Scale Development for Stakeholder Responses in Crises: Centering on Stakeholders in the United Airlines Crisis

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Abstract

In the previous decades, a large amount of crisis communication research has followed an organization-centric perspective and focused on exploring organizational response strategies to minimize negative reputational damage in crises. Our study conceptualized and operationalized stakeholder crisis communication strategies and developed a valid and reliable scale as an evaluation tool. In the context of the United Airlines crisis in April 2017, we conducted two separate online surveys. Results confirmed that a seven-factor instrument of stakeholder crisis response strategies was valid and reliable. Findings also suggested that information seeking was the most preferred response strategy of stakeholders, among a host of active response strategies ranging from the constructive- to destructive-orientation. Theoretical and practical implications were discussed.

Keywords: stakeholder crisis response strategies, crisis communication, assessment, validity, reliability

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Introduction

Organizations face crises every day. Especially in the age of digital and social media, publics could connect with each other instantly and crisis managers are expected to respond quickly and minimize any reputational damage. During the past couple of decades, the majority of crisis communication research has approached the topic from an organization-centric perspective and developed measurement of organizational crisis response strategies (Fraustino & Liu, 2016; B. Johansen, W. Johansen, Weckesser, 2016). For example, Benoit's (1997) image repair theory presented five main strategies to help organizations maintain a positive reputation, consisting of denial (simple denial or shifting the blame), evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness (e.g., bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attacking the accuser and compensation), corrective action, and mortification. Building upon the image repair theory and attribution theory, Coombs (1995, 1998, 2007, 2014) proposed in his situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) a continuum of crisis communication strategies ranging from the least to the most accommodative level, which included attacking the accuser, denial, scapegoat, excuse, justification, remind, ingratiation, compensation, and apology. A comprehensive review of 18 years of research on crisis response strategies from 1991 to 2009 identified 51 articles focusing on organizational crisis response strategies (S. Kim, Avery, & Lariscy, 2009). Similarly, a most recent meta-analysis of research on SCCT (Ma & Zhan, 2016) assumed crisis response strategies as organizational.

To further extend the crisis communication scholarship from a stakeholder perspective, some scholars have examined stakeholder desired strategies on the Internet (Stephens & Malone, 2009), stakeholders' conative coping (Jin, Fraustino, & Liu, 2016) and information seeking or messaging behavior (Brummette & Sisco, 2015; H. K. Kim & Niederdeppe, 2013; Schultz, Utz & Goritz, 2011). Others have begun to explore the crisis response strategies employed by

stakeholders, such as supportive sports fans (N. Brown & Billings, 2013) and faith-holder customers (B. Johansen et al., 2016). However, few of previous studies provided a systematic and comprehensive conceptualization and a valid and reliable scale of stakeholders' own crisis response strategies. Our study sought to do so, in the context of the United Airlines "re-accommodating" crisis in April 2017, involving law enforcement officers violently dragging an Asian American passenger, Dr. David Dao, off one of its overbooked planes. After the videos capturing the event went viral, the United Airlines' poor crisis management made the crisis a complete disaster for the company, losing nearly $1 billion in market value in a single day after the incident (Czarnecki, 2017). Ranked as the second most read crisis story by PRWeek, the United Airlines crisis received a wide range of public attention in 2017 and thus serves as an appropriate case to examine stakeholders' responses in this age of digital and social media (Washkuch, 2017).

Drawing interdisciplinary literature from the fields of strategic management, organizational communication, and public relations on the topics of stakeholders, activism, and public relations strategies, we finalized a seven-factor conceptual and operational framework of stakeholder crisis response strategies, namely information seeking, persuasion, consulting, threat, mobilizing, partnering, and no response. Using data from two online surveys, we contributed to current crisis communication research and practice through: a) enriching crisis communication scholarship by developing a multiple-item scale for stakeholders' crisis response strategies and prioritizing stakeholders as the center of analysis; b) enhancing the practice by providing a reliable and valid evaluation tool that can be used by crisis communication practitioners.

Conceptualization

Multiple Voices in Crisis Communication: Acknowledging Stakeholders

In crisis situations, multiple actors engage in a variety of communicative processes, according to the rhetorical arena theory, a multi-vocal approach to crisis communication (B. Johansen et al., 2016), as opposed to the conventional organization-centric approach. The dominant organization-oriented perspective is represented by the stream of research applying Benoit's image repair theory and Coombs' SCCT (2007, 2014). Commonly studied outcomes include organizational reputation and organizations' crisis response strategies. Based on the attribution theory, the basic assumption of SCCT is that rational stakeholders attribute responsibility to organizations during a crisis. When stakeholders determine that an organization shares minimum, low, or high responsibility, accordingly organizations should adopt different crisis response strategies for victim, accident or preventable crises (Coombs, 2007). For instance, if stakeholders deem an organization as minimally responsible, the organization may employ denial or excuse strategies (Coombs, 2007).

According to SCCT, organizational crisis response strategies differ on the extent of accommodation. The nine strategies—attacking the accuser, denial, scapegoat, excuse, justification, remind, ingratiation, compensation, and apology—range from the least to the most accommodative to stakeholders. Coombs (2014) suggested that, to maximize the effectiveness of these strategies, the more accommodative organizational crisis response strategies should be used when stakeholders increase their attributions of crisis responsibility to an organization. More recently, Coombs and colleagues have begun to identify the impact of organizational crisis response strategies on stakeholders, such as consumers' brand switching and positive word-of-mouth behaviors (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2001). Nevertheless, taken together,

although the SCCT takes into consideration of the rational thinking of stakeholders (attribution of responsibility), the main research trend has been to prescribe ways to repair tarnished organizational images and reputation.

More recently, a growing number of scholars have started examining stakeholders' own emotions, attitudes, and behaviors (e.g., N. Brown & Billings, 2013; Coombs & Holladay, 2008; Jin, 2009; Jin & Liu, 2010; Jin, Pang & Cameron, 2012; B. Johansen et al., 2016; H. K. Kim & Niederdeppe, 2013; Schultz et al., 2011; Stephens & Malone, 2009; Tai & Sun, 2007; Utz, Schultz, & Goritz, 2013; S. Yang, 2016). For example, Jin (2009) tested a cognitive appraisal model that explored the differential impacts of four main negative emotions (i.e., anger, sadness, and fright, and anxiety) on publics' coping strategy preference and organizational crisis strategy acceptance based on an experiment study. Stephens and Malone (2009) focused on organizational crisis message strategies desired by stakeholders based on a content analysis of media content in a 2007 pet food recall crisis. B. Johansen et al. (2016) identified in a textual analysis of Facebook posts the crisis response strategies employed by faith-holders (supporters), hate-holders (opponents) as well as the focal organization. Nevertheless, a more comprehensive conceptualization and operationalization of stakeholders' own crisis responses is needed to advance our body of knowledge in crisis management (Fraustino & Liu, 2016).

In sum, the majority of current crisis communication research followed an organization-centric perspective to maintain organizational reputation and image (Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2007, 2014). A few recent studies moved toward a stakeholder-oriented approach to crisis communication, but did not fully examine stakeholders' own full range of potential response strategies and some studies still were using the identified stakeholder reactions to prescribe best practices for organizations. Accordingly, our study sought to advance the crisis communication scholarship by centering on stakeholders' response strategies in crisis situations both at the conceptual and operational level.

Measuring Stakeholder Crisis Response Strategies

Crisis response strategies according to SCCT and image repair theory are the actions and messaging by management to minimize the negative impact on an organization (Coombs, 2014). These strategies are used to manage stakeholders' perceptions of the organization. To shift the focus from organizations to stakeholders, we conceptualize stakeholder crisis response strategies as what the stakeholders do and say after a crisis occurs.

Past research on stakeholders in organizational communication and public relations suggested some useful strategies such as identifying circles of power within the organization, forming alliances with either marginalized groups or organizational functions who could assist them in becoming influential in the environment (Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002; Lerbinger, 2001; Spicer, 1997). Lerbinger (2001) summarized confrontation tactics for discontented grassroots groups to press demands, solicit public approval, and attract media attention. More recently in crisis communication, studies have investigated stakeholders' responses in crisis situations, including stakeholders' willingness to seek out information about a crisis, face-to-face and online messaging behaviors, and ways to cope with the negative emotions incurred during a crisis (Brummette & Sisco, 2015; Coombs & Holladay, 2008; Jin et al., 2012; H. K. Kim & Niederdeppe, 2013; Schultz et al., 2011; Stephens & Malone, 2009; Tai & Sun, 2007).

Yet few of these studies presented a comprehensive and systematic conceptualization and operationalization of stakeholder crisis response strategies. To do so, we turned to literature on stakeholders, public relations strategies, and activism, in the fields of strategic management,

organizational communication, and public relations. We identified seven main stakeholder crisis response strategies: information seeking, persuasion, consulting, threat, mobilizing, partnering, and no response (e.g., Cammaerts, 2005, 2007; Freeman, 1984; Gibson, Römmele, & Ward, 2003; Gregory, 2007; Hazleton & Long, 1988; Savage, Nix, Whitehead, & Blair, 1991; Utz et al., 2013; Werder, 2005, 2006).

The information seeking strategy is concerned with stakeholders searching for more crisis-related information from an organization in crises. Information needs are common during risk and crisis situations to reduce stakeholders' anxiety (e.g., Griffin, Z. Yang, Huurne, Boerner, Ortiz, & Dunwoody, 2008; H. K. Kim & Niederdepp, 2013; Liu, Jin, & Austin, 2013). Stakeholders often look for, share, and discuss crisis information with friends and families, either face to face or on line (e.g., Jin et al., 2012; Y. Kim, 2016; Schultz et al., 2011; Utz et al., 2013).

The persuasion strategy refers to stakeholders' compliance-gaining actions towards fellow affected stakeholders, by selectively sharing crisis-related information with them and appealing to their emotions or values (Cammaerts, 2005, 2007). The persuasion strategy has been commonly used as a public relations strategy (Hazleton & Long, 1988; Werder, 2005, 2006). Activist groups also frequently resort to persuasion techniques as they more often than not have less power and fewer resources than organizations (Cammaerts, 2007; Derville, 2005).

The consulting strategy is used when stakeholders attempt to resolve the problems together with the affected organization in crises (Gregory, 2007; Savage et al., 1991). It has been suggested as a management strategy to involve supportive stakeholders in brand building or in a labor strike crisis, or as a general public relations communication strategy (Gregory, 2007; Savage et al., 1991; Werder, 2005). To apply this strategy to crisis communication, we anticipate that supportive stakeholders are willing to resolve the crisis, actively engage and initiate dialogues with the organization, and offer their suggestions.

The partnering strategy takes the supportive and collaborative stance of the consulting strategy one step further, indicating stakeholders' complete engagement with organizations (Gregory, 2007). Stakeholders who choose to partner with an organization act as ambassadors and members of an organization's crisis management team, instrumental in the success of an organization's crisis management efforts (Savage et al., 1991). Organizations have been advised to cultivate such a base of champions and loyal stakeholders who can be immensely helpful in resolving a crisis (Freeman, 1984; Gregory, 2007).

Another stakeholder crisis response strategy is threat, a compliance-gaining strategy through the use of coercion and pressure. Werder (2006) recommended that public relations practitioners use a threat and punishment strategy with stakeholders to gain compliance, when stakeholders do not wish to change their positions and a problem solution is needed immediately. Activists also often resort to threatening messages to gain more power over organizations (Derville, 2005). Accordingly, we expect active stakeholders to employ the threat strategy to ensure changes from an organization during crises.

An additional typical stakeholder crisis response strategy is mobilizing, or stakeholder actions to bolster alliances with each other via the use of different media tools so as to demand organizational actions in a crisis (e.g., Gibson et al., 2003). Activists may utilize both traditional and new media tools to spread information rapidly, and they organize internally and externally to disseminate discourse and host debates against organizations whose actions have wronged these stakeholders.

Lastly, no response reflects no engagement and withdrawal by stakeholders. In interpersonal relationships, people often choose to withdraw from a conflict, either giving little

attention to the other relational party or leaving the conflict scene physically (Hess, 2003). A couple of crisis communication studies have also confirmed that in crisis situations, stakeholders often either desire no strategies from the organization (Stephens & Malone, 2009) or engage in passive cognitive coping behaviors (Jin, 2014). We anticipate that stakeholders may opt to refrain from communication or involvement with the organization during a crisis. In contrast, from an organizational perspective, crisis managers sometimes use similar distancing strategies when they hope to disassociate an organization from a crisis, including excuse (organizations being unintentional), denial (organizations sharing no responsibility), and justification (external factors) (Coombs, 1995). These tools were designed to minimize an organization's perceived responsibility in a crisis.

To summarize, based on the above reviewed literature we identified seven stakeholder crisis response strategies: information seeking, persuasion, consulting, threat, mobilizing, partnering, and no response. Considering the exploratory nature of this study, we propose the following research questions:

RQ1: What crisis response strategies were used by stakeholders during the United Airlines Crisis, if at all?

RQ2: How can we measure these stakeholder crisis response strategies validly and reliably?

RQ2(a): What is the construct validity of the scale?
RQ2(b): What is the construct reliability of the scale?

Method

United Airlines Crisis Context

On April 10, 2017, a YouTube video went viral, capturing an already boarded Asian doctor being forcibly dragged off the United Airlines flight 3411 to make room for airlines employees (Steinmetz, 2017). United Airlines CEO Oscar Munoz quickly responded with a statement, in which he apologized for having "re-accommodated" four passengers. Yet a leaked internal memo revealed Mr. Munoz calling these passengers "belligerent." United Airlines had to manage the public outcry and continued to apologize in its press releases. However, more than 40% millennials said they would never fly with United Airlines again or avoid giving it their business. Outraged publics shared the video on popular media platforms worldwide including in China and European countries. United Airlines had to face massive boycott actions and lost nearly $1 billion in market value daily after the crisis (Czarnecki, 2017). This unique crisis showcased a variety of public responses during and after the event on different media platforms, making it suitable to test our scale.

Scale Development and Data Collection

Our data collection took place in August and September 2017. Participants were recruited from an online participants pool and received $1 for their participation. Only current and potential customers of United Airlines participated in our surveys. The initial scale development went through a rigorous screening process. First, items were reviewed and revised based on conceptualization and operationalization from relevant literature and experts' opinions in crisis communication. Second, we used the participant pool from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and conducted a pilot study to modify and refine the instrument (N = 109). Participants completed the draft survey and provided qualitative comments to identify problems and help

improve the items. Wording modifications and item deletions were made based on participant feedback. The final version of the instrument was tested in a final MTurk sample of 609 respondents. After deleting incomplete responses, the final survey size became 579. Both the pilot and final study had a similar participant profile. A screening question was included in both the pilot and final survey, stating, "make sure to select orange for this answer so that we know you are paying attention in the middle of the survey. What color is the sky? Blue or orange?" Participants who selected the wrong answer blue could not proceed further and their data were excluded from final analysis.

Participants

In the pilot study (N = 109), 53.2% participants were male. Participants were on average in their 30s (*M* = 35.27, *SD* = 1.25). In terms of racial composition, 47.7% were Caucasians, 39.4% Asians, 2.8% African Americans, 6.4% Hispanic, 0.9% Native Americans, 0.9% others, and 1.8% preferring not to answer. With regards to their employment status, 62.4% were employed for wages/salary, 24.8% self-employed, 4.6% unemployed, 5.5% a homemaker, 0.9% retired, and 1.8% others. Their annual household income was widely dispersed, with 20.2% less than $24,999, 33.0% $25,000 to $49,999, 35.8% $50,000 to $99,999, and 11.0% $100,000 or more. With respect to education, 52.3% had a bachelor's degree, 15.6% a master's degree, 7.3% a technical or associate degree, 14.7% some college without a degree, 4.6% high school diploma, 3.7% a doctoral degree, and 1.8% 12th grade or less. Regarding their marital status, 48.6% were single, 42.2% married, 4.6% divorced, 0.9% widowed, and 3.7% in a domestic relationship.

In our final survey (N = 579), 44% of participants were male. Participants included 49.1% Caucasians, 32.1% Asians, 0.5% Pacific Islanders, 6.1% African Americans, 6.5% Latinos, 1.8% Native Americans, and 3.9% others. Participants on average were 35 years old (*M* = 34.69, *SD* = 12.12). The majority of the participant (60.7%) were employed for wages or salary, while 20.7% self-employed, 5.8% unemployed, 5.4% a homemaker, 4.2% retired, and 3.2% others. In terms of marital status, nearly half of the participants (42.1%) were single, and 46.5% were married. The remaining participants were 4.7% divorced, 0.9% widowed, and 5.8% in a domestic partnership. Regarding education, 48.8% had a bachelor's degree, 17.7% a master's degree, 9.5% a technical or associate degree, 17.2% some college without a degree, 4.4% high school diploma, 1.5% a doctoral degree, and 0.9% 12th grade or less. Participants' income was diversely spread: 26.0% less than $24,999, 34.6% between $25,000 and $49,999, 29.1% between $50,000 and $99,999, and 10.4% making $100,000 or more.

Measures

We used a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7). Wording modifications were made according to participant feedback. Also, based on the reliability analysis results in the pilot study, one threat item decreasing scale reliability was deleted. All measures in both the pilot and final study were reliable with alpha values above .80. Please refer to Table 2 for all the measures.

Analysis

SPSS and the EQS 6.1 program (Bentler, 2005) were employed for data analysis. In both the pilot study and the final study, we performed descriptive statistics to examine RQ1 (see Table 1). Then, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was done in the pilot study and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in the final study to evaluate measurement reliability and validity (see Table 2

and Figure 1). For the two-step structural equation modeling testing, we used the data-model fit criteria by Hu and Bentler (1999): Comparative Fit Index (CFI) $\geq$ .96 and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) $\leq$ .10 or Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) $\leq$ .06 and SRMR $\leq$ .10.

Results

RQ1 inquired about which crisis response strategies were undertaken by stakeholders during the United Airlines Crisis. Descriptive statistics in both the pilot study and final study showed that respondents chose all of these crisis response strategies to some degree. Specifically, the most preferred response strategy was information seeking (pilot study: $M = 5.31$, $SD = 1.08$; final study: $M = 5.29$, $SD = 1.16$) while the least used one was no response (pilot study: $M = 3.77$, $SD = 1.56$; final study: $M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.57$). The remaining strategies were used moderately: persuasion (pilot study: $M = 4.59$, $SD = 1.23$; final study: $M = 4.68$, $SD = 1.30$), consulting (pilot study: $M = 4.57$, $SD = 1.43$; final study: $M = 4.54$, $SD = 1.41$), threat (pilot study: $M = 4.56$, $SD = 1.63$; final study: $M = 4.51$, $SD = 1.61$), mobilizing (pilot study: $M = 4.38$, $SD = 1.42$; final study: $M = 4.49$, $SD = 1.48$), and partnering (pilot study: $M = 4.32$, $SD = 1.39$; final study: $M = 4.41$, $SD = 1.48$). This suggested that information was the most important need of stakeholders and that stakeholders were quite active, responding in a variety of ways to the United Airlines crisis.

All the seven response strategies were significantly correlated at the .01 level with each other in both the pilot study and final study, with the exception of no response (see Table 1). No response did not correlate significantly with partnering, consulting, persuasion, and threat response strategies in both studies. No response was negatively and significantly associated with information seeking in the final study ($r = -.24$, $p < .01$) whereas the correlation in the pilot study ($r = -.18$, $p = .06$) was only borderline significant. This meant that stakeholders preferred to reach out to and persuade other affected stakeholders, but they also were willing to engage and have a dialogue with the organization to possibly find a solution to the problem, even in a crisis when the United Airlines was apparently at fault. They would rather not withdraw from communication about the crisis. Our study offered a comprehensive profile of stakeholders in crises, who chose a number of active response strategies ranging from constructive- to destructive-orientation.

RQ2 dealt with the measurement validity and reliability of our instrument. We conducted EFA with Varimax rotation in the pilot study and CFA in the final study. First, Cronbach's alpha analysis suggested a necessary deletion of a threat item. All remaining items were reliable (alpha > .80). EFA results (see Table 2) identified a seven-factor structure of stakeholder response strategies in crises, accounting for 78.10% variance. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy value = .84, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity chi-square = 2805.60, $df = 435$, $p < .00$. No additional items were deleted due to low (0.50 cut-off value) or cross loadings (0.30 cut-off) (Hair, Tatham, R. Anderson, & Black, 1998).

CFA results (see Figure 1) in the final study further confirmed the structure. Based on the Lagrange test suggestions, we added error covariances of measures within the same factors. Such additions were theoretically and methodologically sound because measures of the same factor could correlate with each other. Structural equation modeling analysis showed great data-model fit: Model chi-square = 1,093.197, $df = 344$, $p < .00$; CFI = .95, SRMR = .06, RMSEA = .06. All measures loaded highly and significantly on their respective factors, with standardized factor

loadings ranging from .67 to .94 and significant ($p < .05$), showing high convergent validity (J. Anderson & Gerbing, 1998).

To further evaluate construct validity, we calculated the amount of average variance extracted (AVE). A value above .50 was desirable (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The variance extracted for all seven stakeholder crisis response strategies exceeded the threshold: information seeking = .55, persuasion = .65, consulting = .62, threat = .75, mobilizing = .77, partnering = .72, and no response = .72. Next, we confirmed that all the square roots of AVEs were higher than each corresponding factor's correlation with other factors, meaning that our seven-factor framework demonstrated good discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

In addition, we calculated coefficient *H* (Hancock & Mueller, 2001) to assess construct reliability. Ranging between 0 and 1, values above .70 for coefficient *H* indicate good construct reliability. Our seven-factor model exhibited high construct reliability: information seeking = .90, consulting = .88, threat = .94, mobilizing = .95, partnering = .93, and no response = .93.

Discussion

This study is among the first to holistically conceptualize and operationalize an important aspect of crisis communication research: stakeholder crisis communication strategies. We critiqued and extended existing crisis communication research by proposing a seven-strategy framework. Furthermore, results helped confirm that the new measuring instrument was valid and reliable in the context of the United Airlines crisis in 2017.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

First, this pioneering study adopted a stakeholder-oriented approach by developing and examining a new scale of stakeholder crisis response strategies, filling the void in extant body of knowledge in crisis communication that centers on organizational outcomes and further adding to the growing body of knowledge on stakeholder reactions in crisis. The majority of crisis communication research discussed the best organizational response strategies (Benoit, 1995; Coombs, 2014) to minimize organizational reputation damage in crises. Scholars have argued that it is essential to examine how stakeholders respond in crisis situations (Cheng, 2016a; Jin, 2014; B. Johansen et al., 2016). Stakeholders can be a powerful party during crisis situations, adopting diverse response strategies such as information seeking, remediation, and diverting attention (Cheng, 2016b; N. Brown & Billings, 2013; N. Brown, K. Brown, & Billings, 2015; Stephens & Malone, 2009), demonstrating the need for a validated scale of stakeholder crisis responses. Echoing the call to advance our understanding of stakeholders' different voices (B. Johansen et al., 2016), we contend that stakeholders are not one homogenous group of message receivers of organizational crisis communication. In this study, we focused on current and potential customers of United Airlines who utilized a wide range of crisis response strategies, from information seeking to partnering and persuasion. Shifting the focus from organizations only to stakeholders helps us develop a fuller understanding of the complex communicative processes in crises.

Second, this study enhanced our understanding of stakeholders and their crisis response decisions. The results of stakeholders' simultaneous preferred use of multiple response strategies, including collaborative ones, challenged the traditional assumption of passive and hostile stakeholders, which actually helped explain from a stakeholder perspective why the more accommodative *organizational* crisis response strategies are more effective (Coombs, 2014).

Notably our data also confirmed prior research that information is the most desired by stakeholders in crisis and risk situations (e.g., Griffin et al., 2008; H. K. Kim & Niederdepp, 2013; Liu et al., 2013). Stakeholders in the United Airlines crisis in 2017 would like to search for information both face to face and online. Not only did these active stakeholders preferred to seek out crisis information, they also chose to engage with the organization and contribute to resolving the crisis, even when the organization United Airlines was found responsible for the crisis. While remaining collaborative, they did not neglect to choose to empower themselves by using persuasion and media tools to build a strong network with other affected stakeholders. They also were willing to use the threat strategy, warning the United Airlines of possible boycott and lawsuits against them. In other words, these stakeholders in both the pilot and final study were prepared for the worst and hopeful of the best from the organization in the crisis. These findings are consistent with past research of stakeholders engaging in a wide variety of response strategies (N. Brown & Billings, 2013; B. Johansen et al., 2016).

Relating these stakeholder crisis response strategies to organizational response strategies, we hope to remind crisis managers that today's tech-savvy stakeholders may actively persuade and mobilize fellow affected stakeholders but they are also willing to contribute to and partner with the organization to resolve the problems and end the crisis. These findings highlight the need to identify the multiple voices of different stakeholders in crisis situations and respond to their desires and needs.

Last but not least, this study also provided implications for crisis communication practitioners. As social media have empowered stakeholders and provided a convenient platform facilitating the information dissemination and transmission in a crisis situation (Cheng, 2016a), it becomes important to monitor stakeholders' reactions in the crisis communication. This study found that the stakeholders' response strategies were multidimensional and complex, including a variety of active response strategies from constructive to destructive. Stakeholders can be willing to respond both constructively and destructively – often at the same time. Our study presented a useful tool to assess the wide array of stakeholder responses simultaneously. Meanwhile, United Airlines in this case is not the only company to face such a social media-driven crisis. Many other companies including American Airlines are frequently challenged on social media and practitioners have to conduct day-to-day crisis management (Sims, 2018). When companies face increasingly common social media crises, this instrument can be used to gauge the effectiveness of a crisis communication campaign through longitudinally monitoring and measuring publics' responses in different stages of crisis management, which helps crisis managers evaluate stakeholder reception of organizational messaging and strategically plan for next steps. Stakeholders may utilize our instrument to understand fellow affected stakeholder reactions as well.

Limitations and Direction for Future Research
Our study has a few limitations. First, this scale of stakeholder crisis response strategies was only examined in one crisis scenario and should be tested and widely applied in multiple crisis situations and contexts. For example, future studies may apply this scale in a natural crisis occurred in a non-Western context, where the political, cultural, economic environments may totally be different from the West. A cross-scenario or cross-cultural analysis of our scale will be an interesting avenue of future research. Second, since stakeholders vary and include both external and internal ones such as employees from organizations, future studies may adjust the scale of stakeholder crisis response strategies in internal crises to assess the generalizability of

the instrument. Furthermore, future research may compare different stakeholder groups based on their characteristics in relation to crisis response strategies, such as prior level of engagement with and loyalty towards the involved organization. Last but not least, this study only investigated a for-profit organization, scholars in the future may evaluate the scale with a nonprofit or governmental organization.

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Table 1.

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations (Pilot: N = 109; Final Study: N = 579)

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Information Seeking	5.31 (5.29)	1.08 (1.16)	1.00						
2. Persuasion	4.59 (4.68)	1.23 (1.30)	.49** (.50**)	1.00					
3. Consulting	4.57 (4.54)	1.43 (1.41)	.43** (.39**)	.59** (.38**)	1.00				
4. Threat	4.56 (4.51)	1.63 (1.61)	.27** (.37**)	.51** (.42**)	.52** (.50**)	1.00			
5. Mobilizing	4.38 (4.49)	1.42 (1.48)	.41** (.52**)	.60** (.62**)	.59** (.43**)	.60** (.47**)	1.00		
6. Partnering	4.32 (4.41)	1.39 (1.48)	.37** (.24**)	.44** (.23**)	.60** (.62**)	.48** (.36**)	.56** (.36**)	1.00	
7. No Response	3.77 (3.53)	1.56 (1.57)	-.18 (-.24**)	.15 (-.03)	-.00 (-.02)	.06 (-.03)	.05 (-.08)	.07 (.00)	1.00

**p < .01. Final study results in parentheses.

Table 2.
Items, Variance Explained, EFA Factor Loadings (Pilot: N = 109)

| Construct	Item	Variance Explained	Factor Loadings
Persuasion	In this situation, I would appeal to the emotions of other affected stakeholders to agree with me.		.78
	In this situation, I would provide information selectively to influence the opinions of other affected stakeholders.		.78
	In this situation, I would talk other affected stakeholders into siding with me.		.80
	In this situation, I would ask other affected stakeholders to fight against United Airlines.		.74
Info seeking	In this situation, I would find out detailed information about the crisis from other affected stakeholders.		.71
	In this situation, I would check news websites to find out relevant information.		.80
	In this situation, I would check my own social media channels to obtain relevant information.		.78
	In this situation, I would talk with my social circles (friends/relatives) to find out relevant information.		.73
Consulting	In this situation, I would indicate to United Airlines my willingness to engage with them.		.68
	In this situation, I would request from United Airlines its next steps to resolve the crisis.		.68
	In this situation, I would request to visit United Airlines to discuss solutions to the crisis.		.81
	In this situation, I would request a dialogue with United Airlines.		.71
Threat	In this situation, I would warn United Airlines of possible boycott actions.		.82
	In this situation, I would warn United Airlines of possible protests against them.		.86
	In this situation, I would warn United Airlines of possible lawsuits against them.		.84
Mobilizing	In this situation, I would work with other stakeholders to widely expose United Airlines on our own media channels (e.g., webs, blogs, & podcast stations).		.82
	In this situation, I would work with other stakeholders to widely expose United Airlines on mainstream media.		.79
	In this situation, I would work with other stakeholders to widely expose United Airlines on social media channels.		.83
	In this situation, I would work with other stakeholders to widely expose United Airlines using text messages.		.77
Partnering	I would participate in high-level consultation hosted by United Airlines to resolve the crisis.		.81
	I would participate in campaign planning by United Airlines to resolve the crisis.		.85
	I would participate in joint problem-solving efforts by United Airlines to resolve the crisis.		.87
	I would participate in social responsibility initiatives by United Airlines to resolve the crisis.		.86
	I would participate in webinars hosted by United Airlines to resolve the crisis.		.78
No Response	In this situation, I would not be involved in any way.		.90
	In this situation, I would not engage in any way.		.89
	In this situation, I would not exchange any information with anyone about it.		.89
	In this situation, I would not comment on the crisis.		.86
	In this situation, I would not care about how United Airlines resolves the crisis.	78.10%	.84
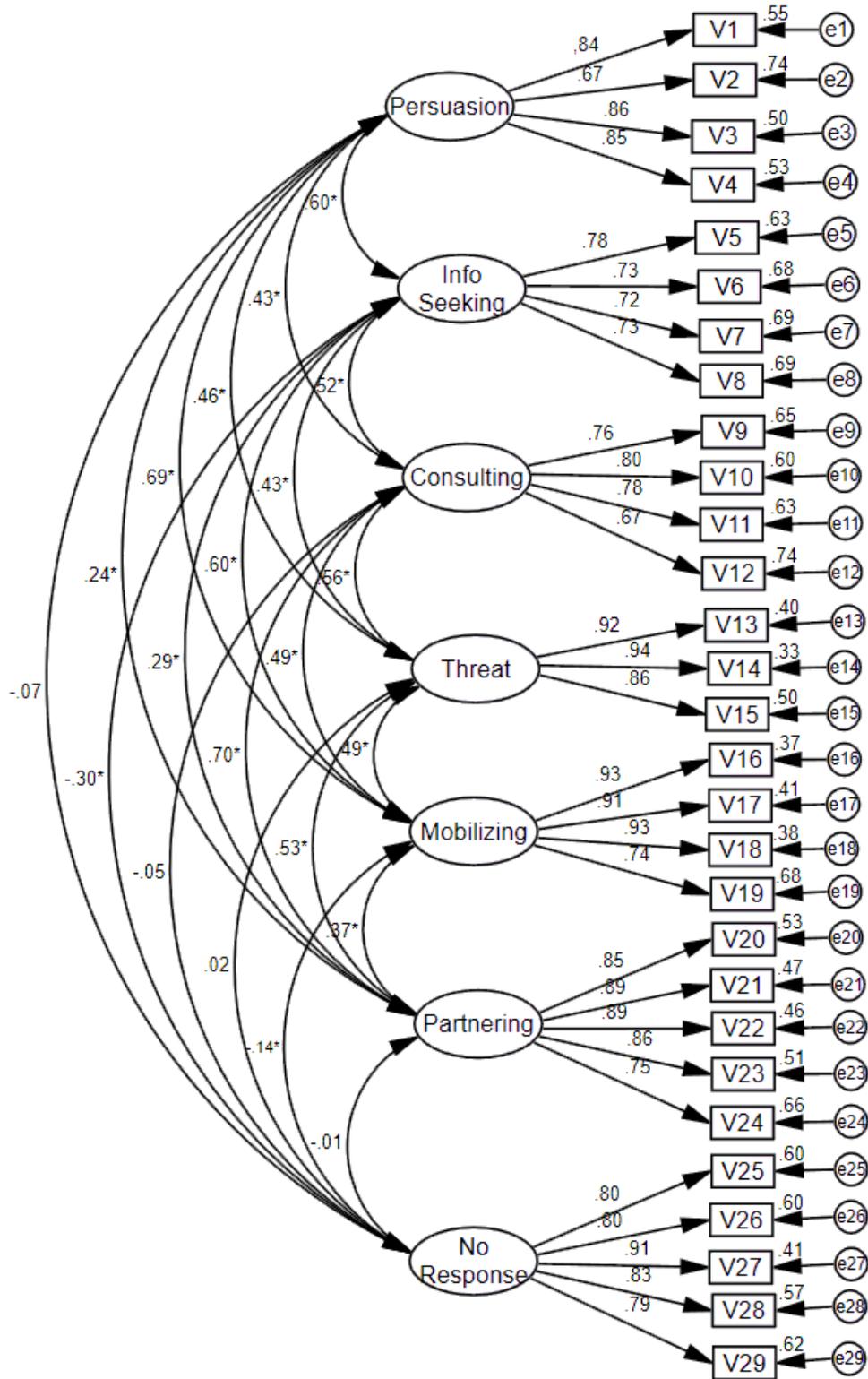
Figure 1. The Stakeholder Crisis Response Strategies Model with CFA Results (N = 579).