsibility for a crisis—even if the cause of the crisis was still under investigation. Having a strong Confucian dynamism score places a priority on virtue rather than the truth of the matter (Haruta and Hallahan, 2003). As a result, the following was hypothesized:

H₁. Articles in the Korean sample contained more full apologies than other measured message strategies.

Natural Selection Foods was found responsible for the E. coli-tainted spinach. As such, a more accommodative crisis communication strategy is suggested (Benoit, 1997, 2000). In collectivistic societies, cultures stress the importance of agreement. Following a disaster, restoring harmony is key—not assigning guilt or innocence in a courtroom. The United States is a highly individualistic society (Haruta and Hallahan, 2003). As such, a company or industry might be wary of using the most accommodative message strategy (full apology) following a crisis, fearing it may potentially lead to litigation. The next most accommodative strategy is corrective action. As such, it is hypothesized that:

H₂. Articles in the US sample contained more corrective action than other measured message strategies.

As was mentioned above, South Korea has strong uncertainty avoidance and Confucian dynamism (Hofstede, 1980, 1991). As such, the companies and industry involved in the dumpling crisis would probably show its shared loss by issuing apologies. On the other hand, the USA had a much greater tolerance for ambiguity, making it easier for the companies and industry responsible for the spinach crisis to avoid assuming responsibility or making statements about its remorse (Haruta and Hallahan, 2003). Based on this the following hypothesis was drawn:

H₃. Korean articles in the sample contained more full apology message strategies than did US articles.

To further investigate crisis messages used in Korea and the USA during the spinach and dumpling crises, the following research questions were posited:

RQ1. Which country more frequently used attack the accuser message strategies?

RQ2. Which country more frequently used denial message strategies?

RQ3. Which country more frequently used excuse strategies?

RQ4. Which country more frequently used justification message strategies?

RQ5. Which country more frequently used ingratiation message strategies?

RQ6. Which country more frequently used corrective action message strategies?

Methodology

This paper examined media framing of these crises – to describe what frames were used and what frames dominated news coverage. This study utilized content analysis as public relations practitioners can use content analysis based on research questions related to any number of attributes of coverage, such as the presence or absence of particular themes (Lindenmann, 1983). Similarly, framing research, utilizes some aspects of content analysis but differs by also counting textual elements as equally salient and influential. In addition, it focuses on the most salient clusters of messages – the frames – and their relationship and influence on audience’s schemata (Entman, 1993).

Thirteen national (eight in Korea and five in the USA) and eight local print media (all from the USA) were selected for the study. The time period included 14 days following the announcement of each the perspective food incidents.

The US sample was collected utilizing LexisNexis and Factiva databases to search for stories related to the health crises. National newspapers included the *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *USA Today*, and *Wall Street Journal*. These newspapers were chosen because of their national reach and readership. To increase the number of articles in the sample, local newspapers were also chosen. These included the *San Jose Mercury News*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *The Fresno Bee*, *The Salk Lake Tribune*, *Discreet Morning News* (Salt Lake City), *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, *Houston Chronicle*, and the *Modesto Bee*. These newspapers were chosen because of their close proximity to the company, Natural Selection Foods, where the E. coli-tainted spinach was produced or because of their proximity to the victims who died from eating spinach.

Key terms used to search the database for the spinach crisis included spinach and E. coli, and resulted in 122 local articles and 96 national articles for a total of 218 articles. Duplicate articles, articles that were unrelated to the spinach crisis, and articles that did not contain a statement from companies or the industry involved in the crisis were discarded. This resulted in a total of 77 articles in the US sample.

The Korean sample was collected utilizing KINDS (Korean Integrated News Database System) database to search for news articles. Eight national newspapers were used for the sample and included *Chosun Ilbo*, *Jung Ang Ilbo*, *Donga Ilbo*, *Hankook Ilbo*, *Hanguerae Shinmun*, *KyungHyang Shinmun*, *Saekae Ilbo*, and *Kukmin Ilbo*. As with the US sample, these newspapers were chosen because of their national reach and readership. No local newspapers were selected because a large number of articles were available at the national level. In addition, because of the media structure and small geographic area of Korea, there is little difference in national and local news coverage. Key terms used to search the database for dumpling crisis included garbage (sooragi) and dumpling (mandu). The database search resulted in 163 articles. After duplicate articles, articles that were unrelated to the dumpling crisis, and articles that did not contain a statement from companies or the industry involved in the crisis were discarded a total of 83 articles remained in the Korean sample.

Coding was conducted by two coders. The US sample was coded by an English-speaking graduate student and the South Korean sample was coded by a Korean-speaking graduate student. The focus of the study was to examine the cultural differences in crisis management strategies adopted by the companies involved in each food crisis using Coombs (1998)’s seven-crisis strategy. Each of Coomb’s (1998) seven crisis communication strategies (attack the accuser, denial, excuse, justification,

ingratiation, corrective action, and full apology strategy) was operationalized, with each of the strategies containing between two and four items operationalization (see Code Sheet). In addition, each strategy type was coded into the dichotomy data (the absence of strategy adoption = 0, presence of strategy adoption = 1).

Results

H_1 was not supported. Articles in the Korean sample did not contain more full apologies than other measured message strategies. In the sampled articles, Korean companies most frequently used justification strategies (51.8 percent) and denial strategies (44.6 percent). Excuse strategy was the next most used strategy (38.6 percent) followed by full apology (32.5), attack the accuser (18.1 percent) and ingratiation (1.2 percent) (see Table I).

On the other hand, H_2 was supported. Articles in the US sample did contain more corrective action than other measured message strategies. Corrective action strategies were used by the US companies in the sample (58.4 percent), followed by ingratiation (28.6 percent), denial (13.0 percent), attack the accuser (11.7 percent), excuse (10.4 percent), justification (3.9 percent), and full apology strategy (1.3) (see Table I).

Crisis strategy	Country	Usage	Frequency	%	χ^2	df	<i>p</i>				
Attack the accuser	Korea (83)	Yes	15	18.1	1.28	1	0.28				
		No	68	81.9							
	USA (77)	Yes	7	11.7							
		No	68	88.3							
Denial	Korea (83)	Yes	37	44.6	19.22	1	0.000*				
		No	46	55.4							
		USA (77)	Yes	10				13.0			
	No		67	87.0							
	Excuse		Korea (83)	Yes				32	38.6	16.99	1
		No		51				61.4			
USA (77)		Yes	8	10.4							
	No	69	89.6								
	Justification	Korea (83)	Yes	43	51.8	44.76	1	0.000*			
No			40	48.2							
USA (77)			Yes	3	3.9						
		No	74	96.1							
		Ingratiation	Korea (83)	Yes	1				1.2	24.30	1
No				82	98.8						
USA (77)	Yes			22	28.6						
	No		55	71.4							
	Corrective action		Korea (83)	Yes	12	14.5	33.70	1	0.000*		
No				71	85.5						
USA (77)		Yes		45	58.4						
		No	32	41.6							
		Full apology	Korea (83)	Yes	27	32.5				26.99	1
No				56	67.5						
USA (77)	Yes			1	1.3						
	No		76	98.7							

Note: *Significant at the 0.001 level

Table I.
Differences of crisis strategy usage between Korea and USA

H_3 was also supported. A chi-square analysis of the data showed that Korean articles in the sample contained more full apology message strategies than did the US sample. There were also significant differences in the adoption of full apology strategy between South Korea and the USA. A total of 32 percent of the Korean sample articles contained full apology strategies, whereas only 1.3 percent of the US sample articles adopted full apology strategies ($\chi^2 = 26.99, p < 0.000$) (see Table I).

Chi-square analysis and t-tests were conducted when investigating *RQ1* through *RQ6*, which dealt with the cultural differences in the adoptions of six of Coombs' (1998) crisis message strategies (attack the accuser, denial, excuse, justification, ingratiation, and corrective action). All crisis strategies, except the attack the accuser (*RQ1*), revealed significant differences between the two countries (see Table I). The data suggest that denial strategy (*RQ2*) was present significantly more often in the Korean sample than in the US sample ($\chi^2 = 19.22, p < 0.000$).

In the case of excuse strategy (*RQ3*), Korean news articles contained significantly more excuse strategies than did US articles ($\chi^2 = 16.99, p < 0.000$). Justification strategies (*RQ4*) also appeared more frequently in the Korean news sample than in the US sample ($\chi^2 = 44.76, p < 0.000$). However, in the cases of ingratiation strategy (*RQ5*) and corrective action strategy (*RQ6*), the US news articles contained those strategies significantly more than Korean news articles ($\chi^2 = 24.30, p < 0.000$ for ingratiation strategy; $\chi^2 = 33.70, p < 0.000$ for corrective action strategy).

Although the attack the accuser strategy, based on general presence of the strategy adoption, did not reveal significant differences between Korea and the US news articles ($\chi^2 = 1.28, p = 0.28$), the results did show significant differences in the second item of the attack the accuser strategy "the organization responsible for the crisis threatens to use force (e.g. a lawsuit) against the person or group claiming that a crisis exists" ($\chi^2 = 12.03, p < 0.000$). This indicated that Korean companies involved in the food crisis more frequently used the threat of a lawsuit or threatened the use of force more often than US companies that were involved in a food crisis.

T-tests were conducted, regarding the crisis strategies that contained more than four operationalized items, to more carefully examine the differences between the two countries (see Table II). The data suggest that in the cases of excuse and justification strategy, Korean news articles contained significantly more articles addressing those strategies than US news articles ($t = 4.33, p < 0.000$ for excuse strategy; $t = 7.48, p < 0.000$ for justification strategy). In addition, there were differences between Korean and US articles in terms of full apology strategy ($t = 4.806, p < 0.000$). However, regarding an ingratiation strategy, US news articles contained significantly more articles addressing the strategy than did Korean news articles ($t = -5.03, p < 0.000$).

Crisis Strategy	Korea			USA			<i>t</i>	df	<i>p</i>
	M	SD	<i>n</i>	M	SD	<i>n</i>			
Excuse	0.398	0.520	83	0.104	0.307	77	4.33	158	0.000*
Justification	0.520	0.502	83	0.052	0.223	77	7.48	158	0.000*
Ingratiation	0.012	0.109	83	0.363	0.626	77	-5.03	158	0.000*
Full apology	0.518	0.91	83	0.013	0.114	77	4.806	158	0.000*

Note: *Significant at the 0.001 level

Table II.
T-test results: crisis strategy usage differences between Korea and USA

Discussion

Denial, excuse, and justification were all used more during the dumpling crisis in Korea than in the spinach crisis in the USA. Additionally, the Korean sample did include more full apology messages than the US sample. However, it was surprising, given Korea's high uncertainty avoidance and Confucian dynamism (Hofstede, 1980, 1991), that the overall full apology strategy was used infrequently. Another point of interest is that the message strategies that were used most often are all considered more aggressive message strategies, going against the Confucian dynamism tendency to create harmony.

The choice to use these more aggressive message strategies may be because the Korean dumpling distributors claimed they were unaware they had been sold rotten radishes (e.g. Donga Ilbo, 2004; Hankook Ilbo, 2004). As a result, they stated they did not know they were including them in their product and, at times, felt that they were being treated unfairly by both the media and the public.

Additionally, it should be noted that while there were fewer apology messages than were anticipated, apologies were still utilized in the sample, and the way that they were used was interesting. Apologies were most often used with the other, aforementioned more aggressive strategies. For example, a Korean company might apologize for distributing bad dumplings and then downplay their part in the crisis or blame it on another organization or the government. For example, the organization might apologize and then state that they were not responsible. This should be noted as a cultural difference between South Korea and the USA. The US also used, although less frequently, some of the more aggressive message strategies. However, full apology message strategy was virtually non-existent in the US sample.

In the case of the US spinach crisis, ingratiation and corrective was used more often than in the Korean dumpling crisis. During the spinach crisis, Natural Selection Foods was found responsible for distributing *E. coli*-tainted spinach. It appears that US companies that distributed the tainted products and the produce industry followed traditional Western crisis communication strategies (Benoit, 1997, 2000) as they tended to select a more accommodative message strategy – corrective action. The organizations probably failed to issue a full apology in an attempt to avoid possible litigation. As a result, corrective action (the next most accommodative message strategy) seems the natural choice in the case of a food crisis as the companies involved – and food industry as a whole – simply wanted to tell customers what steps these organizations were taking to avoid a repeat of the current crisis.

Also of interest was the use of an “other” message strategy that presented in both countries. Companies and food industry representatives and spokespersons in both the USA and Korea used messages strategies that could be categorized as “we are suffering/victims too”. These messages involved the financial impact to the perspective food industries and to those who worked for the companies and industries involved. In the US sample, this message strategy often appeared to take the place of an apology.

Something that was not coded but was noted by the person coding the Korean sample was that the Korean articles rarely noted a spokesperson's name along with quotes from organizations and industries involved in the crisis. This is in-line with Haruta and Hallahan's (2003) study, which found that Japan, which much like Korea is a highly collectivistic culture, failed to identify spokespersons during a crisis situation. The person is speaking on behalf of the larger organization, the collective organization

and is not being singled out. This is very different culturally from the US individualistic practice of reporting all sources.

Conclusion

Currently, the ever-increasing globalization of communication and business dictate that public relations practitioners must consider culture when creating messages. This study further emphasizes the importance of culture as one assesses the appropriateness of crisis communication. For example, the study showed that different messages were used in South Korea and the USA during a similar crisis. Denial, excuse, and justification strategies were used most often to represent responses from Korean organizations, while the USA received media coverage for messages that were ingratiation and corrective in nature.

As such, Hofstede's cultural dimensions have proven a powerful tool to analyze the cultural differences that may exist as these communications are planned. Conscientious public relations practitioners can use this kind of information as they work to better understand how culture affects the way media frame issues, through the messages they present to publics, and the affect these frames have on an organization's key stakeholders and publics. Doing so allows for a better understanding of where information and communication gaps occur during a crisis – providing an opportunity for public relations practitioners to assist in filling them.

For example, if the organizations in this study did, in fact, distribute full apology messages, these messages were covered in news stories at a less frequent rate than more aggressive message strategies. This means that organizations choosing to make a full apology, a message strategy that would be culturally favorable in both countries, should be sensitive to the fact that media outlets may not cover their messages. As a result, public relations professionals may choose to use tightly controlled messages, such as public relations advertising, direct mail pieces, or web sites, to reach consumers, as opposed to relying on gatekeeper-controlled media channels to relay key messages to affected publics. Practitioners can use this kind of study to assist them as they formulate culturally appropriate crisis messages and select appropriate channels for message distribution.

References

- Allen, M.W. and Caillouet, R.H. (1994), "Legitimate endeavors: impression management strategies used by an organization in crisis", *Communication Monographs*, Vol. 61, pp. 44-62.
- Ashley, L. and Olson, B. (1998), "Constructing reality: print media's framing of the women's movement 1966 to 1986", *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 75, pp. 264-77.
- Benoit, W.L. (1997), "Image repair discourse and crisis communication", *Public Relations Review*, Vol. 23 No. 2, pp. 177-86.
- Benoit, W.L. (2000), "Another visit to the theory of image restoration strategies", *Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 48 No. 1, pp. 40-4.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2006), "Update on multi-state outbreak of E. coli O157:H7 infections from fresh spinach", October 6, available at: www.cdc.gov/foodborne/ecolispinach/100606.htm (accessed November 20, 2006).
- Chung Ang Ilbo (2004), "Garbage dumpling strikes the nation", available at: www.joins.com (accessed April 4, 2007).

- Coombs, W.T. (1995), "Choosing the right words: the development of guidelines for the selection of the "appropriate" crisis-response strategies", *Management Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 8, pp. 447-76.
- Coombs, W.T. (1998), "An analytic framework for crisis situations: better responses from a better understanding of the situation", *Journal of Public Relations Research*, Vol. 10 No. 3, pp. 177-91.
- Coombs, W.T. (1999), *Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Coombs, W.T. (2005), "Crisis communication", in Heath, R.L. (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Public Relations*, Vol. 1, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 221-3.
- Donga Ilbo (2004), *Government Food Inspection Bureau's Fault as Well?*, available at: www.kinds.or.kr (accessed April 4, 2007).
- Einsiedel, E. and Thorne, B. (1999), "Public response to uncertainty", in Friedman, S.M., Dunwoody, S. and Rogers, C.L. (Eds), *Communicating Uncertainty: Media Coverage of New and Controversial Science*, Erlbaum, Mahwah, NJ, pp. 43-57.
- Entman, R. (1993), "Framing: toward clarification of a fractured paradigm", *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 43 No. 4, pp. 51-8.
- FDA News (2006a), "FDA warning on serious foodborne E.coli O157:H7 outbreak", September 14, p. 20, available at: www.fda.gov (accessed March 20, 2007).
- FDA News (2006b), "FDA statement on foodborne E.coli O157:H7 outbreak in spinach", September 15, available at: www.fda.gov (accessed March 20, 2007).
- Fearn-Banks, K. (2001), "Crisis communication: a review of some best practices", in Heath, R.L. (Ed.), *Handbook of Public Relations*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 479-86.
- Fitzpatrick, K.R. (1995), "Ten guidelines for reducing legal risks in crisis management", *Public Relations Quarterly*, Vol. 40 No. 2, pp. 33-8.
- Gabriel, M.V. and Taylor, M. (1999), "What cultural values influence American public relations practitioners?", *Public Relations Review*, Vol. 25 No. 4, pp. 433-49.
- Gamson, W.A. (1989), "News as framing: comments on Graber", *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 33, pp. 157-66.
- Gamson, W.A. and Modigliani, A. (1987), "The changing culture of affirmative action", in Braungart, R.G. and Braungart, M.M. (Eds), *Research in Political Sociology*, Vol. 3, JAI Press, Greenwich, CT, pp. 137-77.
- Gitlin, T. (1980), *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.
- Guth, D.W. (1995), "Organizational crisis experience and public relations roles", *Public Relations Review*, Vol. 21 No. 2, pp. 123-37.
- Hankook Ilbo (2004), "CEO of Mandu distribution company committed suicide to claim his innocence", June 15, available at: www.kinds.or.kr (accessed April 4, 2007).
- Haruta, A. and Hallahan, K. (2003), "Cultural issues in airline crisis communications: a Japan-US comparative study", *Asian Journal of Communication*, Vol. 13 No. 2, pp. 122-50.
- Hobbs, J.D. (1995), "Treachery by any other name: a case study of the Toshiba public relations crisis", *Management Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 4, pp. 341-62.
- Hofstede, G. (1980), *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-related Values*, Sage, Beverly Hills, CA.
- Hofstede, G. (1991), *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*, McGraw-Hill, London.
- Hofstede, G. and Bond, M. (1984), "Hofstede's cultural dimensions: an independent validation using Rokeach's value survey", *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Vol. 15, pp. 417-33.

- Hofstede, G. and Hofstede, G.J. (2005), *Culture and Organization; Software of the Mind: Intercultural Cooperation and its Importance For Survival*, McGraw-Hill, New York, NY.
- Ihator, A. (2000), "Understanding the cultural patterns of the world – an imperative in implementing strategic international PR programs", *Public Relations Quarterly*, Vol. 45 No. 4, pp. 38-44.
- Korea Herald* (2004), "Authorities slammed for failing to ensure food safety", June 11, available at: www.kinds.or.kr (accessed April 4, 2007).
- Lindenmann, W.K. (1983), "Content analysis", *Public Relations Review*, Vol. 39 No. 7, pp. 24-6.
- Miller, M.M., Andsager, J.L. and Riechert, B.P. (1998), "Framing the candidates in presidential primaries: issues and images in press releases and news coverage", *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 75 No. 2, pp. 312-24.
- News in Review* (2002), "Deadly water: the lessons of Walkerton", September, available at: www.cbc.ca/newsinreview/Sep2000/walkerton/facts.htm (accessed March 20, 2007).
- Parenti, M. (1993), *Inventing Reality: The Politics of News Media*, 2nd ed., St. Martin's Press, New York, NY.
- Pearson, C.M. and Clair, J.A. (1998), "Reframing crisis management", *The Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 32 No. 1, pp. 59-76.
- Register, M. and Larkin, J. (1997), *Risk Issues and Crisis Management: A Casebook of Best Practices*, Kogan Page, Milford, CT.

Further reading

- Callison, C. (2001), "Do PR practitioners have a PR problem? The effect of associating a source with public relations and client-negative news on audience perception of credibility", *Journal of Public Relations Research*, Vol. 13 No. 3, pp. 219-34.
- Coombs, W.T. and Holladay, S.J. (2001), "An extended examination of crisis situations: a fusion of the relational management and symbolic approaches", *Journal of Public Relations Research*, Vol. 13, pp. 321-40.
- Fink, S. (1984), *Crisis Management: Planning for the Inevitable*, American Management Association, New York, NY.
- Palenchar, M.J. (2001), "Media coverage of risk events: a framing comparison of two fatal manufacturing accidents", paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Washington, DC, August.
- Sturges, D.L. (1994), "Communicating through crisis: a strategy for organizational survival", *Management Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 7, pp. 297-316.

About the authors

Emma K. Wertz is an Assistant Professor in the School of Communication at East Carolina University. Her research focuses on health, crisis, risk, and cultural communication. Emma K. Wertz can be contacted at: wertze@ecu.edu

Sora Kim is an Assistant Professor in the College of Communication at DePaul University. Her research focuses on the consequences of corporate communication strategies and on corporate social responsibility effects on consumer responses. Sora Kim can be contacted at: skim92@depaul.edu

This article has been cited by:

1. Reidinar Juliane Wardoyo, Pang Augustine. Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Rukun : Managing the Transboundary Haze Crisis in Indonesia 136-152. [[Crossref](#)]
2. Young Kim, Andrea Miller, Myoung-Gi Chon. 2016. Communicating with Key Publics in Crisis Communication: The Synthetic Approach to the Public Segmentation in CAPS (Communicative Action in Problem Solving). *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management* 24:2, 82-94. [[Crossref](#)]
3. Silvia Ravazzani. 2016. Exploring internal crisis communication in multicultural environments. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* 21:1, 73-88. [[Abstract](#)] [[Full Text](#)] [[PDF](#)]
4. Dae Jong Song, Jae Wook Choi, Kyunghee Kim, Min Soo Kim, Jiwon Monica Moon. 2016. Quasi-Experiment Study on Effectiveness Evaluation of Health Communication Strategies. *Journal of Korean Medical Science* 31:7, 1027. [[Crossref](#)]
5. Ioannis Theotokas, Ilias Bissias. 2014. A touch of salt: the image of shipping in newspapers of the UK. *WMU Journal of Maritime Affairs* 13:2, 177-190. [[Crossref](#)]