

Recalling Toyota's Crisis: Utilizing the Discourse of Renewal

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ARTICLE INFO

Article Type:
Research Article

Article History:
Received: 2012-01-15
Revised: 2012-12-05
Accepted: 2012-12-10

Keywords:
Technological crisis
Safety recalls
Toyota
Organizational rhetoric

ABSTRACT

Crisis communication is a growing line of research for scholars to pursue. Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer (2010) explained, that the boundaries of crisis communication "are expanding because of the increasing frequency of crisis events" (p. 496). One type of crisis that appears to be happening more often is the lingering crisis. This type of crisis reoccurs or is not quickly resolved and is increasing in frequency (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2010). Toyota has faced a lingering crisis through a series of safety recalls, corresponding media reports, and increased involvement by external agencies (e.g., government, regulatory agencies, and watchdog groups). In this study, the discourse of renewal is applied to Toyota's most recent organizational crisis. The discourse of renewal is a rhetorical response that illuminates the opportunities associated with the crisis and emphasizes the future.

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Crisis communication is a growing line of research for scholars to pursue. Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer (2010) explained, that the boundaries of crisis communication "are expanding because of the increasing frequency of crisis events" (p. 496). One type of crisis that appears to be happening more often is the lingering crisis. This type of crisis reoccurs or is not quickly resolved and is increasing in frequency (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2010). The lingering nature of crisis events is an important factor to consider since it changes the way in which organizations can respond to these types of crisis events. For instance, an organization cannot continue to minimize or apologize for a transgression if it continues to reoccur or persist. As such, it limits the responses available to the organization.

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Toyota has faced a lingering crisis through a series of safety recalls, corresponding media reports, and increased involvement by external agencies (e.g., government, regulatory agencies, and watchdog groups). Toyota's response to its crisis concerning the vehicle recalls is a prime example that demonstrates the usefulness of the discourse of renewal where the organizational rhetoric appears to be centered on organizational changes within Toyota. In addition, the future is at the heart of Toyota's messages. It touts its monetary investment in safety improvements as well as its development of new safety initiatives. In this study, I applied the discourse of renewal – a rhetorical response that illuminates the opportunities associated with the crisis and emphasizes the future – to Toyota's most recent organizational crisis. To begin, an overview of Toyota's crisis will be provided followed by a review and analysis of the discourse of renewal as demonstrated by Toyota's organizational response.

Background

On October 20, 2010, Toyota instituted a voluntary safety recall that included several of its models such as the Avalon, Highlander, and Lexus. Toyota claimed that the reason for this recall was due to problems with the brakes and fuel pump (Tabuchi, 2010). In its press release, Toyota detailed the possibility that “small amount of the brake fluid could slowly leak from the brake master cylinder, resulting in illumination of the brake warning lamp” (Toyota, 2010, para. 1). The Toyota website warned that if this leak is allowed to continue without being addressed, then the master cylinder brake fluid reservoir will become low. This could result in the driver of affected vehicles to “notice a spongy or soft brake pedal feel and braking performance may gradually decline” (Toyota, 2010, para. 4).

This is just the most recent recall for Toyota who had to address concerns about the safety of their vehicles after reports of unintended acceleration surfaced in late 2009 due to floor mats and sticky accelerator pedals (“Toyota Motor Corporation,” 2010). A CNN Money article (2010) reported that this recall resulted in over 5.3 million vehicles being recalled. In response to this crisis, Toyota stopped selling and producing eight vehicle models in January of 2010 until the acceleration problems were resolved.

Both recalls have raised questions about the quality and safety of Toyota vehicles. These recalls, when viewed from Toyota's perspective, can be seen as an organizational crisis. Coombs (2010) defined a crisis as “the perception

of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectations of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization's performance and generate a negative outcome" (p. 477). He further explained that they are "situations that create a need for management to respond—crises trigger the need for communication" (p. 480). One of the consequences of facing a crisis is the potential damage done to an organizational image. As a result of its recall, Toyota attempted to manage the crisis as well as its image.

Toyota's image has not gone unscathed by the recent recalls. Specifically, "its reputation for safety and quality were battered by [the] series of recalls that would eventually total more than eight million cars worldwide" ("Toyota Motor Corporation," 2010, p. 1). In order to remediate its image, Toyota tried to take a proactive stance that emphasized corrective action of the problems. It "stressed that the repairs reflected a companywide effort to be more active in addressing potential flaws" (Tabuchi, 2010, p. 1). This argument was presented in a series of commercials that Toyota developed in order to respond to the crisis.

Crisis communication and the discourse of renewal

Crisis communication

Crisis communication has become a popular topic in terms of organizational rhetoric research (Meisenbach & McMillan, 2006). In an organizational context, a crisis is defined as "a generally predictable series of events that occurs when an organization's values are under assault by an external agent or there is a perception that the organization has committed some wrong doing" (Hearit & Courtright, 2003, p. 83). Similarly, Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer (1998) describe an organizational crisis as a "specific, unexpected and non-routine event or series of events that create[s] high levels of uncertainty and threaten[s] or [is] perceived to threaten an organization's high priority goals" (p. 233).

Crises have been categorized in several different ways. Lerbinger (1997) identified seven types of crises, which include natural, technological, malevolence, poor management values, deception, misconduct, and confrontation (see Table 1). In addition, Coombs (1999) created five categories to encompass crises. This typology consists of natural disasters, accidents, malevolence, rumors, and misdeeds (see Table 1). There are some overlaps in both of these

typologies, however, the categories that are most closely related to the Toyota crisis is the technology and accidents since it involves product defects.

Table 1: Seven types of crisis

Lerbinger	Coombs	Description
1. Natural	1. Natural disasters	Crises caused by natural disasters (e.g., floods, earthquakes).
2. Technological	2. Accidents	Crises associated with human error in a science and technology context (e.g., product malfunction, product recalls).
3. Malevolence	3. Malevolence & 4. Rumour	Crises caused by “enemies” of the organization.
4. Poor management values	5. Misdeeds (accounts for Organizational deception and Misconduct as well)	Crises that result from mismatched organizational goals (e.g., finances versus transparency).
5. Deception		Crises caused by the purposeful deception of an organization’s publics.
6. Misconduct		Crises that are associated with organizational transgressions e.g., questionable business decisions, bribery, embezzlement).
7. Confrontation		Crises that result from arguments between an organization and its publics.

(Coombs, 1999; Lerbinger, 1997)

Technological crises are those that “are caused by incorrect application of science and technology, can occur frequently and typically disrupt an entire system” (DeVries & Fitzpatrick, 2006, p. 161). Similarly, Coombs’ (1999) category of accidents encompasses product malfunctions and “technical breakdowns” (p. 61). This conceptualization can be used to describe the human error and technological defects that have contributed to the Toyota crisis.

While the Toyota recalls can be categorized in this way, they can also be viewed as a lingering or ongoing crisis. A lingering crisis, as its name suggests, is an issue that is not quickly resolved or forgotten about by key publics. DeVries and Fitzpatrick (2006) determined the characteristics of a lingering crisis after completing a case study of the National Zoo:

Characteristics of a lingering crisis:

1. Multiple events occurring over an extended timeframe
2. Intense media scrutiny
3. Escalating involvement of external organizations (watchdog / regulatory / oversight agencies)
4. Incongruent organizational messages and stakeholder perceptions
5. External/internal charges of organizational deception
6. Insufficient organizational responses to stakeholder concerns
7. Organizational failure to address leadership responsibility for crisis
(DeVries & Fitzpatrick, 2006, p. 160)

Based on the provided description of Toyota's crisis, many of these criteria can be observed. For instance, the Toyota crises consisted of a series of recalls over several years that included a high level of media coverage and involved the government, safety agencies, and consumer activists. This categorization makes the crisis unique and dictates the response strategies available to Toyota. One such option is to adopt the discourse of renewal, which would take an optimistic approach to the crisis by focusing on positive outcomes associated with resolution and future performance, rather than emphasizing past events and actions. Like single occurrence crises, a lingering crisis can have a negative effect on an organization's image and reputation.

Organizational image

Benoit and Brinson (1994) define image as the "perceptions of [a] source held by the audience, shaped by the words and acts of the source" (p. 76). Benoit (1995) further explains that organizations as well as individuals have started to view their "face, image or reputation [as] a valuable commodity" (p. vii). As Coombs (2010) notes, this value includes tangible variables like stocks and sales as well as intangible variables like reputational capital.

Fombrun, Gardberg, and Sever's (2000) define reputation as "a collective assessment of a company's ability to provide valued outcomes to a representa-

tive group or stakeholders” (p. 243). This definition focuses on the perception of the organization by an audience, which is important when trying to repair or maintain an image. Hong and Yang (2009) also identified the power associated with organizational reputation since they noted that it has become one of the “key concepts that demonstrates public relations effectiveness” (p. 382). Because of the benefits associated with reputational capital, an image is something that must be protected, especially when it is threatened by a crisis or a perceived offensive act on the part of the organization.

Benoit (1995) explains that “human beings engage in recurrent patterns of communicative behavior designed to reduce, redress, or avoid damage to their reputation (or face or image) from perceived wrong doing” (p. vii). This is especially true in instances when a crisis threatens the rhetor’s image. The statement can be broadened to include organizations as well, since they commonly act as singular rhetors. As a result, organizations also engage in this constant process to preserve their reputation through rhetorical means. This struggle is explicitly present in the persuasive discourse associated with crisis communication.

Discourse of renewal

The discourse of renewal is one form of crisis response strategy (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002). Crisis response strategies are “actions (verbal or non-verbal) taken by the organization to respond to the crisis” (Wong & Hung, 2008, p. 210). These are usually categorized as accommodative or defensive strategies. Accommodating strategies are those that “accept responsibilities, take remedial actions, or both” (p. 211). At the other end of the spectrum of crisis response strategies are the defensive tactics, which “claim that there is no problem or try to deny responsibilities for the crisis” (p. 211). The discourse of renewal could likely be classified in the accommodating strategies category because it encourages the organization to implement the remedial or corrective action portion of the accommodating strategies definition.

Since Coombs’ definition of crisis emphasized the need for communication, it should not be surprising that rhetorical approaches can be applied to evaluate crisis communication. In the case of a rhetorical perspective, the organization’s responses to the crisis are viewed as forms of public address (Coombs, 2010). The discourse of renewal is one of these rhetorical approaches in the study of crisis communication.

The overarching goal of the discourse of renewal is to shift the purpose

of crisis communication in two interrelated ways (Coombs, 2010). It is a more optimistic way to approach crisis communication (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002). First, it attempts to emphasize the “positives that can be taken away from the crisis” (p. 481). As a result of this shift, the crisis is framed as an “opportunity for organizational change and development” (p. 481).

Second, the discourse of renewal focuses on the “future, not on the crisis itself and not on addressing issues of blame or responsibility for the crisis” (p. 481). This shift attempts to move past the crisis to emphasize the corrective and preventative action that the organization plans to institute. In this way, the discourse of renewal differs from other forms of crisis communication that attempt to minimize the event or shirk responsibility. The purpose is to restore image by focusing on strong value positions, responsibility to stakeholders, and growth as a result of the crisis (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002, p. 362).

The tenets associated with the discourse of renewal have been explored in several different contexts. These include the attacks of September 11th, 2001, organizational responses (Cantor Fitzgerald) following terrorist attacks, natural disasters, industrial accidents (Malden Mills and Core Hardwood) and food recalls (Seeger & Ulmer, 2002; Seeger, Ulmer, Novak, & Sellnow, 2005; Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2007; Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002). An additional context that needs to be reviewed is the appropriateness of the discourse of renewal during a lingering crisis.

This is especially true since the discourse of renewal is not appropriate in all crisis situations. Coombs (2010) warns that “not all organizations are in a position to execute [discourse of renewal] because there are certain conditions that must exist for [it] to be effective” (p. 481). These conditions refer to the appropriateness of the response given contextual factors of the crisis. In addition, the question of responsibility for the act is minimized in the discourse of renewal approach. This can be viewed as a form of denial, which could cause organization’s actions to be perceived as unethical. In turn, this could further damage the organizational reputation (Coombs, 2010). Since the discourse of renewal is not an appropriate response in all crisis situations, it is important to understand how Toyota used the overarching tenets of the discourse of renewal in its response as well as assess the appropriateness of this approach given the lingering nature of the recall crisis. This study examines the following two research questions:

RQ1. How does Toyota utilize the discourse of renewal to repair its reputation following the 2009 and 2010 vehicle recalls?

RQ2. Is the discourse of renewal an appropriate strategy for crisis communication?

Methods

Toyota's recalls were examined using the case study method in order to gain a better understanding of crisis communication strategies that they used, especially those specific to the discourse of renewal. According to Stacks (2006), a case study is an "informal research methodology that gathers data on a specific individual, company or product with the analysis focused on understanding its unique qualities" (p. 2). In addition to Stacks' explanation of case studies, Larissa A. Grunig (2008) described this approach as a "collection of methods" rather than a single method (p. 131).

While case studies are utilized in a variety of social sciences, they are an especially popular and effective approach to the study of crisis communication. This is due in part to the ability of the researcher to incorporate multiple sources and methods of information, which "allow the researcher to retain the holistic and meaningful elements of real-life events" (DiStaso & Stacks, 2010, p. 327). This statement highlights the ability of case studies to contextualize the crisis under investigation. In addition to illustrating specific instances and approaches to crisis communication, Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer (2010) explain that "cases have driven the research agenda for public relations and crisis communication" (p. 491).

In order to demonstrate how Toyota utilizes the discourse of renewal, the theoretical framework was applied to six commercials that serve to illustrate Toyota's crisis communication.

Artifacts

Toyota produced these commercials in order to respond to the safety recall concerning its brake and fuel pump problems. A search of the Toyota website revealed a recall information page, which stored pertinent information about the crisis. One of these components was a set of archived commercials and media clips relating to the recall. In this study, six commercials acted as an organizational response and served as the artifact of analysis. These commercials were selected because of their prominent position on the Toyota website and YouTube channel, which suggested that they contained the response Toyota wanted to communicate to its publics.

Specifically, three commercials from the Toyota website (Toyota.com), "Safety First," "Restore," and "Commitment," were reviewed. In addition, a set of three interrelated commercials from the Toyota YouTube channel (youtube.com) were included in this analysis. These were linked to the recall information page and included the "Toyota Invests in Technology and Safety," "Toyota Star Safety System - Helping," and "Toyota Star Safety System - Accident" (see Table 2). Each of the commercials will be detailed below.

Table 2: Toyota's commercials

Title	Location
Safety first	Recall information page: Toyota.com
Restore	Recall information page: Toyota.com
Commitment	Recall information page: Toyota.com
Toyota invests in technology and safety	Toyota's YouTube channel
Toyota star safety system - Helping	Toyota's YouTube channel
Toyota star safety system - Accident	Toyota's YouTube channel

The "Safety First" commercial highlighted the investments and changes that Toyota was making in order to make its publics feel safer. While the narrator stated the specific corrective action steps that Toyota was implementing, footage of factory workers, the production line, and completed cars were displayed on the screen. This commercial was very somber in tone. For example, none of the featured workers were smiling. This tone supported the narrated statements, which implied a sense of responsibility even though it was never overtly stated. In addition the tone served to highlight the hard work that Toyota, as an organization, was putting in to correct its mistakes and resolve the crisis.

The "Restore" commercial emphasized the history associated with Toyota. As the narrator spoke, pictures of Toyota over the past fifty years were displayed. Throughout the commercial, the actions Toyota took in order to restore public confidence were detailed. However, this commercial differed from "Safety First" in its focus on its existing positive organizational image. During the concluding seconds, the commercial directed its audience to the Toyota website (Toyota.com) where the public can get more information. This website is aligned with the messages in the commercial as it also emphasized new safety practices, organizational procedural changes, safety, and history.

“Commitment” followed the same format as “Restore” in terms of focusing on Toyota’s history and existing image. However, the messages in this commercial emphasized that Toyota did not meet its public’s standards and explains that it will work to fix this. Unlike “Restore,” this commercial did not provide specific plans for corrective action, but instead provided an overview similar to “Safety First.” Again, this commercial concluded by sending the public to its website for more information.

“Toyota Invests in Technology and Safety” was the first of the three inter-related YouTube commercials featured on the Toyota channel. The commercial’s overarching theme was that “we care.” This claim was substantiated through the stated commitment to investing in safety as well as highlighting the awards that Toyota won for safety. This commercial moved past the somber tone seen in the previous commercials. For example, it featured upbeat music with footage of supposed customers who were smiling and artistic replications of car parts flying in behind the people as the narrator highlighted Toyota’s focus on safety and corresponding awards. Also, key phrases floated across the screen in order to further underscore Toyota’s message.

The second YouTube commercial, “Toyota Star Safety System – Helping,” followed a similar format to the “Toyota Invests in Technology and Safety” commercial. However, it differed in terms of its emphasis on children and families. The message stressed in “Toyota Star Safety System – Helping” was that everyone deserves to be safe. In order to align itself with this claim, Toyota detailed its new safety features included in the star safety system and encouraged its viewers to visit Toyota.com for more specific information.

“Toyota Star Safety System – Accident” was the third commercial selected from YouTube and again, it followed the same format as the first two. Like “Toyota Star Safety System – Helping,” this commercial highlighted the new star safety system that now comes standard in all Toyota vehicles. However, this commercial differed as it included footage of a testimonial from Toyota’s chief engineer, Greg Bernas. During his statements, Bernas highlighted Toyota’s commitment to safety and emphasized the point that this begins as early as the concept design phase. Again, this commercial referred viewers back to Toyota.com for more information on the new safety features.

Analysis

In order to analyze Toyota’s application of discourse of renewal, each commercial was viewed multiple times to identify instances when the tenets

of the framework were used. Specifically, this included finding statements that either emphasized the positives associated with the crisis and/or statements that highlighted the future. After these instances were identified, they were classified based on the categories described by the overview of the discourse of renewal provided earlier. They were then evaluated in order to uncover emerging themes, which are further discussed in the research portion of this case study.

Results

RQ1

The first research question was concerned with how Toyota utilized the principles found in the discourse of renewal in order to repair its reputation following the 2010 safety recall. This question was addressed by examining the content of the commercials in terms of the overarching goals of the discourse of renewal. These goals include emphasizing the opportunities associated with the crisis and focusing on the future of the organization facing the crisis. However, during the analysis, two more categories were developed in order to adequately capture the themes used by Toyota in its commercials. These additional categories include history and image.

Opportunities

As previously mentioned, one of the overarching goals of discourse of renewal is to emphasize the “positives that can be taken away from the crisis” (Coombs, 2010, p. 481). Throughout the commercials, Toyota attempted to frame the recall as an opportunity to invest in technology as well as an occasion to make its vehicles safer.

Toyota viewed this recall as an opportunity to invest in itself, specifically in its safety and related technology. In the “Safety First” commercial, Toyota informed its audience that it was making substantial investments in safety features. This investment added up to over one million dollars per hour. This fact is also highlighted in the “Toyota invests in Technology and Safety” commercial. In this commercial the narrator explicitly announced that Toyota was investing over one million dollars per hour in order to advance technology and safety while the words “one million dollars every hour” were displayed

technology,” which again, underscored the key points of the statements being made by Toyota.

Toyota also mentioned its investment in terms of time. In the “Commitment” commercial the narrator explained that Toyota was “working around the clock” in order to repair the factors that caused the recall. This investment of time was completed with the hope that by showing its dedication to its publics, Toyota will become a better company. Again, this demonstrated the perceived opportunities associated with the crisis.

In terms of its safety advancements, which were made possible by the previously discussed investments, the Toyota commercials focused on its recent accomplishments and new organizational procedures. Specifically, the organization highlighted its Star Safety System in the “Safety First”, “Toyota Star Safety System - Helping,” and “Toyota Star Safety System - Accident” commercials. In the “Safety First” commercial, the safety system was just mentioned in relation to the company’s ongoing investment in safety features. However it was described as comprehensive and the fact that it now comes standard was emphasized. The “Toyota Star Safety System - Helping” and “Toyota Star Safety System - Accident” commercial provided more details about the Star Safety System. For instance, these commercials explained that the safety system included five accident avoidance technologies.

In addition to the new Star Safety System, Toyota also highlighted other forms of corrective action in terms of an opportunity to correct its wrong and to serve its publics. For example, in “Restore,” the narrator stated that engineers have tested the solutions for the recalls and its dealers are repairing over fifty thousand vehicles per day. Additionally, the “Toyota Invests in Technology and Safety” commercial explicitly demonstrated the opportunities that were produced as a part of Toyota’s renewed commitment to safety by listing a series of awards that the car company has won. These included “multiple top safety pick awards for 2010 by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.” The commercial also explained that it has received more accolades than any other brand. Again, touting its commitment to safety and highlighting its reputation for being a quality automaker.

Future

A second goal of the discourse of renewal is to shift the focus to the “future, not on the crisis itself and not on addressing issues of blame or responsibility for the crisis” (Coombs, 2010, p. 481). Toyota attempted to emphasize the future throughout its response commercials. This was done by highlight-

ing its priorities and goals.

Most of the Toyota commercials were situated in a forward looking context. While the commercials underscored Toyota's corrective action as an opportunity, it also presented its implementation of safety features as an ongoing process that will continue to be updated, even in the future. For example, in the "Safety First" commercial, the narrator claimed that "safety will continue to be a top priority." This statement implied that even after the crisis is resolved, Toyota will continue to be focused on consumer safety and that this will inform its future organizational decisions.

In terms of future goals, the "Restore" commercial explained that Toyota was working to restore faith in the company. This "restoration" appeared to be part of the primary goal of Toyota's crisis communication. The theme of future "restoration" was also present in the "Commitment" commercial, which further elucidated this goal by explaining that Toyota now has a solution to the recalls and hopes to restore faith in the company.

History

While Toyota demonstrated a focus on the future as highlighted in the discourse of renewal, it also emphasized its history. While this may seem contradictory, it is not, because in order to contextualize Toyota's future priorities and goals, the public must be aware of its past. The Toyota history was emphasized in the "Restore" and "Commitment" commercials. Both made the claim that for over fifty years, Toyota has been making "safe, reliable vehicles." Both commercials also included pictures and footage throughout Toyota's organizational lifetime, which a concentration on dated footage.

The "Restore" commercial was the most blatant in conjuring Toyota's past by opening with the narrator explaining that "history has shown a good company will fix its mistakes, but a great company will learn from them." This statement again tied to the history of Toyota by implying that it has the experience and perspective to be able to learn from the crisis rather than just fix the problem that caused the crisis. In addition, it also suggested that Toyota was not just a good company, but a great company, which led directly to the positive connotations associated with Toyota's image.

Image

Toyota also attempted to present itself or its image in the most positive way possible. This was accomplished through bolstering, which Ware and

way possible. This was accomplished through bolstering, which Ware and Linkugel (1973) define as a rhetorical strategy, in which the rhetor attempts to “identify himself with something viewed favorably by the audience” (p. 277). Toyota’s image was also presented in a positive manner by highlighting its corrective action, which was defined as an attempt to “either to repair the damage caused by an offensive act or to prevent reoccurrence of the offensive act or both” (Borchers, 2005, p. 267).

As mentioned in the discussion of the history category, two of the commercials emphasized the safety and reliability associated with Toyota for over fifty years. Similarly, the commercials explained that Toyota knew it was not living up to its publics’ standards or even its own in the “Commitment” commercial. Again, suggesting that Toyota should be associated with high levels of quality. This quality was demonstrated through the numerous awards that Toyota has won since the crisis emerged. These types of claims served to enhance its organizational identity. They also acted as a form of bolstering since it stressed the positive characteristics of Toyota.

The overarching theme of the “Toyota invests in Technology and Safety” commercial was “we care about your safety.” Closely related was the repeated theme in the “Toyota Star Safety System – Helping” commercial and the “Toyota Star Safety System – Accident” commercial, which was “everyone deserves to be safe.” Both of these themes implied that Toyota is an ethical company whose goals are aligned with their publics, especially in terms of safety. In order to meet these shared goals, Toyota has invested a large amount of time and money in its attempts to restore its public faith in the organization by meeting the shared goals, which will hopefully result in a repaired image. This may be accomplished by explaining how Toyota plans to restore the situation or make changes that will prevent reoccurrences (Benoit, 1995).

RQ2

The second research question was concerned with whether the discourse of renewal was an appropriate strategy for crisis communication. In order to determine if Toyota’s use of the discourse of renewal was appropriate, an analysis of Toyota’s strengths regarding the utilization of the approach was completed. In addition, the themes present in two definitions of effectiveness served as an additional measure of overall appropriateness since in order for a response to be effective, it must first be considered appropriate.

Benoit and Drew (1997) viewed effectiveness as being intrinsically tied to

appropriateness since in order for a communication to be effective it must be appropriate to the given situation, which in terms of this study is the lingering recall. Benoit and Drew (1997) combined their definition of appropriateness and effectiveness by stating that they are “two important dimensions of communicative competence [which] reflect whether the recipients of the accounts were offended or not (appropriateness) and whether the recipients were persuaded to restore the face of the transgressor (effectiveness)” (p. 157). While it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of crisis communication, appropriateness is a more easily determined.

Along the same line, Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier (2002) explained that organizational effectiveness is determined by goal attainment and is facilitated through its level of appropriateness. The authors noted that these goals “must be appropriate for the strategic constituencies that are found in the organization’s environment, publics that have the power to constrain the ability of the organization to meet its goals and achieve its mission” (p. 10). Again, this description complements Benoit and Drew’s definition as they both underscore the interplay between effectiveness and appropriateness and audience.

Toyota’s strengths

Toyota exhibited several strengths in terms of its use of the discourse of renewal to respond to its crisis. Specifically, it focused on the positives associated with the recall, like the opportunity to invest time and money to make it a stronger company. In addition, Toyota presented the crisis as a chance to improve its safety features and technology in order to produce safer cars, which will hopefully make it a more competitive company.

Toyota also stressed the future rather than the crisis. This was accomplished by detailing its ongoing priorities and goals. The priorities included addressing the recall and renewing its commitment to safety. In terms of goals, Toyota discussed its hope to restore the publics’ faith in the company. These organizational goals appear to be aligned with the presumed goals of Toyota’s publics.

In addition to the two overarching categories, Toyota also presented its history and image in a positive manner. This is important because “if stakeholders like what they hear and see, they support the company” (Fombrun & van Riel, 2003, p. 20). So the focus on history and image not only contextualizes any attempt at framing, bolstering, and implementing corrective action, but it also fosters positive feelings about the organization by reminding the public about their previously held perceptions of Toyota over the years and

encourages supportive behaviors (Hong & Yang, 2009). As a result, Toyota's use of the discourse of renewal encouraged its publics to have confidence in the organization, which supports the optimism associated with this approach to crisis communication.

Appropriateness and audience

The appropriateness of a message and the audience are two factors that deserve special attention, especially when attempting to determine the effectiveness of crisis communication. In terms of the appropriateness, Toyota's message was appropriate in the given situation since it responded directly to a given exigence that was created by the recall. The message did not attempt to deny or evade responsibility for the crisis, even though an outright admission of guilt or corresponding apology was not present in any of the commercials. Also, it did not try to minimize the danger associated with the braking problems with that resulted in the recall. Toyota appeared to have been aware of the appropriate responses for the situation when developing in crisis communication plan and highlighted those key strategies like framing the crisis as an opportunity and focusing on the future.

In addition to the response being suitable to the situation, it was also appropriate in terms of Toyota's publics. While these commercials did not run on television, they were available online for those audience members who sought additional information about the recalls and corresponding corrective action. Toyota's messages responded to the perceived concerns of the audience and communicated key information to its publics while emphasizing the shared goals. These goals included solving the problem that caused the recall, preventing reoccurrences, and restoring faith in the organization and its products.

Overall, it appears as though the discourse of renewal was an appropriate strategy for Toyota to utilize since the automobile maker was still a competitive organization as of 2012. The New York Times (2012) reported that Toyota's finances were still strong, selling more than 7.4 million vehicles by September 2012. Revenue also increased 18% from 2011, with a reported profit of over \$67.6 billion (New York Times, 2012).

Discussion

Implications

This section will evaluate the case study analysis in order to identify the implications associated with the findings. The discussion of the implications will be organized by research questions in order to summarize the results of each analysis and draw conclusions from the proposed results.

The utilization of the discourse of renewal by Toyota demonstrated the interrelated nature of the two overarching categories. In order to frame the crisis as an opportunity, Toyota had to address the future and not focus on the crisis itself. Otherwise, the messages would not have been presented in such a positive manner. In addition, the history category was included in order to demonstrate the longevity of Toyota as well as contextualize the forward looking nature of the commercials. Toyota took advantage of its strong history in several of the commercials. Specifically, history was used in order to improve Toyota's image through bolstering or highlighting the positive characteristics of the organization. The reflexivity present in these categories may indicate a need for an expansion of the two overarching themes originally stated in the discourse of renewal, especially in terms of history and image.

This case study also demonstrated the utility of the discourse of renewal. Specifically, it was shown to be an appropriate form of crisis management, especially in terms of accounting for the expectations and goals of the intended publics. These findings may be deemed appropriate because Toyota used the discourse of renewal in accordance with three commitments put forth by Ulmer and Sellnow (2002) following their analysis following the September 11th terrorist attacks. These include emphasizing a commitment to the stakeholder in which the response must demonstrate a "commitment to consumer well-being, a willingness to engage in protective innovations" (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002, p. 362). Throughout the commercials, Toyota put its customers and their safety first. In addition, the messages highlighted its commitment to correction. This was accomplished by demonstrating the organization's desire to improve safety standards through technological advancements and monetary investments. In addition, Ulmer and Sellnow (2002) explained that the created message should demonstrate a commitment to its core values. In order to do this, Toyota attempted to move past the fear associated with the crisis by the public. It also emphasized its historical success and safety record.

It appears as though the overarching framework of the discourse of renewal lends itself to appropriate responses since the rhetor must implicitly

accept responsibility and turn the crisis situation into a positive by addressing its future action. However, this lack of an overt acknowledgment of responsibility and corresponding apology might hinder the organizations efforts in terms of managing a crisis and could further deteriorate any attempts of image repair.

Limitations

There were several limitations in this study. First, only six commercials were selected for analysis. There are many more commercials on Toyota's website and its YouTube channel that were not reviewed and as a result, this study dealt with a truncated sample. In addition, these commercials were only available online, so audience members consisted on those who sought out additional information about the recall and Toyota's response to the crisis. Similar to the limitation associated with the selected commercials, this essay addressed only one case study. Therefore, the results I found can only be applied to the specific recall presented as Toyota's crisis and should not be extended to other cases or more general populations. The final limitation is that the results were not able to truly measure the effectiveness of Toyota's utilization of the discourse of renewal in terms of its publics. This is an especially important limitation to note since public perception is the key factor in crises and crisis communication.

Future research

While there are many different lines of future research associated with the discourse of renewal, only three will be discussed in this essay. First, a genre based study of organizational crisis communication exploring the intersections of image repair strategies the discourse of renewal should be completed. Since the discourse of renewal incorporates strategies associated with image repair (e.g., bolstering, corrective action), it would only make sense to understand how these two approaches work together in a crisis situation. This idea is in accordance to the call for additional research by Ulmer, Seeger, & Sellnow (2007). This type of research would consist of a meta-analysis of multiple organizations that implemented the key characteristics of image repair and the discourse of renewal in order to come to more general results.

Second, further studies are needed in order to better understand the public perception of the organization's crisis communication. The use of qualitative interviews and focus groups could be used in order to supplement this

case study, which may provide key insights into the publics' view of Toyota's crisis communication. In addition, a quantitative analysis could be conducted in order to uncover any perception change in terms of image for the organization.

Finally, an analysis of future Toyota recall could be assessed in order to identify the crisis communication strategies that the organization utilizes in the subsequent crisis situations. This analysis could create a better understanding of how lingering crises are addressed and how the discourse of renewal can be applied in these types of crises. In addition, it could further develop the conceptualization of the discourse of renewal as well as determine when it would be an appropriate approach to utilize. This is because the discourse of renewal may not be an effective strategy due to the conditions of the crisis and the minimization of responsibility which could further damage the organizational reputation (Coombs, 2010). Therefore, the discourse of renewal might not be considered appropriate for Toyota to use in future instances of crisis communication.

In this essay, the principles of the discourse of renewal were applied to Toyota's 2010 recall, in order to highlight the utilization of this rhetorical approach to crisis communication in terms of appropriateness. In addition, this case study demonstrated the need to expand the themes associated with the discourse of renewal in order to account for the historical factors that contextualize the organization, its image, and the crisis. Crisis communication and the differing approaches to its study are continuing to grow in popularity and importance. However, as Coombs (2010) explained, there is still "ample room for expansion" (p. 486). As such, communication scholars must continue to research crisis communication and further discuss their results as well as ensuing implications.

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