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**How the Interaction of Public Relations Spokesperson Gender and Ethnicity Effect Audience
Perceptions of Spokesperson, Organization and Message Credibility: Using the Heuristic
Systematic Model to Investigate a Possible Emerging Trend.**

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Abstract

This study focused on investigating the interaction effects of source ethnicity and gender, under different news conditions (crisis and benign news) on audience perceptions of credibility of a spokesperson, the organization and the message. The study also observed the workings of the Heuristic-Systematic Model by providing participants with varying degrees of information and evaluating the effects of the same on spokesperson, organization and message credibility. Participants included 394 participants of mixed gender, ethnicities and ages. The study found that type of news had the most statistically significant effects on audience perceptions of spokesperson, organization and message credibility, altruism and importance. Analysis revealed that gender of the spokesperson had statistically significant effects on audience perceptions of organization altruism, and the interaction of news type and spokesperson ethnicity had statistically significant effects on audience perceptions of organization altruism. The study found that ethnicity and gender do not have any statistically significant effects on audience perceptions of spokesperson, organization and message credibility

Introduction

Public relations practitioners have traditionally ranked low on credibility and trust scales (Schramm & Roberts, 1971; Callison & Zillmann, 2002). Most of the traditional PR source-credibility research has focused on manipulating either the organization or the message. This study explores source credibility by manipulating source-characteristics and the source itself. Although this manipulation is limited to ethnicity and gender, it does open up a new approach to studying PR source credibility by manipulating various basic demographic source characteristics. Through the findings of this study, the researchers hope to find how to possibly gain some of the lost credibility and trustworthiness of PR

spokespersons by identifying the appropriate demographic source characteristic to modify and/or change. This study focused on discovering the effect of the interaction of source ethnicity and gender on the perceptions of credibility of a PR spokesperson, the organization and the message in the minds of the audience. The secondary focus of the study was to assess what kind of message had what effect on perceptions of credibility in the minds of the audience when a particular message type is combined with variations in source-ethnicity and gender. Source-ethnicity was limited to Caucasian and Hispanic spokespersons while message types were limited to crisis news stories and benign news stories. The study also tested the assumptions made by the Heuristic Systematic Model to investigate a possible emerging trend.

Review of Literature

In today's highly competitive and global business environment, effectively managing a crisis is extremely important to an organization's survival and success (Barton, 1993; Fink, 1986). According to Pearson and Mitroff (1993), organizational crisis is "an incident or event that poses a threat to the organization's reputation and viability. A crisis places the survival of the organization in serious risk" (p. 49). The concept of source credibility has been around from ancient times. It has been linked to the study of persuasion and rhetoric since the time of the ancient Greeks. One of the most fundamental and comprehensive studies of persuasion was conducted by Aristotle and collected in the *Rhetoric* (Goodwin, Coleman & Goodwin, 1993, p. 41).

Hovland, Janis, and Kelly (1953) have been credited for being the founders of modern source credibility theory. They identified perceived trustworthiness and perceived expertise of the source as the main dimensions of source credibility. The more the perceived trustworthiness and expertise of the source, the more credibility will be bestowed upon that source by the audience and more importance will be given to the information being transmitted by that source. A study conducted by Eagly, Wood, and Chaiken (1978) concluded that biases attributed to information sources affect the way receivers judge the source and the information being presented. According to Eagly et al., receivers make assessments in their minds regarding the sources' reasons and motivation for taking a particular position on an issue.

This explanation for the communicator's behavior greatly influences the amount of credibility attached to him or her in the minds of the receivers.

In times of crisis, usually, the spokesperson will deliver an official crisis response and will explain the amount of organizational involvement or responsibility for the crisis (Benoit, 1995; Coombs, 1998). The account of the crisis generally determines how members of the organization's public will assess the organization's behavior (Coombs, 1999). Research also suggests that the choice of company spokesperson, especially in times of crisis, should always take into account the credibility of the spokesperson in addition to the severity and complexity of the crisis (Caponigro, 1998; Elsbach & Sutton, 1992). It is thus important for large organizations to be careful and consider many factors before selecting a spokesperson to represent the company, especially in times of crisis, in order to be assured that the chosen spokesperson will score high on credibility ratings with the organization's publics. Another reason for carefully choosing a spokesperson is because during times of crisis, an organization's credibility is also under immense scrutiny (Arpan, 2002). The quality and type of communication being broadcast by the organization becomes a crucial factor in determining the organization's continuing fate in terms of credibility and trustworthiness among its publics.

In an experiment conducted in 2007, Appiah found that when the website featured a testimonial by an African American character, African American browsers identified more strongly with the character, the website, and the product on sale (laptop computer). These browsers were also more likely to believe that the site was targeting them and they recalled more product information from the website that contained testimonial from an African American character. The opposite was true when the website featured testimonial from a Caucasian character and the browsers were African American. On the other hand, the study found that Caucasian browsers had no difference in their reactions when the website featured an African American character testimonial, a Caucasian character testimonial, or no testimonial. Appiah (2007) also has found stronger media effects when the target audience is a racial minority group. Thus, according to Beaudoin and Thorson (2006), "it would be expected that race would play a stronger role in predicting the media responses of African Americans than of Caucasians" (p. 160). Additional source characteristics that have been found to be related to perceptions of message credibility are

credibility, attractiveness and similarity (Perloff, 1993). Also, Williams, Qualls, & Grier (1995) also have suggested that source ethnicity may be related to message credibility as it is a part of the source-effect category of similarity. According to Arpan (2002), "most research addressing perceived similarity between the source and message recipient(s) has measured perceived ideological or attitudinal similarity, rather than cultural or ethnic similarity" (p. 316).

The ethnic make-up of the U.S. is changing rapidly in terms of both the population at large, and the educated and experienced workforce entering various professional fields. As of October 2006, the U.S. population crossed 300 million. The population of Hispanics in the U.S. as of July 2005 was 43 million, or roughly 14% of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006) and this number is expected to grow rapidly in the coming years. Today, this group of Hispanic consumers has an estimated spending power of \$800 billion (UGA Selig Center, 2011) which makes them very valuable to all types of organizations and marketers as they spend more than any other minority group in the U.S. According to Sha (2006), "the existence of many cultures [in the United States] implies a need for public relations practitioners to acknowledge the possibility of differences in salient cultural identities and the need to communicate with internal and external publics whose cultural identifications may differ from those of the practitioner or the organization" (p.53).

Kelman's (1961) identification theory states that people evaluate their extent of similarity with an information source during interaction and communication. Recently, there has been significant research in advertising and source ethnicity. These studies have suggested that "the degree to which an audience identifies with their own ethnic group can determine the persuasiveness of sources of different ethnic backgrounds" (Arpan, 2002; p. 319). More specifically, several studies have concluded that participants who identified strongly with a certain ethnic group have a better attitude toward communication delivered to them by a source belonging to the same ethnicity (Deshpande & Satyman, 1994; Whittler, 1991; William & Qualls, 1989). According to Feick and Higie (1992), when individuals are exposed to a media character with whom they share some personal characteristics, they generally infer that they will share with the media character other characteristics as well. Consequently, in 2002, Grunig added ethnic diversity to his paradigmatic public relations' excellence model. According to Deshpande and Stayman

(1994), if a person is in the ethnic minority in a society, that person's ethnicity will be a more apparent cue to them. On the other hand, members of the majority ethnic group will be less aware of such cues. Also, other researchers have found that people with strong ethnic identities pay more attention to details such as accents and can hence discern whether the speaker(s) belongs to an ethnic out-group or not (Phinney, 1992).

Gender has also found to play a role in public relations and spokesperson credibility. Almost 70% of public relation practitioners and 70%-80% of college students studying public relations are women. However, in spite of this overwhelming number of women in the field, most senior management positions in public relations are occupied by men. There is also a significant difference in salaries and opportunities for promotions in case of women as compared to men. Generally, in public relations, men get better salaries and more opportunities for promotions than do women (Aldoory & Toth, 2002). According to Brunner (2006), there is a significant amount of gender divide within the field of public relations beginning with a clear under-representation of women in introductory public relations textbooks and extending well into the profession. Brunner (2006) stated that the portrayal of public relations spokespersons in various media may be a cause for this discrimination. Brunner (2006) also suggested that the differences in portrayals starts at the college education level where male and female public relations practitioners are portrayed differently leading to further and more serious discriminations throughout the field. In her study, However, few studies have been conducted to test the effects of spokesperson gender on audience perception of credibility.

Hispanics will constitute almost 25% of the U.S. population and with such a rapidly growing population it is safe to assume that the Hispanic market is where future growth in public relations will take place (Wilcox & Cameron, 2012). Also, while there have been numerous studies that have examined the effects of ethnicity and gender of individuals on the probability of being covered in the media, at various levels (Gibbons, 1993; Grose, 2006; Niven, 2004; Sylvie, 1999), there has been little research on the effects of ethnicity and gender of spokespersons, on perceived credibility in the minds of the audience. The present study explored the influence of ethnic and gender information in news stories which is presented solely from identifiers like names and titles of spokespersons of different ethnicities and

gender. In other words, the effects of extra-textual information implied through the use of basic identifiers on audience cognitions were explored.

The Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM)

Due to the concept of “bounded rationality,” cognitive constraints prevent humans from fully processing all available information, or considering all possible outcomes, or even operating rationally when making decisions (Simon, 1955). “Although rooted originally in the context of persuasion research in social psychology, the dual-process theories have been referred to by several authors as relevant to information processing and decision-making” (Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, 1989, p. 235). The *heuristic-systematic model* was proposed by Chaiken in 1987 to explain the cognitive information processing of messages in persuasion contexts. According to Chaiken (1987), when people engage in a communication and/or cognitive process, one of their prime aims is to establish the validity of the information they are receiving. The information they are receiving should fit well with their own judgments as well as with the relevant facts. According to Chaiken (1987), the two cognitive pathways enabling this process are systematic processing and heuristic processing. According to Eagly and Chaiken (1993), systematic processing is “a comprehensive, analytic orientation to information processing in which perceivers access and scrutinize a great deal of information for its relevance to their judgment task” (p. 326). Systematic processing requires more cognitive involvement and effort as receivers have to form logical and factual arguments and closely evaluate issues in order to judge the validity of the position presented in the message (Chaiken, 1987).

According to Eagly and Chaiken (1993), heuristic processing is conceptualized as “a more limited mode of information processing that requires less cognitive effort and fewer cognitive resources than systematic. *Heuristics can be defined as learned procedural knowledge structures*” (p. 327 & 329). When operating simultaneously, both processes (systematic and heuristic) can exert both independent and interdependent effects on judgments (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Hence, if an individual’s heuristics contain skewed prior knowledge or attitudes, it may have an adverse effect on systematic processing and may eventually adversely affect the judgment process (Tamborini et al., 2007). Eagly and Chaiken (1993) concluded that if a task is extremely important, factors such as credibility seem to affect judgment, leading

to skewed processing of information and consequent decision making. This also indicates that the complexity of a cognitive task may be affecting the processing option we choose.

Eagly and Chaiken (1993) also described the *HSM principle of least effort and sufficiency*. According to this principle, individuals are constantly trying to strike a balance between satisfying motivational concerns and minimizing efforts required to process information. Individuals will rely more on heuristic processing as compared with systematic processing if they believe that this can yield a judgment of sufficient confidence. People will rely more on heuristic processing of information as it requires less effort than systematic processing and if judgments based on heuristic cues seem sufficient, they will not be motivated to make the effort of processing the information using systematic processes. Most of the time, the process of relying more on heuristic cues is relatively natural, and occurs automatically.

Methods and Procedure

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the interaction of ethnicity and gender of an organization's public relations spokesperson have any effect on the audience's perceptions of the credibility of that spokesperson, the organization, and the message – under different message conditions. This study also tested the assumptions of the Heuristic-Systematic Model as it relates to the ethnicity and gender of the spokesperson and whether heuristic or systematic processes were used to judge spokesperson, company, and message credibility when spokesperson gender and/or ethnicity and news type was identified to various. The operational definitions of the variables in this study are as follows;

Ethnicity – “Ethnicity is a social construction that indicates identification with a particular group which is often descended from common ancestors. Members of the group share common religious, cultural, and/or geographic traits (such as language, religion, geographic location, and dress) and are an identifiable minority within the larger nation-state.” (The Truman Education Center, 2006). For the purpose of this study, only two ethnic groups were included, Caucasian and Hispanic. Ethnicity was measured on a nominal scale.

Credibility – Grounded in Aristotle's concept of ethos, McCroskey and Young (1981) defined the concept credibility as *believability*. “Credibility is the *reasonable grounds for being believed*. One who is credible is trustworthy. We have confidence in a person's character and competence” (We Build People

Organization, 2006). Credibility can also be defined as “the judgments made by a message recipient concerning the believability of a communicator” (Callison, 2001, p. 220). An existing credibility scale used in previous research (Mohammed-Baksh, Choi & Callison, 2007; McCroskey & Young, 1966) was used to measure credibility.

Research Questions

This experimental study was conducted with three sets of independent variables, spokesperson ethnicity (Caucasian, Hispanic and no ethnicity identified), spokesperson gender (male, female and no gender identified) and type of news (benign and crisis news) and six dependent variables (spokesperson credibility, spokesperson altruism, organization credibility, organization altruism, message credibility and message importance to the audience). The study with a 3 x 3 x 2 factorial design investigated the main, 2-way interaction, and 3-way interaction effects of the independent variables. As previous research has been conducted on the main effects of spokesperson ethnicity and gender on credibility of the spokesperson, message and organization, the research questions in this study focused on the interaction effects of spokesperson gender and ethnicity on spokesperson, message and organizational credibility resulting in the following 21 research questions:

RQ1: What interaction effect do the spokesperson's ethnicity and gender have on audience perceptions of spokesperson credibility and spokesperson altruism?

RQ2: What interaction effect do the spokesperson's ethnicity and gender have on audience perceptions of organization credibility and organization altruism?

RQ3: What interaction effect do the spokesperson's ethnicity and gender have on audience perceptions of message credibility and message importance?

RQ4: What interaction effect do the spokesperson's ethnicity and the type of news have on audience perceptions of spokesperson credibility and spokesperson altruism?

RQ5: What interaction effect do the spokesperson's ethnicity and the type of news have on audience perceptions of organization credibility and organization altruism?

RQ6: What interaction effect do the spokesperson's ethnicity and the type of news have on audience perceptions of message credibility and message importance?

RQ7: What interaction effect do the spokesperson's gender and the type of news have on audience perceptions of spokesperson credibility and spokesperson altruism?

RQ8: What interaction effect do the spokesperson's gender and the type of news have on audience perceptions of organization credibility and organization altruism?

RQ9: What interaction effect do the spokesperson's gender and the type of news have on audience perceptions of message credibility and message importance?

RQ10: What interaction effect do the spokesperson's ethnicity and gender, and type of news have on audience perceptions of spokesperson credibility and spokesperson altruism?

RQ11: What interaction effect do the spokesperson's ethnicity and gender, and type of news have on audience perceptions of organization credibility and organization altruism?

RQ12: What interaction effect do the interaction of spokesperson's ethnicity and gender, and type of news have on audience perceptions of message credibility and message importance?

Research Design

The three independent variables of this study were (1) the ethnicity of the public relations spokesperson (limited to Hispanic, Caucasian & no ethnicity identified), (2) the gender of the spokesperson (male, female and no gender identified), and (3) message type (crisis and benign message conditions), which constituted a 3 x 3 x 2 factorial experiment. Nine stimulus articles created for either the benign and crisis condition (totaling 18 messages) were used for the 18 experimental conditions created in this fully crossed design. Each research participant was randomly assigned (by the computer software) to one of the 18 possible experimental conditions. The participants evaluated the message in relation to each article and the evaluations were primarily based on perceptions of credibility and altruism of the spokesperson and the organization and the credibility and importance of the message. Figure 1 (Appendix A) is a graphical representation of the randomized posttest-only control group design.

The 18 experimental conditions in the study included crisis news with a Hispanic male spokesperson's name; negative news with a Caucasian male spokesperson's name; negative news with gender-neutral Hispanic name; negative news with only source's male gender identified; negative news with a Hispanic female spokesperson's name; negative news with a Caucasian female spokesperson's

name; negative news with only spokesperson's female gender identified; and negative news with gender neutral Caucasian name; and negative news with neither the ethnicities nor the gender of the spokesperson identified. Additionally, nine similar conditions with benign company news will also be created for a total of 18 message conditions. Appendix B is a graphical representation of the study conditions within a single news type (either benign or crisis news).

Population & Research Participants

The population of interest in this study consisted of people who constitute the audience for general news. Although the experimental conditions used print media (images of newspaper articles delivered over the Internet), the results of this study can be generalized to people consuming news through any of the traditional sources, including the internet. Participants included 720 students, faculty, staff and administrators of mixed gender and ethnicities at a large Midwestern University. Around 55% of the participants were college students and the remaining were staff, faculty and administrators affiliated to the same university system. College students were deemed appropriate for this study because research has found that newspaper readership is related to the amount of education achieved, and that 68% of people with college degrees read newspapers (Callison, 2001; Robinson & Levy, 1996; Reina, 1995). Also, college students are active consumers of the Internet and also consume news online. Hence the researchers concluded that college students were a fair representation of present and future news consumers.

Stimulus Material

Information source type was manipulated by creating nine sets of crisis messages and nine sets of benign messages for a company (Requip Pharmaceuticals). One set was created in a way that the spokespersons' ethnicity and gender was identified as Caucasian male while the second set had the same message but the spokesperson's ethnicity and gender was identified as Hispanic male. The third and fourth sets were Caucasian female and Hispanic female respectively. The fifth and sixth sets were created in a way that only the spokesperson gender was identified and there is no indication of spokesperson ethnicity and the seventh and eighth sets used gender-neutral names to identify ethnicity without indicating any gender. The ninth set did not identify the spokesperson's ethnicity or gender. The

same nine conditions, but with benign company news, were also created totaling 18 sets of messages. Spokespersons in the treatment conditions were identified as “*Director, Public Relations.*” The message, spokesperson title and the name of the organization chosen was held constant in all message conditions, while only the spokesperson’s name and gender differed through the conditions. The research focused on finding effects of associating message source with source ethnicity and gender on credibility perceptions of the source and the related organization by a mixed audience.

Across all conditions, one existing organization in a fictitious crisis was used. The brand in crisis was Requip (medication for restless leg syndrome) and the news listed 30 people having symptoms of stroke after consuming the medication. Under the Caucasian spokesperson condition, the names of the spokespersons were *Michael Smith* and *Jennifer Smith*. Under the Hispanic spokesperson condition, the names of the spokespersons were *Mario Lopez* and *Maria Lopez*. The gender-neutral names used were *Pat Smith* for the Caucasian condition and *Pat Lopez* for the Hispanic condition. The job title of *Director, Public Relations – Requip Pharmaceuticals* was held constant across the message conditions and followed the names. The gender only conditions referred to the company spokespersons only as “*She*” or “*He*” and did not mention any names. The control message condition contained only the message without any author identified and no reaction from the company.

The names of the spokespersons were selected by a panel of experts made up of 20 University faculty members from a selection of several Caucasian and Hispanic names in a way that the choices reflected the most typical ethnic selection as assessed by the experts. All the articles were created using Adobe InDesign software and were uploaded into the computer software *SawTooth*. The articles were made to look exactly like an original black and white newspaper article scanned into a computer. One dummy article with benign news and no source identified were also created for this study. The neutral article was about Jet Blue Airlines announcing new flights to Brazil. The neutral article was created and included in the stimulus material to disguise the real purpose of the study and to make all of the news stories appear more realistic.

Procedure

All the experiments were completed by the participants on their personal or work computers. Once the participants agreed to participate, they were required to log on to the study website where they saw one of 18 coded stimulus packets which the computer randomly assigned to them. Each packet revealed by the computer contained one of the 18 treatment articles, in addition to one dummy article and a few questionnaires. The neutral article was always placed before the treatment article. The dummy article was followed by a dummy questionnaire and the treatment article was followed by a set of questionnaires to assess credibility perceptions and to gather some additional demographic information.

With the stimulus packets randomly revealed by the computer, the participants were informed that the articles were taken from the Associated Press newswire and scanned into the computer for the purpose of this study. Participants were told that they were participating in a news evaluation study and that they would be required to read a few newspaper articles and answer a few questionnaires at the end of each article. After reading each article, participants answered a set of dummy measures included to disguise the purpose of the study. Once the dummy questionnaires were answered, participants were required to complete five additional pages of measures (including demographic information) designed to gauge perceptions of credibility of the spokesperson, the message and the organization. Also, to encourage participants to read the articles, there was a yes/no button created at the end of each article that asked the participants whether they had read the articles completely. This also helped the software link the responses to the right stimulus condition. The entire participation process lasted for an average of 10-15 minutes.

Evaluation of specific message source/spokesperson: After reading the dummy and the experimental articles, participants were asked to respond to questions designed to reveal each participant's perceptions about the spokesperson, the organization and the message. Credibility scales and measures used in previous credibility research were used as guides (Mohammed-Baksh, Choi & Callison, 2007; McCroskey & Young, 1981) to create several 11-point semantic differential scales ranging from 0 (not at all) to 10 (extremely). The same scales were used for evaluating the audiences' perceptions of the spokesperson and the organization. Items in the spokesperson and organization evaluation scale included, *just, honest, trustworthy, concerned about community, accurate in disclosures,*

involvement in social causes, cares about people, good, pleasant, credible, virtuous, responsible, caring, only interested in company profits and selfish.

Evaluation of the message: Participants were asked to rate the organization's message on an 11-point semantic differential scale based on previous research (Mohammed-Baksh, Choi & Callison, 2007; McCroskey & Young, 1981) to reveal each participant's perceptions about the message in terms of credibility. Items in the message evaluation scale included, *message is true, tells the whole story, is accurate, can be trusted, is factual, is credible, this message is of importance to me, is of significance to me, and is urgent.*

Qualifier questions/ Manipulation check: The last four questions immediately followed the demographic questions and were used to assess whether the participants noticed the manipulations that were implemented in the stimulus material for the purpose of manipulation check. These questions included: "*Did you notice the gender of the company spokesperson in the articles you just read?*" and "*what was the ethnicity of the spokesperson,*" and "*Did you notice the ethnicity of the company spokesperson in the articles you just read?*" and "*what was the gender of the spokesperson.*" These qualifier questions were included in the survey to assess whether participant responses were a direct result of the manipulations of the independent variable in the stimulus material. If only a small portion of the participants noticed correctly the gender and ethnicity of the spokesperson, the manipulation of the independent variable did not function as expected, which would be a threat to the internal validity of the study. It could be argued that the inclusion of a control condition eliminates the need for any qualifier questions. However, a separate group of individuals were exposed to the control conditions and the qualifying questions were included as a check-measure for individual participants in the treatment conditions.

Data Analysis

After data collection, responses to items consisting of each of the subscales were averaged to generate an overall measure of a factor in a factorial structure established in previous research (Mohammed-Baksh, Choi & Callison, 2007). Reliability of the scales were examined and data were submitted to 3-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to find effects of spokesperson's gender,

ethnicity, and type of message on participants' perceptions of credibility and altruism of the spokesperson and credibility and importance of the message. Effects of the full-model MANOVA, including the main effects and 2-way and 3-way interaction effects were examined. For analyses that yielded significant main effects across experimental conditions, Tukey HSD pair-wise post-hoc tests were performed to find patterns of the difference between among the three levels of the variables. When analysis yielded statistically significant interaction effects, simple main effects analysis was performed to find cell differences.

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the interaction effects of spokesperson ethnicity, gender and the type of message on audience perceptions of credibility and altruism of the spokesperson and the organization, and on credibility and importance of the message. The chapter will contain the description of the participants, data preparation for analysis, manipulation check, and results of hypothesis testing.

Demographics of Participants

A total of 394 subjects participated in this study. Participants were a mix of college students, faculty, staff and administrators of mixed gender and ethnicities. All participants were recruited from the University system. A total of 159 male and 235 females participated in this study. Of the 394 participants, 284 were Caucasians, 60 were Hispanics, nine African Americans, 27 were Asians, and 14 identified themselves in the "other" category. Of the 394 participants, 222 were between the ages of 18 and 23 years, 68 were between the ages of 24 and 29 years, and 104 were over 30 years of age. Demographic characteristics and the number of participants were almost evenly distributed across 16 conditions, and had at least 12 responses in two conditions. Demographic characteristics of all participants are summarized in Table 1 and distribution of subjects across conditions is summarized in Table 2.

Data Preparation

Credibility scales from previous research (Mohammed-Baksh, Choi & Callison, 2007) were used for this study to measure the dependent variables. Data reduction for this study was based on results of the factor analysis conducted on data of previous research (Mohammed-Baksh, Choi & Callison, 2007).

The factor analysis used in previous research yielded two factors for spokesperson and organization credibility: *spokesperson/organization credibility* and *spokesperson/organization altruism*. The factor analysis on the scales from previous research also yielded two factors for message credibility: *message credibility* and *message importance*.

All measures included multiple items on 11-point semantic differential scales with possible scores ranging from 0 to 10 (with 0 being the least and 10 being extremely high). Items that loaded high on a certain factor were summed up and averaged to create a new factor score. It should be noted that the factors of *spokesperson altruism* and *organization altruism* were made up of two items, “*only interested in company profits*” and “*selfish*.” As the abovementioned factors were both made up of negative items, a lower total point rating on these factors translates into a higher mean altruism score for the spokesperson and the organization. Findings reported in this study are of the mean *altruism* score and are hence, an indication of positive audience perceptions. For the remaining factors of *spokesperson credibility*, *organization credibility*, *message credibility* and *message importance*, a higher score was an indication of more positive perceptions.

Items that highly loaded on the variable of *spokesperson credibility* included *just*, *honest*, *trustworthy*, *concerned about community*, *accurate in disclosures*, *involvement in social causes*, *cares about people*, *good*, *pleasant*, *credible*, *virtuous*, *responsible*, and *caring*. Responses of participants in the current study to the items showed a high degree of internal consistency ($\alpha = .97$). Two items of *only interested in company profits* and *selfish* were highly loaded on the variable of *spokesperson altruism*. The inter-item consistency for this factor was high as well ($\alpha = .81$).

Same items as *just*, *honest*, *trustworthy*, *concerned about community*, *accurate in disclosures*, *involvement in social causes*, *cares about people*, *good*, *pleasant*, *credible*, *virtuous*, *responsible*, and *caring* were included in the factor of *organization credibility*. The scale showed a high degree of internal consistency ($\alpha = .94$). The variable of *organization altruism* included two items of *only interested in company profits* and *selfish*. The inter-item consistency for this factor was also found to be high ($\alpha = .82$).

The variable of *message credibility* included items like *message is true*, *tells the whole story*, *is accurate*, *can be trusted*, *is factual*, and *is credible*. The scale showed a high degree of internal reliability

($\alpha = .95$). The variable of *message importance* included items like *this message is of importance to me*, *is of significance to me*, and *is urgent*. The internal reliability coefficient of the scale was high as well ($\alpha = .78$).

Manipulation Check

Manipulation check was performed to examine if the manipulation of the independent variable functioned as expected. For the current study, it meant whether readers remembered noticing the gender and ethnicity of the spokesperson that were manipulated to vary across the 18 message conditions. Four questions were inserted at the end of the questionnaire that asked participants (a) whether they noticed the gender (or ethnicity) of the spokesperson? And (b) if they did, what was the gender (or ethnicity) of the spokesperson? The number of participants who noticed the gender (or ethnicity) of the spokesperson and correctly recalled the information are summarized in Table 3.

Data Analysis

Variables of spokesperson credibility, spokesperson altruism, organization credibility, organization altruism, message credibility and message importance of Requip pharmaceuticals were subjected to 3-way multivariate analysis of variance with spokesperson's ethnicity (Hispanic, Caucasian, and no ethnicity identified), spokesperson's gender (female, male, and no gender identified) and type of message (benign message and crisis message) as independent variables. Main effects, 2-way interaction effects, and 3-way interaction effects generated from the MANOVA are reported below to answer the research questions.

Research question one asked "What interaction effects do the spokesperson's ethnicity and gender have on audience perceptions of spokesperson credibility and spokesperson altruism?" Analysis found no statistically significant interaction effects of spokesperson's ethnicity and gender on audience perceptions of spokesperson credibility, $F(4, 376) = 0.44, p = 0.78$, and spokesperson altruism, $F(4, 376) = 1.26, p = 0.28$. Research Question two asked "What interaction effects do the spokesperson's ethnicity and gender have on audience perceptions of organization credibility and organization altruism?" Analysis found no statistically significant interaction effects of spokesperson's ethnicity and gender on audience perceptions of organization credibility, $F(4, 376) = 0.30, p = 0.88$, and organization altruism, F

(4, 376) = 0.60, $p = 0.67$. Research Question three asked “What interaction effects do the spokesperson’s ethnicity and gender has on audience perceptions of message credibility and message importance?” Analysis found no statistically significant interaction effects of spokesperson’s ethnicity and gender on audience perceptions of message credibility, $F(4, 376) = 0.60$, $p = 0.66$, and message importance, $F(4, 376) = 1.70$, $p = 0.15$. Research Question four asked “What interaction effect do the spokesperson’s ethnicity and the type of news have on audience perceptions of spokesperson credibility and spokesperson altruism?” Analysis found no statistically significant interaction effects of spokesperson’s ethnicity and type of news on audience perceptions of spokesperson credibility, $F(2, 376) = 0.32$, $p = 0.72$, and spokesperson altruism, $F(2, 376) = 0.17$, $p = 0.84$. Research Question five asked “What interaction effect do the spokesperson’s ethnicity and the type of news have on audience perceptions of organization credibility and organization altruism?” Analysis found no statistically significant interaction effects of spokesperson’s ethnicity and type of news on audience perceptions of organization credibility, $F(2, 376) = 0.13$, $p = 0.88$.

However, analysis revealed statistically significant interaction effects of spokesperson’s ethnicity and type of news on audience perceptions of organization altruism, $F(2, 376) = 3.00$, $p = 0.05$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.016$. Following the significant interaction effect, the simple main effects of type of news within ethnicity groups and simple main effects of ethnicity within the type of news were examined. Descriptive statistics of the dependent variable of organization altruism were grouped by the independent variables of spokesperson’s ethnicity and type of news and presented in Table 4. When the data were split by type of news to examine the ethnicity effects, the F-test for the benign news condition was significant, $F(2, 388) = 4.52$, $p = .02$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$. Post-hoc comparisons between the three groups who read the benign news announced by spokesperson with different ethnicity information revealed that audience of the Hispanic spokesperson rated the organization altruism ($M = 5.71$) significantly lower than the audience who read the benign news featuring the Caucasian spokesperson or spokesperson whose ethnicity was not identified. The F-test for the crisis new condition was not significant, $F(2, 388) = .30$, $p = .74$. When the data were split to examine the effect of Type of News on participants’ perception of organization altruism, it was found that the type of news, benign vs. crisis, announced by a spokesperson with

Hispanic ethnic background did not affect participants' perception of organization altruism. However, the crisis news announced by a spokesperson with Caucasian ethnic background or a spokesperson whose ethnic background unidentified elicited lower level of organization altruism than the benign news announced by the spokesperson. Table 4 is a summarization of descriptive statistics of organization altruism for the interaction effects of ethnicity and type of news.

Research Question six asked "What interaction effect do the spokesperson's ethnicity and the type of news have on audience perceptions of message credibility and message importance?" Analysis found no statistically significant interaction effects of spokesperson's ethnicity and the type of news on message credibility, $F(2, 376) = 0.64, p = 0.53$, and message importance, $F(2, 376) = 0.15, p = 0.86$. Research Question seven asked "What interaction effect do the spokesperson's gender and the type of news have on audience perceptions of spokesperson credibility and spokesperson altruism?" Analysis found no statistically significant interaction effects of spokesperson's gender and type of news on audience perceptions of spokesperson credibility, $F(2, 376) = 1.25, p = 0.29$, and spokesperson altruism, $F(2, 376) = 0.15, p = 0.86$. Research Question eight asked "What interaction effect do the spokesperson's gender and the type of news have on audience perceptions of organization credibility and organization altruism?" Analysis found no statistically significant interaction effects of spokesperson gender and type of news on audience perceptions of organization credibility, $F(2, 376) = 0.52, p = 0.60$, and organization altruism, $F(2, 376) = 0.06, p = 0.95$. Research Question nine asked "What interaction effect do the spokesperson's gender and the type of news have on audience perceptions of message credibility and message importance?" Analysis found no statistically significant interaction effects of spokesperson's gender and type of news on audience perceptions of message credibility, $F(2, 376) = 0.66, p = 0.52$, and message importance, $F(2, 376) = 0.93, p = 0.40$. Research Question ten asked "What interaction effect do the spokesperson's ethnicity and gender, and type of news have on audience perceptions of spokesperson credibility and spokesperson altruism?" Analysis found no significant interaction effects of spokesperson's ethnicity and gender, and type of news on audience perceptions of spokesperson credibility, $F(4, 376) = 0.33, p = 0.86$, and spokesperson altruism, $F(4, 376) = 0.59, p = 0.67$. Research Question 11 asked "What interaction effect do the spokesperson's ethnicity and gender,

and type of news have on audience perceptions of organization credibility and organization altruism?”

Analysis found no interaction effects of spokesperson's ethnicity and gender, and type of news on audience perceptions of organization credibility, $F(4, 376) = 0.49, p = 0.75$, and organization altruism, $F(4, 376) = 0.28, p = 0.89$. Research Question 12 asked “What interaction effect do the of spokesperson's ethnicity and gender, and type of news have on audience perceptions of message credibility and message importance?” Analysis found no interaction effects of spokesperson's ethnicity and gender, and type of news on audience perceptions of message credibility, $F(4, 376) = 1.51, p = 0.20$, and message importance, $F(4, 376) = 1.36, p = 0.25$.

Main Effects

Although this study focused on the interaction effects of spokesperson gender and ethnicity on spokesperson, organization and message credibility, the main effects were also evaluated. Analysis found no statistically significant main effects of spokesperson's ethnicity on audience perceptions of spokesperson credibility, $F(1, 376) = 2.05, p = 0.13$, and spokesperson altruism, $F(2, 376) = 0.86, p = 0.42$. Analysis found no statistically significant main effects of spokesperson's ethnicity on audience perceptions of organization credibility, $F(2, 376) = 0.53, p = 0.59$, and organization altruism, $F(2, 376) = 0.70, p = 0.50$. Analysis found no statistically significant main effects of spokesperson ethnicity on audience perceptions of message credibility, $F(2, 376) = 1.14, p = 0.32$, and message importance, $F(2, 376) = 0.98, p = 0.38$. In other words, when the audiences were forming their perceptions about the company message credibility and importance, the spokesperson's ethnicity was not a factor that affects the process.

Analysis also found no statistically significant main effects of spokesperson's gender on audience perceptions of spokesperson credibility, $F(2, 376) = 0.39, p = 0.68$, and spokesperson altruism, $F(2, 376) = 2.01, p = 0.14$. Analysis found no statistically significant main effects of spokesperson's gender on audience perceptions of organization credibility, $F(2, 376) = 1.40, p = 0.25$. This means that when audiences were forming opinions about organization credibility, the spokesperson's gender was not a significant influencing factor. However, analysis revealed statistically significant main effects of spokesperson's gender on audience perceptions organization altruism, $F(2, 376) = 4.77, p < 0.05$, Partial

$\eta^2 = 0.025$. Further, Tukey HSD post-hoc analysis revealed significant pair-wise differences between male ($M = 4.94$, $SD = 1.91$) and female ($M = 5.53$, $SD = 2.03$) spokespersons ($p < 0.05$). Pair-wise comparison also revealed significant differences between male ($M = 4.94$, $SD = 1.91$) and no gender identified ($M = 5.72$, $SD = 2.17$) spokespersons ($p < 0.05$). Analysis revealed that audience's perception of organization altruism were being influenced by the spokesperson's gender and further pair-wise comparisons revealed that organization altruism was rated higher when the spokesperson was male as opposed to when gender was not identified or when the spokesperson was female respectively.

In addition, analysis revealed no statistically significant main effects of spokesperson's gender on message credibility, $F(2, 376) = 2.12$, $p = 0.12$, and message importance, $F(2, 376) = 0.31$, $p = 0.73$. Analysis found statistically significant main effects of type of news on audience perceptions of spokesperson credibility, $F(1, 376) = 17.02$, $p < 0.001$, Partial $\eta^2 = 0.043$, with spokesperson credibility being higher in the benign news condition ($M = 5.59$, $SD = 1.44$) than in the crisis news condition ($M = 4.91$, $SD = 1.56$). Audiences tend to assign more credibility to spokespersons in the benign message conditions than they do to spokespersons in crisis message conditions. However, analysis found no statistically significant main effects of type of news on audience perceptions of spokesperson altruism, $F(1, 376) = 1.50$, $p = 0.22$. This could mean that the audience perceptions of spokesperson altruism were not significantly influenced by the type of news they were reading.

Analysis revealed statistically significant main effects of type of news on audience perceptions of organization credibility, $F(1, 376) = 29.34$, $p < 0.001$, Partial $\eta^2 = 0.072$, with organization credibility being higher in the benign news condition ($M = 5.74$, $SD = 1.78$) than in the crisis news condition ($M = 4.75$, $SD = 1.75$). Analysis also revealed significant main effects of type of news on organization altruism $F(1, 376) = 7.47$, $p < 0.01$, Partial $\eta^2 = 0.019$, with organization altruism being higher in the benign news condition ($M = 5.13$, $SD = 2.13$) than in the crisis news condition ($M = 5.67$, $SD = 1.95$). In other words, the type of news significantly affected audience perceptions of organization credibility and altruism. Further analysis revealed that organization credibility and altruism were both rated higher in the benign news condition than in the crisis news condition.

Finally, analysis revealed statistically significant main effects of type of news on audience perceptions of message credibility, $F(1, 376) = 6.55, p < 0.05$, Partial $\eta^2 = 0.017$, with message credibility being higher in the benign message condition ($M = 5.58, SD = 1.88$) than in the crisis news condition ($M = 5.16, SD = 1.67$). Analysis also found statistically significant main effects of type of news on audience perceptions of message importance, $F(1, 376) = 39.92, p < 0.001$, Partial $\eta^2 = 0.096$, with message importance being higher in the crisis message condition ($M = 4.03, SD = 1.94$) than in the benign news condition ($M = 2.83, SD = 1.83$). Analysis found that audiences found the crisis news significantly less credible than benign news. However, across conditions, audiences found crisis news significantly more important than benign news.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to determine the effects of spokesperson ethnicity and gender, and the type of news on audience perceptions of spokesperson credibility, spokesperson altruism, organization credibility, organization altruism, message credibility and message importance. The study also attempted to evaluate effects of spokesperson ethnicity and gender using the Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM). This was done to assess whether participants would use heuristic cues or systematic thinking processes to form perceptions about spokesperson, organization, and message credibility, under different news conditions. Hence for this study, information on spokesperson ethnicity and gender was made available within the text of the messages to encourage participants to use systematic processing for the variables of spokesperson ethnicity and gender. The research focused on uncovering what mix of spokesperson ethnicity and gender in a particular type of news situation that organizations could leverage to maximize spokesperson, organization and message credibility. No implications are made here for organizations to discriminate against any particular ethnicity or gender, or show preference of any particular ethnic/gender combination under different news conditions.

A relatively unknown organization was used so as to not let prior company reputation affect the dependent variables of the study (Bea and Cameron, 2007). The choice of this particular organization was made in order to mimic a real crisis while at the same time creating a low involvement issue which

was intended to increase the amount of attention given by the participants to the source of the message rather than the message itself (Petty, Cacioppo & Goldman, 1981).

The names and titles of the spokespersons in the news stories were chosen to serve as an indication of their ethnic backgrounds and gender. The name and title of the spokesperson were mentioned at least three and five times respectively in the treatment news stories and type of news was made obvious through the content of the news stories, and the (prominent) story headlines. In other words, participants needed to read the article in order to discern the ethnicity and gender of the spokesperson while the headlines of the news articles (*Requip Launches Liquid RLS Medicine and Big Trouble for RLS Pill*) were indicative of the type of news story that followed.

It should be noted that the factors of *spokesperson altruism* and *organization altruism* were made up of two items, “*only interested in company profits*” and “*selfish*.” As the abovementioned factors were both made up of negative items, a lower total point rating on these factors indicate a higher mean altruism score for the spokesperson and the organization. Findings reported in this study are of the mean altruism score and hence, are an indication of positive audience perceptions.

Findings suggest no significant main effects for spokesperson ethnicity on audience perceptions of spokesperson credibility, spokesperson altruism, organization credibility, organization altruism, message credibility and message importance. Although these results contradict findings of some past studies, and some of the principles of the heuristic-systematic model (Appiah, 2007; Arpan, 2002; Beaudoin & Thorson, 2005; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Ramasubramanian, 2007; Sigall & Ostrove, 1975), they concur with research that suggests that generally, Caucasian audiences do not reveal any clear preference for spokespersons/models of different ethnicities, and members of majority ethnic groups are less aware of ethnic cues (than members of minority ethnic groups) during the decision-making process (Balon, Philport, & Beadle, 1978; Barban, 1969; Choudbury & Schmid, 1974; Deshpande & Stayman, 1994; Schilinger & Plummer, 1972; Tolley & Goett, 1971). As this study had more Caucasian participants (284 of 394) than Hispanic participants (60), these findings could have been the result of the overall ethnic make-up of the sample rather than any other factor. The findings also concur with previous research that has concluded that, in media situations, Hispanics with a higher degree of acculturation

display no significant preference for either type of model when the model is either Caucasian or Hispanic and Hispanics with a medium degree of acculturation preferred Caucasian models over Hispanic models (Ueltachy & Krampf, 1997).

This study found that the audience rate organizations with male spokespersons higher than organizations with no gender identified spokespersons and female spokespersons in terms of organization altruism. Findings revealed no significant main effects for spokesperson gender on audience perceptions of spokesperson credibility, spokesperson altruism, organization credibility, message credibility and message importance. However, spokesperson gender was significantly affecting audience perceptions of organization altruism. Analyses revealed that male spokespersons scored highest in organization altruism followed by 'no gender identified' spokespersons and female spokespersons. These findings are consistent with findings from previous research that posited that, as a news sources, the audience places more trust in male spokespersons as compared to female spokespersons (Schudson, 2003).

Results also revealed that type of news significantly affected audience perceptions of spokesperson credibility, organization credibility organization altruism, message credibility and message importance. Benign news always caused spokesperson, organization and message ratings to be higher than crisis news. One reason for this could be that generally, audiences' ratings are dependent on type of news and mostly, crisis messages cause audience to blame the organization and its spokespersons for the crisis. However, all the news articles were created in such a way that they did not assign responsibility for the crisis to the organization. The articles only listed the crisis and implied the organizations involvement with the crisis within the content of the article. The headlines of the news stories however, blatantly linked the organization with the crisis. In such a scenario, it is possible that the participants in this study used the limited information from the headlines as heuristic cues and made their judgment decisions based on heuristic rather than systematic cues, thus supporting the assumptions of the heuristic-systematic model in this case.

The results also revealed no significant interaction effects for spokesperson ethnicity and gender on audience perceptions of spokesperson credibility, spokesperson altruism, organization credibility,

organization altruism, message credibility and message importance. It is not surprising to find these results as each of the factors (ethnicity and gender) individually did not have any significant main effects on the dependent variables, and hence their combination also was not significant.

The interaction of spokesperson ethnicity and type of news did reveal significant effects on audience perceptions of organization altruism. Organization altruism was rated lower for Hispanic spokespersons in the benign news conditions than for no ethnicity identified spokespersons and Caucasian spokespersons in the benign news conditions respectively. Also organizations with Caucasian spokespersons and no ethnicity identified spokespersons in the benign news conditions rated higher in terms of altruism than organizations with Caucasian spokespersons and no ethnicity identified spokespersons in the crisis news conditions. These results suggest that having a Hispanic spokesperson in times of benign news causes perceptions of organization altruism to be lower than when using a Caucasian or 'no ethnicity identified' spokesperson. However, during times of crisis, an organization is rated lower in terms of altruism, regardless of its spokespersons' ethnicities. These findings also suggest that when information is limited and of less importance (benign news condition), participants rely more on heuristic information processing in forming opinions. Hence, we see that in benign news conditions, organization altruism is rated lower for Hispanic spokespersons than no ethnicity identified, and Caucasians spokespersons. Such effects are not observed in the crisis news conditions where there is more important information available and people may be basing their perceptions on facts (systematic thinking) and not on heuristics. The workings of the heuristic-systematic model mentioned above are also apparent when we observe that organization altruism is rated higher when spokespersons are identified as Caucasians and 'no ethnicity identified' in the benign news condition than in the crisis news conditions where systematic thinking seems to be the process that helps form audience perceptions. On the other hand, the study found that the interaction of spokesperson ethnicity and type of news had no effect on audience perceptions of spokesperson credibility, spokesperson altruism, organizational credibility, message credibility and message importance.

The study found no effects of the interaction of spokesperson gender and type of news on audience perceptions of spokesperson credibility, spokesperson altruism, organization credibility,

organization altruism, message credibility and message importance. These findings are similar to some earlier studies (Andsager & Mastin, 2003) and suggest that audience judgments about spokespersons, organizations and messages, during times of benign news and crisis news are not based on spokesperson gender.

The study found no effects of the interaction of spokesperson ethnicity, spokesperson gender, and type on news on audience perceptions of spokesperson credibility, spokesperson altruism, organization credibility, organization altruism, message credibility and message importance. These findings suggest that spokesperson ethnicity, gender and type of message in combination cause no differences in audience perceptions about the organization, its spokespersons or its messages. It may be possible that when audience members are exposed to high amount of information, they choose not to use the systematic thinking processes and this information overload causes them to revert to heuristic processing (Chaiken, 1987). Hence, we see no interaction effects of spokesperson ethnicity and gender on the dependent variables of the study, while at the same time observing significant main effects of factors like news type on the same variables. This may be because the headlines of the news articles in this study clearly link the organization to the crisis and the benign news situations. As the headline in the news articles is the most prominent section of the news articles, it may be possible that it is the only aspect of the manipulation that is aiding heuristic processing. All other factors like spokesperson ethnicity and gender are not readily apparent and required the participants to read the articles carefully and arrive at conclusions about the spokesperson's ethnicity and gender based on the spokesperson's name and titles. All other factors require systematic processing in order to be made apparent. Hence, we see significant main effects for news type and very few main effects for spokesperson gender and interaction effects for spokesperson gender and news type, and no effects for spokesperson ethnicity, and the interaction of spokesperson ethnicity, spokesperson gender and message type.

The spokesperson's ethnicity and gender may not have shown significant main effects on audience perceptions of spokesperson, organization, and message credibility because society has evolved to accept people of different genders and ethnic backgrounds. As the U.S. population becomes more diverse, many minority ethnicities become more mainstream and experience greater acceptance by

the mass audience. The same can be said for gender. As women continue to grow professionally in the U.S. society, gender may no longer be an issue that affects how people form opinions and perceptions of credibility. Maybe society has evolved to a point where race and gender are less significant issues of heuristics and the audience does not always consider these when making important judgments.

Additionally, it is possible that spokesperson ethnicity and gender did not significantly affect audience perceptions of spokesperson, organization and message credibility because all participants were affiliated with an institution of higher education with 62% of the participants having some college education and the remaining having attended graduate school or higher. Wagner and Zick (1995) found a negative correlation between the amount of education and racism. The findings of this study could be a result of the fact that the participants were all educated and a part of a large university system.

Finally, the names and titles of the spokespersons, and the type of news stories were the only manipulations of spokesperson identity in this experimental study. A majority of research dealing with source ethnicity and gender uses model photographs, detailed descriptions, accents, and television recordings in addition to names and titles to identify different ethnicities and gender (Appiah, 2007; Arpan, 2002; Balon, Philport, & Beadle, 1978; Barban, 1969; Beaudoin & Thorson, 2005; Choudbury & Schmid, 1974; Deshpande & Stayman, 1994; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Ramasubramanian, 2007; Sigall & Ostrove, 1975; Schlinger & Plummer, 1972; Tolley & Goett, 1971). It could have been possible that the manipulations of this study were not adequate or obvious enough to be noticed by a majority of the participants thus adversely affecting the results of the study. It is possible that the outcomes of this study are an accurate representation of the perceptions that audience members arrive at after being informed about spokespersons' ethnicity and gender by the use of only ethnicity-specific names and gender-specific titles. There is also the possibility that the manipulations in this study were not obvious enough for the respondents to notice. A stronger manipulation like spokesperson photograph may have yielded different results.

Limitations of the Study

As with any empirical research study, the present study had some limitations. Only two ethnic groups were studied therefore the results of the study were not generalizable to a wider ethnic population

of company spokespersons. The entire experiment was conducted online therefore the opinions of people using the internet and participating in this online experiment may not have been an accurate representation of the views of the general population. Also, the organizational messages were limited to two types of bad/crisis news and benign news stories which do not encompass all types of corporate news stories. Hence, this may affect the generalizability of the study across message types and severity.

This study also did not control for prior perceptions of public relations and organizations in the minds of the participants. The study also did not explore the effects of other spokesperson demographic factors, like age, on credibility perceptions. Demographic factors of the audience also were not included in the study analysis which could reveal some additional interaction effects between spokesperson and audience demographic factors. Finally, because the entire experiment was conducted online, there was little control over the participant's physical and emotional environment and state at the time of participation.

The manipulations of the independent variables in the study, specifically ethnicity and gender were not powerful enough causing many participants not to notice the manipulations. However, the manipulations were created to mimic real-world corporate news articles in times of crisis and benign corporate message where news articles generally only list spokesperson name and title. Nonetheless, the researcher believes that using additional manipulations like spokesperson's photograph would have made the manipulations more powerful and apparent and could have resulted in different findings. Another limitation of this study was that the organization chosen was from the pharmaceutical industry and findings from this study may not be generalizable to organizations from all industries. The organization chosen was intended to have low involvement with the subjects and to encourage participants to notice the different aspects of the story (like the spokesperson's ethnicity and gender, and type of message) using more organizations from different industries could help increase the generalizability of the results.

Although the study has some significant limitations, its findings nonetheless will be extremely valuable for educators, practitioners and organizations engaged in public relations. These findings can be used by practitioners to understand how audience perceptions are formed in a realistic setting and what

combination of ethnicity and gender works best in communicating the organization's messages in various news situations.

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Table 1: Participant Demographic Information

Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Male	159	40.35
Female	235	59.65
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	284	72.08
African American	9	2.29
Hispanic	60	15.23
Asian	27	6.85
Other	14	3.55
Age		
18 – 23	222	56.35
24 – 29	68	17.26
30 +	104	26.39
Education		
Some college education	247	62.69
Graduate school or higher	147	37.31
<i>Total N = 394</i>		

Table 2: Distribution of Subjects across Conditions

Gender	Ethnicity	News Type	<i>n</i> in each condition
Male	Caucasian	Benign	22
Male	Hispanic	Benign	17
Male	No ethnicity	Benign	23
Female	Caucasian	Benign	26
Female	Hispanic	Benign	25
Female	No ethnicity	Benign	27
No gender	Caucasian	Benign	22
No gender	Hispanic	Benign	25
No gender	No ethnicity	Benign	12
Male	Caucasian	Crisis	19
Male	Hispanic	Crisis	22
Male	No ethnicity	Crisis	25
Female	Caucasian	Crisis	23
Female	Hispanic	Crisis	26
Female	No ethnicity	Crisis	18
No gender	Caucasian	Crisis	15
No gender	Hispanic	Crisis	27
No gender	No ethnicity	Crisis	20
TOTAL			394

Table 3 Manipulation Check

Condition Characteristic	No. of Experiments with manipulations		No. of Respondents correctly recalling	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Ethnicity				
Hispanic	142	(36.04%)	47	(33.1%)
Caucasian	127	(32.23%)	40	(31.5%)
No Ethnicity Identified	125	(31.73%)	70	(56.0 %)
Gender				
Female	145	(36.80%)	112	(77.2%)
Male	128	(32.49%)	85	(66.4%)
No Gender Identified	121	(30.70%)	42	(34.7%)

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics (Mean/SD/N) of Organization Altruism for Interaction Effects of Ethnicity and Type of News

	Hispanic	Caucasian	Unidentified	Total
Benign	5.71/2.20/67	5.00/2.09/70	4.66/2.00/62	5.13/2.13/199
Crisis	5.53/1.93/75	5.77/1.80/57	5.75/2.12/63	5.67/1.95/195
Total	5.61/2.06/142	5.35/2.00/127	5.21/2.12/125	