

**Repairing Toyota:
Image, Public Relations, and Crisis Communication**

Marisa Brennan

Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
M.A. in Communication

Department of Communication

Faculty of Arts

University of Ottawa

© Marisa Brennan, Ottawa, Canada, 2014

Abstract

Toyota faced a massive international recall crisis in 2009 that threatened to destroy its image in relation to the quality and safety of its vehicles. The majority of Toyota's recalls were issued in the United States, where Toyota was heavily scrutinized in media coverage. This exploratory study examines media and public relations content to examine how the media framed the crisis, and how Toyota framed image repair efforts during the crisis. It explores the foundations of image and communication, drawing upon William James and Jürgen Habermas, in addition to the theoretical underpinnings of impression management and framing analysis (e.g., Goffman, 1959; 1974), source selection (e.g. Hall et al., 1978), and image repair and crisis communication (e.g., Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2007). Qualitative framing analysis is employed to code and analyze data sourced from three American newspapers, as well as Toyota U.S.A.'s press releases during the crisis period. The framing analysis revealed the fundamental role of customers and industry experts in defining a crisis when an organization's credibility is diminished in the media, as well as the strong presence of culturally embedded themes in media framing. Toyota's recovery was strongly linked to its actions to communicate transparently, remedy the situation, and demonstrate cultural sensitivity to its American customers. Drawing upon the findings, this study provides general recommendations for corporate crisis communication at the various stages of issue management, the crisis, and post-crisis.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank everyone who provided me with the support to complete this thesis.

First, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Mahmoud Eid, for his guidance and unwavering commitment to my academic development. I will take the lessons I learned working with him far beyond this project.

I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Isaac Nahon-Serfaty and Dr. Rocci Luppigini for their insightful comments and ideas.

I would like to thank my mentor, Natasha Nystrom, for helping me explore the professional applications of my research, and for giving me encouragement when I needed it most.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, John Brennan and Erika Weltzien. Their support and invaluable perspective during the writing of this thesis (and throughout my entire academic career) have meant the world to me. Thank you for everything. I dedicate this thesis to you.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Figures	v
List of Abbreviations	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Research Problematic and Purpose	4
Thesis Overview	6
Chapter 2: Literature Review	9
Image and Communication: Theoretical Foundations	10
Perception of Self and Reality: William James	11
Public Sphere and Communicative Action: Jürgen Habermas	15
Impression Management: Erving Goffman	20
Primary and Secondary Definers: Stuart Hall	23
Image and Crisis Communication	27
Situational Crisis Communication	28
Communication Strategies to Repair an Image	30
Frame Analysis	33
Framing and Restoring Corporate Image: The Case of Toyota	35
Media Framing	35
Public Relations Framing	39
Image, Public Sphere, and Toyota's Crisis Communication	42
Media Coverage and Toyota's Impression Management	43
Chapter 3: Methodology and Research Design	47
Key Concepts	47
Research Questions	50
Research Design	51
Data Sampling, Collection, and Analysis	54
Sampling Strategy and Size	54

Data Collection	54
Coding and Analysis	58
Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion	64
Media Framing.....	64
Source Selection Practices	65
Toyota Drivers	66
Industry Experts	70
Government Sources	73
Toyota Spokespersons	76
Culturally Embedded Themes.....	81
Corporate Image.....	82
Cultural Identity and Nationalism.....	88
Technology as Problem and Remedy	93
Public Relations Framing.....	98
Framing Attributes of the “Toyota” Image	99
Corporate Identity: Japan, and the Toyota Way	101
Corporate Brand: Safety and Quality.....	104
Framing Issues and Responsibility Through Image Repair	107
Denying an Electronic Cause.....	108
Reducing Offensiveness and Evading Responsibility	111
Corrective Action and Mortification.....	112
Chapter 5: Conclusion.....	117
Key Findings.....	117
Findings in Light of Theory	119
Strategic Recommendations.....	121
Limitations, Implications, and Lessons Learned	125
Thesis Summary.....	128
Bibliography	132
Appendices.....	143
Appendix A: Media Framing Matrix	143
Appendix B: Public Relations Framing Matrix	144

List of Figures

Figure 1: Diagnosed Causes in News Articles.....	67
Figure 2: Technology as a Problem and Remedy in News Articles	94
Figure 3: Framing of Attributes in Press Releases.....	100
Figure 4: Toyota's Image Repair in Press Releases	110

List of Abbreviations

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
NHTSA	National Highway Transportation Safety Administration
SCCT	Situational Crisis Communication Theory
SUA	Sudden Unintended Acceleration

Chapter 1

Introduction

Crises are unexpected, sudden events that can happen to any organization. In principle, a crisis presents a serious threat to the basic values of a system, which necessitates critical decision-making due to time pressures and uncertain circumstances (Rosenthal, Hart & Charles, cited in Eid, 2008). Corporate crises typically involve a wide spectrum of stakeholders, including customers, shareholders, the government, and the media. When corporate image is implicated as a result of a crisis, perceptions held by these stakeholders can shift, necessitating a defensive response to repair corporate image (Benoit, 1997).

Communication is a fundamental feature of crisis response, as it directly impacts public perceptions of a crisis (Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2007). The language in crisis communication affects public perceptions of the organization, and of the crisis itself (Coombs, 2007). These perceptions are important, as they reflect the public opinion of an organization's image, and influence the current and future relationship that stakeholders have with the organization (Ibid). Prominent studies in the field of crisis communication (e.g., Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2007) articulate strategies that can be employed to shape attributions of the crisis, change perceptions of the organization in crisis, and reduce the overall negative effect of the crisis. Public opinion is a particularly important consideration for crisis managers, as stakeholder perceptions indicate the degree of perceived organizational responsibility for the crisis (Coombs, 2007). Situational factors such as crisis type, crisis history, and perceived responsibility for the crisis are other essential considerations when formulating an effective crisis communication strategy.

The news media are a particularly strong indicator of how an organization is publicly perceived (Coombs, 2007). As an “unavoidable reality” of the public communication process, media frames suggest a connection between concepts, issues, and ideas to their audience (Nisbet, 2010: 44). News framing is also an important feature of crisis management, as most of the information that a company’s stakeholders gather about the organization is through news coverage, in addition to secondary sources, such as social media (Coombs, 2007). The nature and application of framing research is relevant to journalists and public relations professionals for different reasons. Journalists are ethically obliged to avoid framing issues in such a way that suggests hyperbole or offers concrete answers when none are available (Nisbet, 2010), while public relations professionals use framing as a strategic means to create or maintain a favourable image of the organization (Hallahan, 1999).

Despite high public scrutiny of corporate communication during a crisis, the occurrence of a crisis does not necessitate a negative outcome for the organization’s image. Communication can be used to help repair the damage brought on by a threat to organizational image, and various organizations ¹ have employed communication strategies to successfully recover corporate image following an image crisis. Crises can even present opportunities for organizations to demonstrate their preparedness for a crisis by demonstrating favourable qualities to customers and stakeholders at critical moments.

Toyota’s series of recalls from 2009 to 2010 was one of the biggest public relations crises ever experienced in the automotive industry. Following a fatal car

¹ Examples of successful “textbook” public relations strategies during a crisis include Maple Leaf Foods’ handling of the 2008 listeria crisis, as well as Johnson and Johnson’s crisis management during the 1982 Tylenol recall crisis (Ulmer et. al, 2014). These cases contrast prominent case studies of failed crisis communication, such as Exxon’s 1989 response to the Valdez oil spill.

accident² involving a family in a rented Lexus that suddenly accelerated out of control, Toyota recalled roughly 7.5 million vehicles in the United States. The company faced numerous reports of deaths linked to “sudden unintended acceleration”, a \$16.4 million fine for “knowingly hiding” safety concerns from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), and a financial impact of more than \$5 billion through incentive campaigns inspired to recover public opinion (Mueller, 2011: 65).

The Toyota crisis is a particularly interesting case study for crisis communication research for two reasons. First, the recalls threatened to destroy the foundations of its image as a car manufacturer in terms of the quality and safety of vehicles. Toyota’s branding is focused strongly on features related to safety, quality, and reliability (Vincent, 2012: 78). The foundations of the “Toyota promise” of exceptional safety and quality were put into question by Toyota’s widespread recalls and the company risked losing all credibility (Ibid: 211). Second, Toyota’s response to the 2009-2010 crisis was not a “textbook” case of consistently effective crisis management. Toyota’s initial crisis management was characterized by its inability to identify and articulate the cause of the problems, which were coined in media coverage as “sudden unintended acceleration” (SUA) (Liker & Ogden, 2011). Toyota initially exhibited reticence to take action at the onset of the crisis, but was able to correct the situation once it was able to clarify the causes of the recalls and address criticism in the United States.

² On August 28, 2009, a car accident sparked one of the biggest public relations crises ever experienced in the automotive industry. Mark Saylor, an off-duty Highway Safety Officer, was driving three of his family members in a rented Lexus when the car suddenly careened out of control on the highway, collided with another vehicle, and burst into flames. All four family members were killed instantly in the crash. (Liker & Ogden, 2011). In the moments before the vehicles collided, Mr. Saylor’s brother-in-law reported to authorities that the accelerator was trapped in a recorded 911 call (Ibid). This prompted a series of investigations and inquiries, as well as similar reports of accidents in the months that followed.

The 2009-2010 crisis is an example of Toyota's shift from vague communication to responsiveness and transparency. The shift in Toyota's crisis management approach makes it an important case study in understanding the relationship between public relations and media frames during a crisis. News coverage was not factual in the absence of a confirmed cause of SUA. For example, one media report included a staged demonstration on ABC News, where a Toyota vehicle was filmed surging out of control. This report was later discredited after further investigation efforts by Toyota revealed that the situation was intentionally staged by manipulating the electronics of the vehicle. While media criticism was still present in the years following the crisis, Toyota clarified the cause of the recalls in media coverage and regained its financial standing and image as the crisis subsided in 2011. This study examines fundamental features and shifts in public relations and media content to formulate a deeper understanding of how Toyota's image was repaired during the crisis. It identifies and analyzes frames within Toyota's press releases and news articles from the onset of the crisis (i.e. September 2009), until media coverage experienced a considerable decline³ (i.e. January 2011-January 2012).

Research Problematic and Purpose

Frames are highly influential mechanisms that play a central role in defining public opinion of a crisis situation. Through framing, public relations practitioners and journalists can contribute to the escalation and de-escalation of a crisis. Within the crisis

³ The decline was subjectively determined by the shift in the tone of news framing during this period, in addition to the comparatively low volume of news coverage observed in the data (i.e. four or less articles mentioning the Toyota recall were published each month from January 2011-January 2012, compared to three or more days a week, from January 2010-May 2010). This period was included in the analysis in order to gain a perspective of media framing as coverage of the crisis declined.

communication literature, numerous studies have examined the role of media framing during a crisis (e.g. Seon-Kyoung & Gower, 2009), as well as the ways in which corporate entities frame external communication during a crisis (e.g. Benoit, 1997). Framing analysis of news media can provide public relations professionals with useful insights into appropriate crisis response strategies to minimize the damage to organizational image (Seon-Kyoung & Gower, 2009). It is important that crisis managers present their “side of the story” to the media, as the frames present in reporting are the frames that most stakeholders will adopt (Coombs, 2007: 171). Furthermore, as the news media have the power to define a story through framing and impact the public’s interpretation of a story, they also have an implicit responsibility to be aware of framing practices. As such, framing research is essential to make both parties aware of their role in defining the crisis situation to the public. This can mitigate public relations response efforts, and make journalists aware of factors that may influence their framing of a crisis at a given time.

Despite the importance of both public relations and media activities in framing a crisis, foundational studies in corporate crisis communication (e.g. Benoit, 1997) conduct research from a primarily organizational perspective. Coombs (2007) notes that the predominance of organizational case studies in the crisis communication literature has resulted in a lack of knowledge about “how stakeholders react to crises or to the crisis response strategies used to manage crises” (163). While Coombs (Ibid) includes stakeholder perceptions of organizational responsibility in his analysis, Schultz and Raupp (2009) note that this does not account for shifts in framing beyond the initial phase of the crisis. Although crisis communication research (e.g. Coombs & Holladay, 2010)

identifies the importance of constant media monitoring throughout the crisis, the concept of crisis responsibility is determined at the onset of the crisis, and defined in static terms.

This study aims to contribute to addressing this gap in crisis communication research by providing an exploratory investigation of the strategies used by Toyota in its external communication activities in the context of media framing beyond the initial phase of the crisis. Frames within public relations and media content are qualitatively analyzed across the framing cycle (e.g. Miller & Riechart, 2001) and coded for key frames, as well as framing shifts that occurred over time. Based on the framing analysis, this study finally introduces strategic recommendations for issue management and crisis communication in a corporate image crisis.

Thesis Overview

This thesis investigates various framing models (e.g. Hallahan, 1999) and framing and reasoning devices (e.g., Entman, 1993; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Van Gorp, 2010) used in press releases and media coverage to understand the framing of Toyota's image during the crisis from a broad perspective. It consists of the following chapters: introduction, literature review, research design and methodology, findings and discussion, and conclusion. First, the literature review draws on the philosophies of William James and Jürgen Habermas to orient the study's focus on perception and strategic communication. William James' (1981a; 1981b) thoughts on self-perception and reality anchor the interpretivist worldview of the thesis. James' understanding of reality as a subjective, individual interpretation that is constructed through perceptions of actions and ideas is integral to the thesis' theoretical and methodological focus on how content is

framed. Jürgen Habermas' (1964) understanding of the public sphere provides the foundations for the theory of communicative action (1984), in which Habermas establishes the conditions for effective communication, as well as the conditions of strategic and communicative action. Language ultimately underlies Habermasian theory as an essential precursor to achieving understanding between individuals. Habermas' ideas are foundational to the study's central focus on the communicative aspects of crisis response, and in specifically understanding the characteristics of strategic communication from a public relations and media perspective.

The theoretical framework further addresses the ways in which messages are formulated and understood in society, as well as in the context of an organizational crisis. First, the thesis outlines Erving Goffman's *Frame Analysis* (1974), which establishes framing as a lens that organizes social experiences and interactions. This work was foundational to methodological applications of framing in the field of communication and media studies, where Goffman's (1974) theory is applied to the analysis of public relations and media content. The study also draws upon Hall and colleagues' (1978) theory of primary and secondary definers in media content to understand how practices of source selection impacted media framing of the Toyota crisis. Finally, theories of impression management and crisis communication strategies to repair image (e.g., Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2007) intersect to understand crisis communication in light of strategic public relations.

In Chapter 3, the research design and methodology, the framework established in Chapter 2 is linked to the explication of the themes and concepts that guide the analysis. This section conceptualizes relevant concepts, and details the qualitative research design,

research questions, and procedures of data collection and analysis. The features of framing analysis and their specific applications to the research are also detailed, including specification of coding and analysis procedures. This chapter presents the two research questions and two sub-questions of the study, and describes the sampling processes that were used to select press releases and news articles.

Chapter 4, the findings and discussion section, organizes the analysis by the research questions outlined in the methodology section. This section analyzes the findings of the research, and identifies the most noteworthy findings of the project. The findings and discussion are divided into the following three main sections: source selection, media framing, and public relations framing. This section applies the understanding of communication, impression management, and framing articulated in the literature review to analyze the findings of the study.

Chapter 5, the conclusion, outlines the study's most important findings and describes their specific contribution to knowledge in the crisis communication field. Based on the findings and analysis section, Chapter 5 draws strategic recommendations from the findings to inform crisis communication activities. It also acknowledges the limitations and implications of the research. Finally, the conclusion suggests areas for further exploration in light of the findings of the study, and provides a summary of the entirety of the thesis.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

In order to examine and analyze communication strategies to repair corporate image during a crisis, it is important to draw upon the work of theorists relevant to these ideas. The theoretical framework of this study reflects the foundations of image and communication, as well as modern theories of self-presentation and framing. William James' (1842-1910) pragmatism, in which there is no universal definition of reality, orients the study's discussion of image. From this perspective, consciousness is constructed through individual experience; the way an event is presented, or framed, consequently impacts how it is interpreted. To understand the characteristics of effective communication in a crisis, this thesis also draws upon the philosophy of Jürgen Habermas. Habermas grounds his social theory in language, and establishes the importance of rational communication in the theories of the public sphere and communicative action.

The selected theoretical framework reflects the study's focus on public relations and media content. Theories of self-presentation and impression management (e.g. Goffman, 1959) and media source selection (e.g. Hall et al., 1978) are discussed to examine impression management from the corporate perspective, as well as how these activities are reflected in media coverage of the organization during an image crisis. The theoretical foundations of impression management situate the discussion of modern crisis communication theories (e.g., Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2007), which apply impression management and relevant crisis communication strategies in the public relations context. To orient the methodological approach, this study draws upon Erving Goffman's (1974)

Frame Analysis, which interprets experience as mediated through frames, or the conditions through which events are presented. Communication theories of framing that expand upon Goffman's (1974) theory are also discussed to guide a framing analysis of media and public relations content. The most relevant threads of knowledge from these intellectual contributions are drawn together in a comprehensive analysis of Toyota's public relations strategies during the recall crisis.

Image and Communication: Theoretical Foundations

The literature review begins with a discussion of the pragmatic underpinnings of William James' philosophy. As a scholar of psychology, James pays considerable attention to the ways in which the mind conceptualizes and constructs impressions of reality. James (1981a) explores the production of reality by focusing on the multiplicity of individual experiences, rather than on absolute truth. The *Perception of Reality* (Ibid) and the *Consciousness of Self* (James, 1981b) establish concepts fundamental to understanding how image is constructed, and the issues related to restoring image when it no longer aligns with a desired, or previously held impression. It is James' understanding of perception that makes his theories so powerful and interesting, particularly when applied to the focus of this study. For James, perception and reality are shifting and relative concepts, where impressions are subject to change based on situational variables. James' (Ibid) work expands this discussion to understand how the "self" is negotiated in different social environments, and how impressions are managed and perceived by external audiences.

Perception of Self and Reality: William James

William James' thoughts on consciousness are a compelling example of the pluralism inherent in the pragmatic method (Putnam, 1997). James' discussion of pragmatism stresses the importance of individual experience, rather than universal truth in constructing experience:

While I talk and the flies buzz, a sea-gull catches a fish at the mouth of the Amazon, a tree falls in the Adirondack wilderness, a man sneezes in Germany, a horse dies in Tartary, and twins are born in France. What does that mean? Does the contemporaneity of these events with one another and a million others as disjointed, form a rational bond between them, and unite them into anything that means for us a world?

(James, 1956: 119)

These simultaneously occurring, yet unrelated events reflect James' central thesis, which is located in the fundamental duality of mind, subject, object, and the substantiality of consciousness (Putnam, 1997). Within this paradigm, the totality of images appears to the individual as a "chaos of fragmentary impressions", where specific items are focused upon based on subjective criteria, ordering individual experience (Seigfried, 1978: 22). These events hold no actual significance as a collective body of experience. As they do not carry definitive validity, it follows that nothing can be effectively deduced from looking at all phenomena as a whole (Edie, 1987). Attention must therefore be ascribed to only certain aspects of consciousness and experience in order to make sense of an event or concept. James' understanding of the orders of experience embraces a multivariate perspective of reality and experience, rather than attempting to reduce reality into a comprehensive and simplified system. The *Perception of Reality* (James, 1981a) rejects a universal understanding of image in favour of one that is subjectively determined by the

shifting experiences and perceptions that occur between individuals in a social environment.

Building upon this premise, James articulates that the spheres of reality are not accorded permanence to an equal degree, as an experience is more likely to be determined “real” if it is deemed particularly noteworthy by the individual perceiving it (James, 1981a: 929). Human activities and interactions create these “real” experiences, and are highly influential in determining what aspects of reality are selected for attention (Lamberth, 1999). If a certain event is considered more salient than other aspects of reality, it is accorded more prominence in the individual memory and resonates more strongly as part of reality (Ibid). In this sense, reality is not a static concept, as it is determined in relation to shifting events that are experienced by the individual (Brennan, 1968). By examining “the camera, and not what the camera is taking pictures of”, James sheds light on the complex conditions under which experience is created, rather than attempting to generalize and simplify what constitutes reality (Goffman, 1974: 2). The *Perception of Reality* (James, 1981a) examines the aspects of reality that are ascribed meaning by the individual, rather than aspiring to define reality itself, and as such, is highly relevant to understanding how public perceptions function to create actual meaning, and constitute the reality of a given impression.

Understanding the believability of self-presentations is central to presenting a coherent and legitimate image to others in a social situation. The *Consciousness of Self* (James, 1981b) influenced many early theorists (e.g. James Baldwin, Charles Cooley, and Herbert Mead), who later elaborated upon James’ views in their theories of the self and identity (Putnam, 1997). Modern sociological theory, such as Erving Goffman’s (1959)

theories of self-presentation and impression management, also draws upon the early understanding of the individual in social psychology to understand the self from a symbolic-interactionist perspective (Reynolds, 1993). For James (1981b), the self is complex in nature, and consists of two main components of consciousness: the empirical self and the pure ego (Pawelski, 2007). The empirical self comprises the material, social and spiritual selves⁴, while the pure ego is understood as the enduring impressions and ideas that are held by the self, which can be recognized as its “brand” (Ibid: 36). The “social self” is particularly relevant to understanding image, as this self identifies with the world through “the recognition which [an individual] gets from his mates” (James, 1981b: 281). These interpersonal relationships can solidify and alter previously established impressions of reputation and image. In contrast to the material self, which consists of the body, clothes, and other external elements of the individual, the social self is the reputation that an individual holds with their friends, colleagues, and others (Pawelski, 2007).

Based on a situational assessment of the “immediate and actual, and the remote and potential” (James, 1981b: 315) the individual negotiates social interactions through rivaling and mutually exclusive self-presentations:

I am often confronted by the necessity of standing by one of my empirical selves and relinquishing the rest. Not that I would not, if I could, be both handsome and fat and well dressed, and a great athlete, and make a million a year, be a wit, a bon-vivant, and a lady-killer, as well as a philosopher; a philanthropist, statesman, warrior, and African explorer, as well as a ‘tone-

⁴ The *material self* consists of the body, clothes, and other physical possessions. The *social self* is created through interactions with others. This identity is dependent on the context of the situation, as “[an individual] has as many different social selves as there are distinct groups of persons about whose opinion he cares. He generally shows a different side of himself to each of these different groups” (James, 1981b: 282). The *spiritual self* is the most intimate version of the self, which is comprised of moral sensibility, conscience, and will; as such, it refers to “man’s inner subjective being” (Ibid: 283).

poet' and saint. But the thing is simply impossible. The millionaire's work would run counter to the saint's; the bon-vivant and the philanthropist would trip each other up; the philosopher and the lady-killer could not well keep house in the same tenement of clay. Such different characters may conceivably at the outset of life be alike possible to a man. But to make any one of them actual, the rest must more or less be suppressed.

(James, 1981b: 295)

As James notes, any self-relevant image can be expected to produce a set of consequences for an individual, meaning that strategies are employed to manage perceptions in public (Schlenker, 1980). Some images may be compatible, but others strain believability when considered together, depending on the situational context (Comello, 2009). Although images with high “expected” values (e.g. attractiveness) represent high individual ideals when considered alone, reality and prior reputation may impose constraints on what a particular individual can claim about himself (Schlenker, 1980). From this perspective, individuals negotiate behaviour and construct personal reality based on a variety of factors including the attractiveness of an image and expected social sanctions associated with a positive or negative self-image. James’ (1981b) multidimensional conceptualization of the self presents important implications for strategic communication; understanding how to reconcile conflicts between identities can help to clarify and enhance a message. (Ibid).

William James (1981a; 1981b) provides a rich framework for understanding how image is perceived, constructed, and managed by actors. The *Perception of Reality* (James, 1981a) examines the origins of perception, and discusses the relationship between impressions and reality. As such, it is applicable to a discussion of the relationship between framing and negotiations of reality. James’ pluralistic understanding of perception (Ibid) also raises the question of whether truly mutual understanding is

possible under the subjective conditions of perception and reality, as it encounters the paradox of how a concept can be experienced, or understood in the same way by two individuals (Lamberth, 1999). The following section addresses this consideration through a discussion of Jürgen Habermas' theories of the public sphere (1964) and communicative action (1984), which infer various conditions for creating mutual understanding through the act of communication. Several functions of discourse are examined as a means to bridge divergent perspectives and facilitate understanding between individuals.

Public Sphere and Communicative Action: Jürgen Habermas

Jürgen Habermas (1929-present) is a prominent critical philosopher and sociologist of the Frankfurt school of German critical theory. Habermas' theories of the public sphere (1964) and communicative action (1984) present a particularly interesting framework from which to consider perceptions of public relations crisis communication strategies within a study focused on both public relations and media content. The public sphere allows for an examination of strategic public relations activities to repair corporate image in media content. Public relations and journalism ultimately have differing strategic motivations; while public relations activities are oriented to further corporate interests, journalists are expected to report content that is factual and unbiased (Eid, 2008). The following section discusses communicative and strategic action (Habermas, 1984) to provide a multidimensional view of the way in which dialogue and mutual understanding are constructed and facilitated between public relations and media in the public sphere.

Based upon the principles and conditions implicit in consensus and understanding, the *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Habermas, 1964) defines the public sphere as a space of mediation between the public and the state in which “something approaching public opinion can be formed” (49). As such, all citizens are granted equal opportunity to debate and address issues in the public sphere. This view of public opinion replaces the notions of “mere opinion”, or arbitrary views, referring more positively to the views held by individuals engaging in rational-critical debate (Calhoun, 1992: 17). Habermas situates his theory of communication in the ideals of consensus and rationality. The public sphere of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is characterized by rational critical argument, where arguments are judged based on content, rather than the speaker’s position in society (Ibid). Habermas (1989) describes the transformation of the ideals that grew out of the bourgeois cultural institutions in eighteenth century Europe, and their later demise at the hands of the capitalist system.

Newspapers, magazines, radio, and television are described as the media of the public sphere, although the influx of private interests later transformed the “journalism of conviction to one of commerce” in the 1890’s (Habermas, 1964: 53). Habermas specifically links the destruction of the public sphere to the blurring of the boundaries between the public and private spheres of society (Ibid). The state and private society became interlocked, resulting in private organizations gaining public power, and the state gaining access to the private realm (Calhoun, 1992). As a related phenomenon, the focus of public discourse shifted from one of objective, general interest to one of negotiated compromise among competing interests. This resulted in the replacement of rational-critical debate by negotiation and individualistic consumption (Ibid).

Habermas' concept of the public sphere not only characterizes members of the public sphere, who exchange in free and equal debate, but also the ways in which interactions should occur between members of society and major institutions (Maier, 2005). The very concept of public relations is incompatible with the public sphere for Habermas, as public relations involve goal-oriented and strategic interactions with publics. Rather than construct discourse on a case-by-case basis through mediation in the public sphere, public relations "simply serves the arcane policies of special interests" (Habermas, 1964: 55). However, Hauser's (1999) reformulation of the Habermasian public sphere suggests that discourse within the public sphere may be more complex than Habermas initially conceived. Since vernacular discourse is naturally occurring, public conversations are naturally occurring as well (Hauser, 1999). This implies that public discourse, and therefore the public sphere is not "dead", but rather that "communicators are not listening" (Maier, 2005: 223). From this perspective, public relations activities may not be inherently detrimental to discourse within the public sphere. For Maier (Ibid), adaptive crisis communication strategies can contribute to the public sphere by incorporating public opinion into crisis decision-making. For this reason, Maier advocates prioritizing and understanding the needs and interests of an organization's key publics, rather than focusing solely on controlling discourse. As contributors to public discourse, public relations have the opportunity to engage with issues within the public sphere, and decide whether they will develop or destroy communication within it (Ihlen & van Ruler, 2007).

For Habermas (1984), the ideal function of communication is to establish democratic order in society by creating conditions of mutual understanding. Habermas

does not deny that much of communication is context-specific, but he maintains through the theory of universal pragmatics that there are universal features central to all acts of communication (Burlison & Kline, 1979). From this, Habermas asserts a correspondence theory of truth, in which truth can be only redeemed through discourse (Edgar, 2006). *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Habermas, 1984) presupposes that all communication is implicitly social and rational in nature. As such, it presents a means of facilitating understanding between members of an organization and its publics, which is a vital step in avoiding the escalation of conflict (Burkart, 2007). Habermas distinguishes between strategic and communicative action in social situations, drawing on speech-act theory and the concept of rationality:

I define communicative action, inter alia, by stating that action coordination must satisfy the condition of an agreement reached communicatively, without reservation. The requirement that illocutionary aims be pursued “without reservation” is intended precisely to exclude cases of latently strategic action. In strategic action, linguistic processes of reaching understanding are (generally) not used as a mechanism of action coordination. Here, we can no longer explain the coordination of different plans of action through reference to conditions for a communicatively achieved agreement that culminates in the inter-subjective recognition of criticizable validity claims; instead, we may appeal only to the conditions for the reciprocal influence that opponents, acting in a purposive rational way and oriented respectively toward their own success, attempt to exert upon one another.

(Habermas, 1998: 203)

The structure of language in communicative action superimposes understanding of the structure of action and collective actors in the situation, rather than the strategic actor in question. Implicit in Habermas’ distinction between communicative and strategic action is the requirement that each individual involved in the communicative situation is equally able to propose, question and debate propositions without using manipulation to achieve

consensus (Salter, 2005). However, in some cases, individuals may suspend the validity claims essential for communicative action through strategies of “impression management, of self-presentation oriented to reaching understanding” (Habermas, 1998: 205). In this sense, there are limits to communicative action when applied to sociological theory, as language is contextually dependent.

While journalists are generally perceived to employ a communicative model in communicating unbiased information to the public, public relations follows the logic of strategic action to further the interests of the organization (White, 2012). Most criticism of the demise of the public sphere has focused on public relations, but “few, if any, media sociologists integrate literature or concepts from public relations theory into their accounts” (L’Étang, 2007: 122). While Habermas concurs that this responsibility has not been fulfilled in contemporary journalism, in principle, journalists have a responsibility to report news in a fair, truthful and accurate way (Kitross, cited in Eid, 2008). In this regard, journalists operate under different motivations than public relations practitioners, who are expected to abide by ethical principles, but are not expected to deliver unbiased content. Despite this apparent dichotomy, both communicative and strategic models of action “attribute to the actors a capacity for setting goals and for goal-directed action, as well as an interest in executing their own plans of action” (Habermas, 1998: 203). These models differ primarily in the nature of these goals, as a communicative action program orients goals based on the emerging needs of each actor in the discourse, while strategic goals are motivated by the success of an individual actor. Public relations activities can be oriented towards abstract principles or practices in communicative action, although

attempts (e.g. Leeper, 1996) to adopt Habermasian ethics directly onto the reality of public relations have been deemed idealistic at best (Burkart, 2007).

Jürgen Habermas' theories of the public sphere and communicative action are essential to a consideration of communication between an organization and its publics during a crisis. The public sphere is relevant to understanding the function of public relations in conveying information and modifying communication or strategic goals in response to public opinion. Communicative action (Habermas, 1984) further explicates how discourse in the public sphere is formulated, and under what conditions. While public relations activities are strategically motivated, the underlying principles behind the Habermasian theories of public sphere and communicative action can be applied to an analysis of organizational crisis communication strategies to repair corporate image in the media.

Impression Management: Erving Goffman

The following section of the literature review discusses the theoretical underpinnings of self-presentation and impression management and addresses relevant, modern applications to the organizational setting. Impression management was originally conceptualized through a sociological lens (e.g. Goffman, 1959) to signify the communication strategies employed by individuals to convey and manage a desired image or impression. Goffman's (1959) sociology is fundamental to understanding both social interaction, and the study of relationships with an organization's internal and external publics (Johannson, 2007). Although Goffman is primarily interested in the structure of face-to-face and daily interactions, his theories have macroscopic

implications, particularly when applied to greater relationships in society (Smith, 2006). For example, modern researchers of organizational communication (e.g. Allen & Caillouet, 1994) have applied impression management to the organizational setting.

The *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Goffman, 1959) provides a dramaturgical metaphor for performances, or social presentations of the self. A performance is defined as a “kind of image” resulting from the activities employed by an actor over the course of a social interaction (Ibid: 252). Goffman examines these face-to-face interactions by employing the concepts of Face, Front stage, and Back stage. In self-presentation, individuals construct an image of themselves, or Face, to claim personal identity, and present themselves in a manner that is consistent with that image (Goffman, 1959). As a major principle of Goffman’s (1959) theory, competent actors are primarily motivated by a desire to be perceived favourably by others. This desire is manifested in the construction of Face, and motivates actions to repair it when it is threatened. Face is constantly negotiated between the actor and audience through impression management tactics, which are either accepted or rejected by the audience. This performance is part of the Front stage, or public self, although private elements of the Back stage could unintentionally undermine this performance.

Goffman notes that the expressiveness of an individual involves two radically different types of sign activity, which includes both “the expression that he gives, and the expression that he gives off” (1959: 2). These concepts bear close similarity to definitions of *projected image* and *perceived image* in organizational communication (e.g. Foreman, Whetten & Mackey, 2012). *Projected image* refers to how organizational members want the organization to be externally perceived, and *perceived image* refers to the audience’s

actual perceptions, rather than the actor's intended impression (Ibid). The expressions "given" and "given off" by individuals in a social interaction are also linked to identity, as "a performer may be taken in by his own act, convinced at the moment that the impression of reality which he fosters is the one and only reality...in such cases, he comes to be performer and observer of the same show" (Goffman, 1959: 80). There are also instances where individuals engaged in the process of impression management can become consumed by their own actions and internalize the performance as part of their identity (Ibid).

External impressions of the actor contribute to the creation and maintenance of an image, as the actor's performance and the audience's resulting impression of the actor are mutually dependent. As such, perception plays a central and essential role in the process of self-presentation. The performer can attempt to define a situation, but reality is regulated entirely by the audience, who must accept the performer's definition of the situation as believable for it to be successful (Goffman, 1959). For Goffman (Ibid), the audience may take different positions towards the impression that is communicated by the actor, regardless of the desired impression; the impression can be perceived as sincere, or rejected as false. If the audience does not believe in the impression, a different impression will be created, which may run counter to the actor's desired image. However, impressions are subject to change, and can move from sincere to cynical, and vice-versa depending on impression management efforts and other situational variables (Johansson, 2007).

Goffman's (1959) theories of Face and impression management⁵ underlie the framework of studies of corporate image repair in a crisis (e.g., Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2007). Although focused on interpersonal interaction, these theories transition naturally to the concepts of image and identity in the organizational context (Johannson, 2007). Both corporate and individual actors are dependent on their image and reputation, and manage them through strategies of impression management (Kazoleas & Teigen, 2006). Like individuals, organizations engage in performances in various settings before audiences in order to present and maintain a desired image, or Face (Allen & Caillouet, 1994). These strategies are similarly oriented in the goal of influencing image and reputation so they align with the corporate identity (Gilpin, 2010).

Primary and Secondary Definers: Stuart Hall

An investigation of media content should “aim to capture the strategies of negotiation between journalists and their sources” (Stevenson, 2002: 36), as the relationship between journalists and their sources is central to understanding the role of the news media in the public sphere (Fenton, 2010). *Policing the Crisis* (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson et al., 1978) draws attention to the routine structures of news production, and examines how the media come to “reproduce the definitions of the powerful” (Ibid: 57). While *Policing the Crisis* focuses mainly on the portrayal of crime and moral deviance in the media, this work has relevant applications to issues such as source selection in media content, which it describes as a “key terrain where ‘consent’ is won or lost” and as “a field of ideological

⁵ While some scholars use the terms impression management and self-presentation interchangeably, Schlenker (1980) distinguishes these concepts, defining impression management as the “attempt to control images that are projected in self-relevant or imagined social interactions” and self-presentation as an individual's efforts to manage impressions of himself, rather than an external entity (6).

struggle” (Hall et al., 1978: 220).

For Hall and colleagues (1978), the primary sources cited in news articles condition the patterns of the news selection process, which subsequently constructs news frames (Berry & Kamau, 2013). Primary definers are understood as dominant groups that are able to “cue the media in to a particular event” (Stevenson, 2002: 35). For example, Welch, Fenwick and Roberts (1998) conceptualize primary definers in media coverage as the experts cited in news articles to understand patterns in the content of quoted statements by different groups of experts on crime. In turn, the media act as secondary definers by selecting and interpreting information from the primary definers of the event (Stevenson, 2002). As secondary definers, the media further the credibility of “expert” sources by reproducing their definitions and interpretations of events (Hall et al., 1978). The concept of primary and secondary definers rests on the assumption of the encoding/decoding model, where language is encoded, or given meaning, by those with the “means of meaning production” (Ibid: 68). The message is then decoded, or ascribed meaning, by an audience (Ibid).

The media do not simply report events that are “naturally” newsworthy; news is the end of a complex process that begins with the selection of events and topics according to a pre-established set of categories (Hall et al., cited in L’Étang, 2007: 53). These categories are based on *news values*, which are determined by the reporter’s sense of what constitutes an item that will be of interest to the reader. A news value is a functional term for news priorities and what counts as news (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). Events become news to the extent that they satisfy the conditions of impact⁶, and the pragmatics

⁶ These include: threshold, frequency, negativity, unexpectedness, and unambiguity, in addition to audience identification (e.g., personalization, meaningfulness, and reference to elite nations).

of media coverage (e.g., consonance, continuity, and composition). (Ibid). News values have been the focus of research to ascertain key features of media coverage, such as “immediacy, scale and impact, unexpectedness, predictability, and human interest” (Ibid: 124). Newsroom decisions on the inclusion and exclusion of material and what should be emphasized in selected content are based on these criteria. The extraordinary or emotional elements of a story can be emphasized through selection, positioning, and its construction in order to increase its newsworthiness.

Sources play an integral role in the production of news and are intrinsically linked to the news values and news frames that structure the final news article (Berry & Kamau, 2013). For Hall and colleagues (1978), source selection is determined based on their perceived credibility by the journalist or news organization. Credibility is defined by a source’s position in society, which is why official sources (e.g., scientific experts and other official sources, such as politicians) are granted privileged access to news space and become “primary definers” of the issues in question (Ibid). Other researchers (e.g. Davis, cited in Barry & Kamau, 2013) describe how competing sources have learned to operate within a mediated environment and make use of agenda setting tools (e.g. public relations managers) so they are capable of changing the role of traditional primary definers.

Schlesinger and Tumbler (2000) criticize Hall and colleagues (1978) for the polarization of primary and secondary definers, which discounts the possibility of *frame negotiation* (Gamson, 1984) within the news article, as well as the impact of external factors. For Schlesinger and Tumbler (2000), the concept of primary definition is not a resolved matter, as factors such as the massive investments in public relations by state agencies present implications about source competition and the workings of the public

sphere. Although it is important to understand the factors behind decision-making about source selection, Berry and Kamau (2013) contest that source selection plays a crucial role in determining the framing of news content, regardless of the complexities over who is manipulating whom. Journalists essentially act as intermediaries between source and reader, relaying a message that might be “ideologically inflected” by the source but only implicitly defined by the journalist’s placement of the citation within the article (Ibid: 86).

As the media define what significant events are taking place and offer “powerful interpretations” of how to understand these events, they have a responsibility to report balanced content (Hall et al., 1978: 56-7). Whenever possible, media statements should be grounded in objective and authoritative statements from accredited sources (Ibid). These accredited sources include those with institutional power and position, organized interest groups as well as the expert or authority on the issue. Moreover, source selection plays a strong role in determining the tone of a news article:

The media thus tend, faithfully and impartially, to reproduce symbolically the existing structure of power in society’s institutional order this is what Becker has called the ‘hierarchy of credibility’—the likelihood that those in powerful or high status positions in society who offer opinions about controversial topics will have their definitions accepted, because such spokesmen are understood to have access to more accurate or more specialized information on particular topics than the majority of the population.

(Hall et al., 1978: 58)

Due to this structural preference for opinions of the powerful, prominent spokespersons become primary definers of topics. Primary definers of topics have a degree of influence over how a concept is defined in an article, and thus can impact how the reader interprets a news story. Journalistic balance and framing can be affected even when different

sources are included in an article, as the primary definition sets the limit for all subsequent discussion by framing, or defining the problem (Ibid).

The elements of a message that are emphasized through source selection are fundamental to understanding how the perspectives of various sources contribute to media framing (Hall et al., 1978). The primary and secondary definers that structure news stories are relevant to a discussion of how source selection in reporting impacts organizational image, as well how these sources contribute to framing during a crisis. Establishing authority over media framing is an important concern for organizations, particularly in an environment of negative media framing and intense scrutiny. Certain sources (e.g. industry experts) can saturate media coverage with “information or disinformation” solely because they are considered official and credible (Welch et. al, 1998: 235). Understanding the nature of the content that appears in quotations from various sources in news articles is an indicator of their overall perceived credibility on a given issue. While other structural factors such as corporate or political power also influence media content, research on source selection remains an important aspect when understanding the way that organizational image is structured and framed within news articles.

Image and Crisis Communication

The essential role of corporate crisis communication is to affect the public opinion process by establishing and communicating proof that the prevailing “truth” is not factual, or only partly factual (Fearn-Banks, 2007). Image repair⁷ remains the dominant

⁷ While the conceptual and methodological framework of this study draws upon Benoit’s (1997) theory of

paradigm for crisis communication research (e.g., Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Benoit, 1995, 1997; Burns & Bruner, 2000; Coombs, 2007). Erikson, Weber and Segovia (2011) link “perceived or actual wrongdoing” as a precursor to organizational image repair strategies to reduce negative images (211). One of the primary objectives of crisis management is to retain or repair the image of the organization, which exists primarily through these perceptions (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993; Sturges, 1994). Elements from image repair theory (Benoit, 1997) and situational crisis communication theory (Coombs, 2007) are used in this study to identify and categorize image repair strategies through framing analysis.

Situational Crisis Communication

In a crisis, organizational reputation can be severely threatened by stakeholder perceptions. Timothy Coombs’ (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) provides a theoretical framework for understanding how crisis communication strategies can be used to repair reputational damage incurred during various reputational crises, including those brought on by a product recall. According to SCCT, crisis managers must address the degree of reputational threat (i.e. determined by perceptions of the organization’s initial responsibility for the crisis, the crisis history, and prior reputation) posed by the crisis in order to formulate an effective response. Coombs (2007) applies

“image restoration”⁷, the term “repair” is used to refer to Toyota’s efforts to protect their image, rather than “restore”. Burns and Bruner (2000) raise important methodological considerations for public relations researchers drawing upon Benoit’s (1995) theory. The first problematic identified is the term “restoration”, as “a corporation’s image is not unitary nor homogeneous” (Ibid: 29). From this perspective, it is possible that an organization in crisis will not return its image exactly to its pre-crisis state, and therefore its prior image will not be “restored”. Benoit (2000) later acknowledged that he preferred the term image “repair” rather than image “restoration”, as the theory does not purport to claim that image can be restored to its prior state.

framing theory to SCCT, where crisis types are understood as frames. This allows for a focus on how the crisis is presented, and how this affects cognitive schemas of the event (Ibid). SCCT also draws upon attribution theory, under the premise that individuals attribute responsibility for negative and unexpected events, and stakeholders design their behaviour in accordance with these perceptions.

SCCT identifies crisis types into three clusters: victim crises, accidental crises, and preventable (or intentional) crises. Coombs (2007) outlines the following crisis scenarios: *technical error accidents*, where an industrial accident is caused by an equipment or technological failure; *human error accidents*, where an industrial accident is caused by a human mistake; *technical error product recalls*, where a product is recalled because of equipment or technology recall; and *human error product recalls*, where a product is recalled due to a human mistake. Coombs (Ibid) recommends accommodative strategies when the organization has strong personal control over the crisis, and defensive strategies when the organization has little control. As more responsibility is attributed to the organization, reputational threat increases, although organizations with previously high reputational standing can use this to their advantage (Ibid). Refining the understanding of the crisis situation and how it can be understood is an ongoing concern of SCCT (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). There are multiple variables that affect the way that reputational defense and image repair are framed by corporations and the media, as well as external factors that may influence public perceptions. A human error crisis requires crisis response strategies that demonstrate more concern for the victim than a technical error crisis, such as compensation for the victim or full apology, while a technical crisis can use excuses, such as delay intention or control of the crisis

event. Individuals view organizations as more responsible for human error crises than technical error crises (Coombs, 2007). Coombs and Holladay (2002) also address the importance of prior organizational reputation, stating that organizations with higher reputation will employ situational crisis communication strategies with greater success than organizations that do not have a positive reputation prior to the crisis. Other issues can also affect organizational response to a crisis, such as level of crisis responsibility and crisis type, and should be considered when image repair strategies are being determined (Coombs, 1998).

Communication Strategies to Repair an Image

Benoit's (1997) theory of image repair is grounded in two main assumptions. First, communication is a goal-oriented activity. Second, maintaining a favourable image is a fundamental goal of communication. In situations where face, image, or reputation is threatened, individuals will take measures to repair their damaged reputation. Strategies employed to repair image are understood as goals or "effect[s] sought by discourse" (Ibid: 80). For Benoit, public perceptions are considered more important than the organization's understanding of the situation. In the event that an organization is held responsible for an action and it is considered offensive, Benoit explains that an organization can respond with various defensive strategies aimed towards repairing their image. Communication researchers commonly draw upon Benoit (1997) to analyze strategic responses to crisis (Erikson, Weber & Segovia, 2011).

Image repair theory (Benoit, 1997) indicates five categories and fourteen total options for responding to an image crisis. Denial argues that the act did not occur, or that

the accused did not commit it. Evasion of responsibility focuses on rejecting or underplaying the responsibility of the accused for an act, and includes four variants (e.g., scapegoating, defeasibility, making an excuse based on accidents, and suggesting justification based on motives or action). Reducing offensiveness involves attempts to reduce the negative feeling experienced by the audience, and has six variants (e.g., bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attacking one's accuser, and compensation). Corrective action involves the accused's offer to take action to resolve the problem. This strategy can be extremely important to correct or prevent recurrence of the problem, especially if responsibility is admitted; for stakeholders and the other publics, it can be reassuring to know that action has been taken to repair the damage. The difference between corrective action and compensation, a variant of reducing offensiveness, is that corrective action is characterized by an offer to rectify the situation itself, rather than appease an injured party. Finally, mortification involves acknowledging the commission of an offensive act to reduce its negative impact.

Although image repair theory is highly descriptive and based on "retrospective sense making" through various case studies, it is also criticized as "short on predictive value and causal inferences" due to its reactive, rather than proactive characteristics (Coombs & Schmidt, 2000: 163). Benoit (1997) provides a means to evaluate the success of a particular strategy, but does so solely by analyzing outgoing corporate messages, rather than how publics reacted to these strategies. Burns and Bruner (2000) caution against the causation implicit in Benoit's theory, as "newspaper coverage of an issue can decline for many reasons . . . Benoit's claim that image repair was the sole variable causing reduced decline is therefore questionable" (35). To mitigate this problem,

Coombs and Schmidt (2000) suggest two options for making research more prescriptive so that crisis managers have clearer guidelines for responding to a crisis. The first option is to execute a series of similar case studies, in order to find patterns that would indicate the effect of specific strategies in a certain type of crisis. The second is to empirically examine the effect of various strategies that are employed through a crisis case, using Benoit's (1997) descriptive typologies.

Criticism of image repair and SCCT in the literature relates to the effectiveness of using strategic, rather than communicative action in situations where the public already perceives the organization negatively. Studies (e.g., Erikson, Weber & Segovia, 2011; Gower, 2006; Marcus & Goodman, 1991; Taylor & Kent, 2006) evaluate the effectiveness of different crisis communication strategies, particularly those of Benoit (1997) and Coombs (2007). In general, the concept of repairing an image using evasive strategies is criticized, as this "can be effective, [but can also] come across as insincere and even deceptive, particularly when the organization is obviously in the wrong" (Ulmer et. al., 2014: 58). When organizations use communication strategies other than corrective action, this may indicate to the public that management is not taking full responsibility for the crisis, and not taking action to minimize its impact (Erikson, Weber & Segovia, 2011). While stakeholders are more likely to react more positively when accommodative strategies are used, Gower (2006) notes that bearing responsibility for the crisis may make the organization vulnerable to legal action. As an alternative, corrective action and bolstering strategies (Benoit, 1997) can be used as they present less of a legal risk than strategies of directly accepting responsibility (Ibid). Showing compassion is not equivalent to accepting responsibility for an event or situation, but it can be used to show

concern when the organization cannot be held publicly compassion responsible for their actions, for legal reasons or general uncertainty.

Frame Analysis

The concept of framing has a long and multidisciplinary history, and is largely credited to Walter Lippman in communication, Gregory Bateson in psychology and Erving Goffman in sociology (Hallahan, 1999). Bateson identifies framing as “a spatial and temporal bounding of a set of interactive messages” (1972: 191). For Bateson, the participants’ understanding of the interaction they are engaged in (e.g., social norms and roles) operates as a form of *metacommunication*, which guides the process of communication. Goffman later expanded upon Bateson’s definition from a sociological perspective in *Frame Analysis* (1974), where he investigates the ways in which individuals organize and make sense of their daily experiences and engage in social interaction.

Goffman situates framing theory by thematically questioning the circumstances under which reality is perceived. Drawing upon William James’ (1890a) subdivision of reality into “sub-universes” and Alfred Schütz’s (1945) multiple realities, Goffman premises his discussion with a socially constructed view of reality. Goffman argues that the concept of reality is not constant; it exists through multiple states that guide the individual’s perception of reality, and is subjectively determined based on perspective. Frames guide the individual’s understanding of events, and in turn, the individual reinforces and legitimizes existing frames. Goffman isolates the concept of framing as a specific “schemata of interpretation” that allows individuals to interpret and define a situation through various processes (1974: 21). The frames with which individuals

organize their experiences are cognitive and grounded in “strips”, or sections of a stream of ongoing activity.

For Goffman, “frames imply a correspondence or isomorphism between the individual’s perception and the organization of the strip that is perceived” (Smith, 2006: 56). Definitions of a given situation are anchored into broad primary frameworks that are not dependent on antecedent interpretations or schemas. The primary framework anchors meaning and “provides a way of describing the event to which it is applied” (Goffman, 1974: 24). Primary frameworks are divided into “natural” and “social” frames and constitute the way that individuals respond to a given situation. Natural frames are beyond the individual’s control, while social frames are constructed by the society in which they function. Just as human interactions are inconstant, Goffman (1974) claims that frames shift constantly throughout any given interaction. In any given situation, multiple framings of the same event will occur; Goffman defines these frames as the relative conditions through which individuals perceive and comprehend events (Smith, 2006). Goffman outlines keying, anchoring and fabrication frames in his analysis to discuss how different types of frames can affect the individual’s perceptions of a concept or occurrence. The most important framing processes include *keying*, the transformation of a pre-established primary framework into something else; *anchoring*, the primary framework within which ideas are rooted; and *fabrication*, the efforts of individuals to manage activities so that impressions are maintained. In *fabrication*, reality consists of the understanding of what is going on (Goffman, 1974).

Frame Analysis (Goffman, 1974) provides the foundation for prominent contemporary theories of framing in communication studies (e.g., Entman, 1993; Gamson

& Modigliani, 1987; Hallahan, 1999). Framing theory presents a perspective from which to consider how communication materials are presented, and how they are perceived. For Goffman, the way a message is framed is of greater interest than the original message itself, as elements that are emphasized or excluded from the frame can influence the way it is interpreted. In crisis communication, framing analysis reveals the particular strategies used to convey information to the public. This contributes a vital perspective to this study, particularly as it analyzes how the events of the Toyota crisis were framed by different sources, and how this implicated its corporate image. The following section elaborates further on modern applications of Goffman's (1974) theory in communication studies, as well as how framing theory is applied to an analysis of both media and public relations content.

Framing and Restoring Corporate Image: The Case of Toyota

Media Framing

Media frames capture the richness and complexity of media discourse, providing a sense of the general idea of a body of text, as well as elements of controversy within it (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Entman treats media framing as a deliberate process, where the most essential components are frame selection and salience in defining an issue:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. Frames, then, define problems—determine what a causal agent is doing and costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of cultural values; diagnose causes—identify the forces creating the problem; make moral judgments—value

causal agents and their effects; and *suggest remedies*—offer and justify treatments for the problem and predict their likely effects.

(Entman, 1993: 52)

These processes of inclusion, exclusion, and emphasis play a role in focusing attention on specific aspects of narratives of a given issue or event (Hallahan, 1999). As disseminators of news content, Hallahan further argues that the media have a central role in shaping public perception, as the news selection process essentially “frames the story” and “tells people how to interpret it, as it limits or defines the message’s meaning by shaping the inference that individuals make about the message” (Ibid: 207). The way an issue or event is framed in the media can also have implications on how the story is perceived. As such, frames within media content can be conceived as both a cognitive device used to encode, interpret, and retrieve meaning, as well as reflective of journalistic routines. Framing is a means of both constructing news discourse, or as a characteristic of the discourse itself (Pan & Kosicki, cited in D’Angelo, 2002). In this sense, framing analysis differs from other methodology forms of media analysis, as it studies the organized symbolic elements of news texts to understand how meaning is constructed. Part of the significance of framing analysis is that it can identify the elements that structure meaning for audience members (Ibid).

For journalists, frames are also a means to quickly identify and classify information into a comprehensive package for audiences (Gitlin, 1980). News stories contain a central organizing frame, or theme (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989) that links different semantic elements of a story (e.g. background information, description of an event or actor, quotations from sources) together into a coherent narrative (Pan & Kosicki, cited in D’Angelo, 2002). This frame is represented as a media package, which

gives meaning to a particular issue (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Media frames typically embody a range of positions, and can be captured through numerous devices. (Ibid). Gamson and Modigliani examine specific categories within texts rather than examining the body of text as a whole. Framing devices are manifest elements that serve as indicators of the frame. Gamson and Modigliani (1989) identify five framing devices (i.e., metaphors, historical examples, catchphrases, depictions, and visual images), although other devices can be taken into account, such as:

themes and subthemes, types of actors, actions and settings, lines of reasoning and causal connections, contrasts, lexical choices, sources, quantifications and statistics, charts and graphs, appeals (emotional, logical, and ethical), all of which contribute to the narrative and rhetorical structure of a text.

(Van Gorp, 2010: 91)

These criteria for frame selection can be observed not only in the body of a news article, but also in specific features such as article headlines, subheads, photos, photo captions, source selection, quotation selection⁸, “pull” quotes, logos, and statistics and charts (Tankard, 2001).

D’Angelo (2002) acknowledges the “scattered conceptualization” of framing, given the diversity of these framing devices (881). However, he encourages framing researchers to “use all available unitizing techniques found in content analysis and discourse analysis to defend the existence of different framing devices and provide the

⁸ While Gamson and Modigliani (1989) do not explicitly mention scare quotes within the list of frames approach, Deacon and colleagues (2007) further indicate the presence or absence of scare quotes as an important aspect of framing analysis, as “the presence or absence of these markers helps the work of rebuttal at key junctures in the news narrative” (178). Scare quotes are commonly used devices in media reporting, and are intended to demonstrate that the journalist is not in agreement with the opinion of the speaker, or veracity of the statement that is quoted (Deacon et. al, 2007). They typically appear as inverted quotation marks to delineate a particular lexical item in a sentence at a key juncture. They can cast doubt on the veracity of a statement by highlighting even a simple word (e.g. “because”) in a headline or news article (Ibid).

means to detect frames in news” (Ibid). Reasoning devices (e.g. Entman, 1993) refer to the causal reasoning associated with the receiver’s interpretation of a frame. These causal inferences include problem definitions, diagnosis of causes, moral evaluations, and suggested remedies. Framing and reasoning devices provide a means to evaluate the overall framing package in instances where the perspectives of competing sources are cited⁹.

The framing cycle (Miller & Riechart, 2001) evolves in phases determined by the nature of the efforts made by stakeholders, and their resulting effects. Because issues are not directly related to news values, issues often remain dormant until they impact the public agenda (Ibid). During the *emergence phase*, issues gain visibility and journalists rely on spokespersons as sources of information and comments. After an event propels an issue onto the public agenda, stakeholders begin to establish a specific point of view to frame the issue in the *definition phase*. The definition phase is characterized by framing negotiation between an organization and its stakeholders. In the *resonance phase*, the frames of a stakeholder group become ascendant when they resonate with the values of the public. The *resolution phase* marks the final stage of the framing cycle, where one frame dominates debate, and decision-makers set policy to conform to it. The framing news cycle provides a lens through which to examine frame negotiation between media and public relations during a crisis. While this theory applies mainly to competing sources within media coverage, Miller and Riechart note, “additional propositions could be tested on such important phenomena as the impact of various public relations strategies on placement of frames in news” (2001: 120). As such, this study applies the

⁹ For example, a news article containing a detailed, emotional narrative from a driver and a one-sentence comment from Toyota would be weighted from the driver’s perspective during the coding process.

principles of the framing cycle to understand the media's role as a stakeholder in the framing negotiation process between public relations and the media. The following section discusses the application of strategic framing negotiation from a public relations perspective.

Public Relations Framing

Framing plays an integral role in public relations practice (Hallahan, 1999). As public relations activities are focused on establishing and maintaining mutually beneficial relations with the public, establishing “common frames of reference about topics or issues of mutual concern is a necessary condition for effective relations” (Ibid: 207). Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) identify the potential of framing in public relations to “manage meaning” or influence others (3).

Similar to reasoning devices in news framing, public relations framing consists of framing models that provide structure to the frame. Hallahan (1999) outlines seven models of framing applicable to public relations¹⁰. The most relevant models to this study include framing of attributes, issues, and responsibility, as well news framing (i.e. media framing). In framing of attributes, characteristics of objects and/or individuals are either accentuated or ignored through semantic framing (e.g. product claims or attributes in advertising). Framing of issues is used at all phases of a crisis, including issue management and to contain their development over the life cycle of a crisis or controversy (Ibid). The ultimate objective in this frame is to control the prominence of an

¹⁰ The seven models of framing include: situations, attributes, choices, actions, issues, responsibility, and news (Hallahan, 1999). Framing of attributes, issues, and responsibility were only selected for analysis due to the study's limited scope, as well as their applicability to the research questions.

issue in media reporting, and how it is framed in relation to the public interest. In framing of responsibility, individuals attribute causes of events to either internal or external factors. Efforts to attribute responsibility for issues are employed through either acceptance or denial, depending on the controversy of the issue (Hallahan, 1999). Finally, news framing reflects how stories are portrayed in the media. In proposing a story, public relations professionals engage in processes of preferred framing, and communicate with the media through frame negotiations (Gamson, 1984).

As framing of issues and responsibility are linked with issue management and crisis communication (Hallahan, 1999), typologies of image repair during a crisis (Benoit, 1997) helped to identify these frame models. Framing of issues is intended to control the prominence of an issue in the media through attempts to define the way people think about an issue. Likewise, reducing offensiveness is used to diminish the organization's role in creating or exacerbating the problem, and includes the following six variants: bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attacking one's accuser, and compensation. Framing of responsibility refers to the acceptance or denial of responsibility for an event. This consists of either gaining recognition for good works, or responsibility avoidance in situations of controversy. Responsibility can be framed by acceptance (e.g. denial, corrective action, mortification), or by evading responsibility (e.g. scapegoating, defeasibility, making an excuse based on accidents, and suggesting justification based on motives or action). (Benoit, 1997).

Inconsistencies between corporate statements and media reporting of a crisis can also be explained through framing. As the media have a persuasive impact on public perceptions and can affect the escalation and the de-escalation of a crisis situation, public

relations strategies are generally regarded as successful when *preferred frames* (Hallahan, 1999) are reflected in the news (Schultz et. al., 2012). During a crisis, public relations activities are oriented towards defining the crisis through various framing techniques, such as *attribute framing* to emphasize or de-emphasize certain aspects of the crisis (Hallahan, 1999). Public relations activities “must be concerned with packaging information about the event and the organization’s response in order to shape media coverage, based on knowledge of this type and culturally resonating themes that will garner public favour” (Ibid: 229). While media are expected to report stories free from bias, media framing of events through a singular, dominant perspective has usurped the concept of balanced reporting (Morley, 2011). Other research suggests that journalists strive to frame stories in ways that they perceive will parallel the views of their target audience (Hallahan, 1999). Along with the media’s framing of events and issues, public relations practitioners who provide information as sources for a story also contribute to the framing of a story as it is presented in the media (Zoch & Molleda, 2006). Understanding these different models of framing is highly important when considering strategic objectives from a public relations perspective during a crisis (Hallahan, 1999).

Framing theory has been widely applied to communication studies, due to its potential to connect the processes of presentation of news content and news consumption (Fearn-Banks, 2007). Public relations frames of a crisis may impact media coverage and media framing, which ultimately affect public attitudes toward a particular issue or situation (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). However, the role of social institutions (e.g. the media) in the maintenance of or challenge to frames has not been adequately studied (Hertog & MacLeod, cited in Claeys et al., 2010). As this study is primarily concerned

with investigating organizational communication strategies used to repair image in a crisis, it is important to investigate framing in both media and public relations content. The inclusion of both public relations material and media coverage of the Toyota recall crisis allows for an examination of both impressions “given” and “given off” within impression management theory (Goffman, 1959: 80). Furthermore, while much of corporate communication research takes on an organization-centric perspective, the grounding of image formation in audience reception necessitates an acknowledgement of the influence of other message sources (Cornelissen, 2000). Rather than analyzing one source of information, the inclusion of both forms of content allows for a more holistic perspective on how impressions are managed during a crisis, and how this might impact reports of the same event from public relations and media sources of information. An analysis of media coverage is essential, as public image is ultimately constructed through the impression that is perceived by the audience, regardless of an organization’s preferred framing of an event (Goffman, 1959).

Image, Public Sphere, and Toyota’s Crisis Communication

There is a strong theoretical and conceptual link between the public sphere (Habermas, 1964), communicative action (Habermas, 1984), and public relations and media framing in the Toyota crisis. The public sphere and communicative action bring into focus the role of public relations in incorporating public opinion into crisis decision-making, and how framing impacts the way information is communicated during an image crisis. Drawing on this Habermasian framework, communication and public opinion are viewed in this thesis as central to establishing an effective crisis communication strategy. The Toyota

case study sheds light on this aspect of the theoretical framework, as Toyota shifted its crisis response from being vague and internally focused to being more responsive to public opinion. While media have a responsibility to report factual and unbiased content (Eid, 2008), media framing of the Toyota crisis was largely speculative during this period (Liker & Ogden, 2011).

Framing is central to understanding the structure of both public relations and media content, as frames inevitably highlight or exclude certain aspects of a message. As negative information is typically weighted more heavily than positive information, Hallahan (1999) suggests that a successful framing strategy influences “more effortful processing or message elaboration” (208). Goffman (1974) asserts that all communication is framed in a certain way in order to present relevant aspects of a message. Likewise, in image repair, corporations deliver information to the public by highlighting, changing or excluding certain aspects of the message in order to adhere to the image repair strategy. When this information is reported, certain aspects of those messages are framed, and as such, the meaning of the message may change. Frames are present in all communication, and inevitably reveal the motivations of the individual presenting a given piece of information.

Media Coverage and Toyota’s Impression Management

Perception is a particularly important consideration in an image crisis, as public perceptions of organizational responsibility can determine the severity of the crisis itself (Coombs, 2007). This study draws upon *The Perception of Reality* (James, 1981a) as well as modern theories of impression management and presentation (Benoit, 1997; Coombs,

2007; Goffman, 1959; 1974) to consider how specific aspects of corporate image¹¹ are reflected in media coverage during an image crisis. Toyota's perceived delay in addressing the situation extended to negative characterizations of Toyota's corporate identity as "obsess[ed] with perfection" (Czinkota & Ronkainen, 2012: 538). Toyota's emphasis on fixing problems at the source to detect potential defects¹² was also criticized as an example of fundamental flaws in its corporate identity (Heller & Darling, 2012). Toyota was required to adjust its approach and proactively respond to mounting public speculation to recover its image and credibility¹³. Communication refocused on the principles of Toyota's corporate identity; Toyota later assured the public that its priorities were realigned on "first, safety; second, quality; and third, volume", which indicated a realignment with its traditional sense of corporate identity (Ibid: 164).

The *Consciousness of Self* (James, 1981b) understands the actions of individuals as performances enacted to influence the impressions held by others in a given social situation. When impressions of an individual are threatened, it follows that the actor in question will take measures to recover their image (Goffman, 1959). Within this framework, this study draws on theories of crisis communication (e.g., Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2007) to focus an analysis of Toyota's image repair efforts during the crisis. Toyota's image suffered greatly in the early stages of the crisis, which had an impact when it came to disseminating accurate information to the public and dispelling rumours.

¹¹ This refers to the aspects of corporate image discussed in the literature review, specifically projected image, perceived image, and corporate identity.

¹² This refers to *genchi genbutsu*, an element of the Toyota Way that is focused on investigating the source of the problem to uncover solutions (Liker & Ogden, 2011).

¹³ Many reports of sudden and unintended acceleration were reported, although they were later attributed to driver error and therefore were not founded in reality. However, this was not determined until one year after the recalls began. As such, Toyota was initially criticized for dismissing complaints made by federal regulators and others in February 2010, although it began to respond defensively when the news media and NHTSA began to frame various causes of the recalls (Liker & Ogden, 2011).

Analyzing Toyota's image repair efforts in the greater context of media framing is central to understanding the conditions of effective crisis communication.

Framing contests between public relations and media reveal the struggle to "define" news (L'Étang, 2007: 130). Analyzing both Toyota's external communication and media reporting sheds light on factors that may have influenced media framing, as well as how Toyota responded to it. To understand the role of media framing in defining the crisis, this study also draws upon several media theories (e.g., Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Hall et. al, 1978; Miller & Riechart, 2001). These theories contextualize the analysis of factors external to public relations activities to understand the role of source selection, as well as the role of news values (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Hall et al., 1978) and issues framing (Miller & Riechart, 2001) in framing issues and responsibility. Examining themes articulated by the sources cited within media coverage is an essential component of the framing analysis of this study, as it illustrates the role of different sources in structuring media framing.

The threads of knowledge discussed in this chapter are drawn together to form the theoretical framework, which guides the empirical research of this study. This framework is anchored in the epistemology of William James (1981a; 1981b), who asserts that reality is created through perception, and managed through the consciousness of self. The impressions "given off" by individuals are ultimately dependent on how they are perceived by others. The concepts of perception and consciousness of self situate the theories of impression management and frame analysis (e.g., Goffman, 1959; 1974). Impression management logically flows from these concepts, as it is entirely based on the perceptions of others and can be applied to understanding corporate strategies of image

repair, and how image is managed during a crisis. The empirical research of the study applies Goffman's (1974) framing theory to the analysis of media and public relations content. Hall and colleagues (1978) also contribute to the empirical research, as the concept of primary and secondary definers is applied to capture how sources are used in news reporting, and how this impacts the encoding of news articles. Media and public relations have differing motivations, but both use communication to further their objectives in the public sphere. Jürgen Habermas' (1964; 1984) theories provide a perspective that allows for the examination of different strategic framing practices in both media and public relations content. Image repair and situational crisis communication can be analyzed within the context of the public sphere, and communicative and strategic action (Ibid). As discussed, different strategic motivations influence media and public relations framing during a corporate crisis. The framing cycle (e.g. Miller & Riechart, 2001) and news values (e.g. Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Hall et al., 1978) also provide important considerations to incorporate in an analysis reflective of media and public relations content. The following section discusses the methodological application of these threads of knowledge in this study.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Research Design

The methodology chapter explicates how the foundational ideas within the literature review are applied to achieve the purposes of the study. The objective of the theoretical framework is to provide a lens through which to understand the findings of the study, free from pre-existing assumptions and biases (Neuman, 2011). This chapter begins by making the theories and concepts of the literature review explicit for rigorous application to the study. The research questions provide a starting point from which to investigate the microscopic conceptual level of the thesis, which specifically addresses Toyota's efforts to repair its image during the crisis, as well as media framing of Toyota's image. This chapter finally describes the broader analytical framework of the study, which includes the research design and the procedures used to collect and analyze the data.

Key Concepts

Conceptualization refines abstract concepts into "clear, rigorous, systematic" definitions at the outset of a study so they can be applied to respond to its research questions (Neuman, 2011: 168). As qualitative data often consists of words or symbols rather than the numeric values characteristic of quantitative research, it can be interpreted in various ways (Berg, 1998). While there are multiple definitions of certain concepts within this study, it is important to clarify which definitions guide the methodology and research design. The key concepts precede the research questions to make their application to the research questions explicit. The following key concepts of this study are: corporate

image, corporate identity, attribute frames, cultural frames, image crisis, and image repair.

Corporate Image. Understanding the specific definition of corporate image is important, as this concept anchors the focus of this study. Image is defined as a complex of cognitive interpretations comprised of how an entity or individual is perceived, and is related to the efforts of that entity or individual to project a given impression. In this sense, the outcome of corporate image is observed through the assertion of various attributes of the organization, combined with perceptions of these corporate statements.

Corporate Identity. Corporate identity is a feature of corporate image and refers to the values and beliefs of an organization. This study focuses on the external, rather than internal aspects of corporate identity. For example, corporate identity is observed through external communication materials discussing products, behaviour, and actions (Olins, 1991). Framing of Toyota's corporate identity includes elements such as the Toyota Way, as well as attributes of Toyota's image. Finally, corporate identity is not considered static in nature. The ways in which a corporation presents its identity to the public are subject to change depending on a variety of situational factors. The research questions of the study base the understanding of Toyota's corporate identity in the literature reviewed (e.g. Vincent, 2012), but also reflect a fluid understanding of corporate image, and examine how aspects of Toyota's corporate identity were portrayed at different points in time during the crisis.

Attribute Frames. Through attribute framing, organizations can either emphasize or ignore characteristics of objects and/or individuals through semantic framing (Hallahan, 1999). This study conceptualizes attribute frames through corporate statements about the characteristics of the organization (e.g. the safety of Toyota vehicles; Toyota's commitment to transparency), which are reflective of how the organization wants to be publicly perceived. These frames are indicative of corporate goals, but do not necessarily reflect how the organization is actually viewed by its stakeholders and other publics. Attribute framing within corporate statements and materials can reveal important aspects of corporate image, through the emphasis or exclusion of certain organizational attributes (Ibid).

Cultural Frames. Cultural frames are based on common cultural values, themes, and narratives that help individuals understand and relate to the frame of a given article (e.g. an accepted/established corporate image; American cultural values; the dangers of modern technology). Journalists use these frames to contribute to the dramatization, and emotional appeal of a story (Van Gorp, 2010). Cultural frames allow for an examination of Toyota's image in the context of media reporting practices. These frames are present in problem definitions, diagnoses of causes, moral evaluations, and suggested remedies in articles (Van Gorp, 2010), all of which structure the perceived image of the crisis, and of corporate crisis management.

Image Crisis. A crisis is characterized as a serious, sudden threat to the basic values of a system, combined with uncertainty regarding how events will unfold (Eid, 2008). Critical

decision-making is essential during a crisis, as a result of the uncertainty and time constraints of the situation. Crises also have life cycles that may be amenable to management, although this may not necessarily resolve the situation. (Rosenthal, Hart & Charles, cited in Ibid). Within this framework, this study specifically conceptualizes a corporate image crisis as brought on by a sudden and uncertain threat to corporate image, characterized by a negative shift in stakeholder perceptions of the organization (Benoit, 1997).

Image Repair. The concept of image repair is directly related to critical decision-making during a corporate image crisis. It is specifically used in this study to refer to an organization's strategic communication efforts to mitigate damage to perceptions of corporate image. While this term is borrowed from Benoit (1997), its use in this study encompasses both communication strategies related to both image repair theory (Ibid) and SCCT (Coombs, 2007). This study's application of the term "repair" (Benoit, 1997) rather than "restore" (Benoit, 1995) allows for a fluid examination of corporate image, where image does not necessarily need to be restored to its prior state to be considered repaired.

Research Questions

The main purpose of this study is to identify and investigate shifts in public relations and media framing during the Toyota recall crisis. Guided by the foundations of image and communication articulated in the literature review, the research questions are specifically informed by media theories (e.g. Goffman, 1974; Hall et al., 1978) and crisis

communication theories (Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2007) to inform this analysis. The following two main research questions and four sub-questions orient the research methodology of the study, and reflect the dual analysis of public relations and media content:

RQ1: How did American media frame the Toyota crisis?

RQ1.1: What sources were selected in media framing? Why?

RQ1.2: What cultural frames were embedded in media reporting?

RQ2: How did Toyota frame its corporate image in public relations content?

RQ2.1: What attributes of corporate image were framed? When?

RQ2.2: How did Toyota use image repair to frame its corporate image?

Research Design

The research design of this study flows from the theoretical framework, which establishes perception and self-presentation as mutually dependent concepts. The latent meanings implicit within acts of self-presentation are instrumental in shaping and framing perceptions. This study is concerned with *how* information is presented, rather than simply *what* content is communicated. As such, the methodology of this study is oriented in qualitative framing analysis as a means to uncover latent structures within communication materials.

In contrast to quantitative methods focused primarily on uncovering manifest content, such as traditional content analysis, the qualitative use of framing analysis

provides a means through which to view latent meanings¹⁴ without reducing the analysis to a count of textual elements based on size and frequency. Quantitative methods for measuring media content could lead to an oversimplified framing analysis, particularly when applied to identifying story topics, issue positions, or negative and positive characterizations (Deacon et. al, 2007). As such, the techniques in the qualitative method are able to capture “the general relationship between news and ideology, or the specific processes by which news reproduces or alters ideology” (Tuchman, 1978: 79). The qualitative and interpretive approach to framing analysis can be difficult from a coding perspective, as definite categories may not immediately present themselves. However, allowing these insights to emerge through an inductive approach allows for the emergence of large “macroframes” that would have remained latent within the data through other methods (Reese, 2010: 37). Qualitative framing analysis also gives greater emphasis to the cultural content of frames and how they draw upon a set of shared social meanings (Ibid). The absence of reductionist quantifying measures in qualitative research helps to avoid oversimplification, allowing for ambiguity and complexity in the findings.

Framing analysis was specifically selected to evaluate the research questions of the study because it allows for the examination of the structure of overarching issues, topics, and themes within the data. An examination of frames leads naturally to the exploration of how they are connected to other features that give them support and reinforcement, such as cultural framing, as well as the news production cycle. Within framing analysis, Van Gorp (2010) notes the importance of understanding the structure of

¹⁴ The locus of meaning in manifest content is within the physically present and countable features of content (Berg, 2011), such as source selection or article placement. In contrast, the meaning of latent content is inferred by recognizing the “deep structural meaning” (Ibid: 212) behind the surface structure of a text.

cultural framing. It is important to emphasize these frames within the analysis process as they possess the “defining capacity” to be introduced into social life, and also make an appeal to ideas that are more familiar to the audience (Ibid: 87). Journalists structure news articles with these elements of common understanding, which are often reflective of the culture of the audience. Other features that support the examination of frames include the framing cycle (e.g. Miller & Riechart, 2001), where journalists emphasize certain aspects of the story depending on the duration of the issue. Understanding frames as embedded within culture, as well as the news framing cycle contextualizes the analysis within a greater structure, rather than as part of a series of freestanding, isolated elements (Reese, 2010).

Finally, there is precedent in the crisis communication literature for employing a framing analysis methodology. Framing analysis is used in prominent communication research (e.g., Coombs, 2007) to explore the outcome of crisis communication strategies to repair image. While framing analysis is commonly applied to news content, it is also used to analyze public relations material (Hallahan, 1999). In the news production process, public relations sources frame topics to journalists in order to project a certain frame onto the reporting of an issue or event; journalists need these sources’ frames to create news, but may also add their own frames in the process (Ibid). Van Gorp (2010) recommends including content disseminated by these “frame sponsors”, including press releases, in order to better understand media framing of an issue.

Data Sampling, Collection, and Analysis

Sampling Strategy and Size

Due to the quantity of material encountered, the sample was limited to three newspapers. Articles within this sample were divided based on timeframe, and then purposively selected based on length of description and the relevance of certain articles, as determined by the researcher. The data in this study are selected through non-probability sampling strategy; specifically the purposive sampling technique. While probability sampling is used for quantitative studies and relies on mathematical probability, non-probability sampling is qualitative, does not require a representative sample, and selects a sample of cases that are deemed to be specifically relevant to the interests of the study. Within non-probability sampling, there are seven possible sampling techniques. Out of these seven strategies, purposive sampling was selected, as it allows for case selection that meet specific criteria, which is determined based on the judgment of the researcher. Purposive sampling was used to select appropriate media outlets and specific news articles in this research, which are discussed further in the following section.

Data Collection

In order to generalize the content analyzed across the study, the population of the study included relevant newsroom content from the Toyota website in the United States (e.g. official statements and press releases) and news articles (e.g. online and print) from the *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, and *Los Angeles Times* that included the keywords “Toyota” and “recall”. The focus on American media was appropriate within the

framework of the study, as the bulk of the recalls occurred in the United States and Toyota focused most of its image repair efforts there for this reason. Some articles within the data were purposively eliminated as “frameless”, due to a lack or absence of framing and reasoning devices, as well as the general focus of each news article (i.e. articles had to be primarily focused on the Toyota recall). As the analysis focused on how information was conveyed in the text, rather than its explicit subject matter, some news stories did not meet these criteria essential for the formulation of a frame package and were excluded during the purposive collection of source material. The data were individually printed out for coding and analysis.

With regard to the timeframe of the sample, this study focuses on content related to all recalls that occurred from September 1, 2009 until January 31, 2012. Toyota issued three major recalls from 2009 to 2010, including: the potential for floor mat interference with the accelerator pedal; the possibility of a sticking accelerator pedal¹⁵; and braking problems (i.e. Prius Hybrid). Toyota’s first public announcement specifically regarding the floor mat recalls occurred on September 14, 2009¹⁶. National attention began to focus on Toyota’s quality problems following Mark Saylor’s accident, which allegedly resulted from the SUA of his rented Lexus on August 28, 2009 (Fan, Geddes & Flory, 2011).

¹⁵ Two different recalls related to acceleration occurred within the same timeframe (2009-2010), which included a recall for the potential for floor mat interference with the accelerator pedal, and another recall for the possibility of a sticking accelerator pedal. The potential floor mat interference with the accelerator pedal recall is linked to Mark Saylor’s accident, and involves the possibility of an unsecured driver’s floor mat interfering with the accelerator pedal, causing it to remain pressed down. The second recall is the sticking pedal accelerator recall, which refers to the potential for the accelerator pedal to mechanically stick in a partially depressed position, or return slowly to its original position. While these recalls are separate, some vehicles were affected by both recalls.

¹⁶ Toyota released a consumer safety advisory concerning the floor mat interference with the accelerator pedal on September 14, 2009. There were no earlier public advisories released through Toyota’s United States media newsroom (www.toyota.com). To detect all possible content concerning the problematic floor mats, keywords including “floor mat” and “recall” were used through the search function. No recalls had occurred before this point, and the sharp increase media interest did not follow until months later (Bapuji, 2012).

While complaints did occur before January 1, 2009, prominent media outlets did not feature the story until the Saylor accident occurred on August 28, 2009 (Bapuji, 2012). While the recalls stopped in early 2011, media coverage continued throughout the year as settlement negotiations with NHTSA continued in the aftermath of the recalls. While media coverage on this issue continues to present day, this study analyzes content from September 1, 2009 until January 31, 2012 in order to understand Toyota's image repair efforts in the midst of the crisis and in its aftermath. This follows the recommendations of scholars (e.g. Eid, 2008) who value the advantages of studying the immediate response to a crisis.

As mentioned, the collection of source material included materials from Toyota's online newsroom as well as news articles¹⁷ from the *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, and *Los Angeles Times*. Content was gathered using *Eureka*, *LexisNexis*, *Factiva*, Toyota's online newsroom (i.e. United States website), as well as the newspapers' archived online articles in instances where content was unavailable through the databases. In total, the data population of the study consisted of 867 news articles and 86 press releases. The study focused on Toyota's online newsroom content rather than other materials (e.g. social media), due to the exploratory nature of the study. Toyota's official statements on its online newsroom were further determined to be a sufficient indicator of its efforts to repair its image and communicate publicly. Toyota's online newsroom content was directed to a wide variety of publics, including the media, the United States government and regulatory bodies and American consumers.

¹⁷ News articles are defined as news articles or opinion columns written specifically by reporters. As this study was focused on journalistic reporting of the recalls, letters to the editor from the general public (as well as other content, such as social media) were not included in the sample.

While Toyota recalled millions of vehicles globally, the sample contains only American newspapers and Toyota's United States newsroom, as the bulk of the recalls occurred in the United States, and Toyota's image repair strategy was heavily focused on the American public. This was concluded based on Toyota's image repair efforts, which included an apology to United States Congress, as well as numerous statements to their American customers and letters to the editor of United States newspapers. With regard to the media population of the sample, the *Los Angeles Times* was selected in addition to higher circulating national papers (e.g. *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*), as it covered the recalls extensively, and assigned two beat reporters to the story. Toyota also publicly released letters to the *Los Angeles Times* in response to their coverage of the recalls. National publications (e.g. *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*) were selected based on their high circulation and consistent coverage of the recall crisis¹⁸. Articles in the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* also resulted in responses from Toyota in the form of letters to the editor and press releases. *Eureka*, *Factiva* and *LexisNexis* were used as the primary databases for obtaining media content, in addition to online sources. *Eureka* held articles from the *Los Angeles Times*, *Factiva* held news articles from *Wall Street Journal*, and *LexisNexis* held articles from *New York Times* for the time period of interest (i.e. 2009-2012).

¹⁸ *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times* are consistently ranked (from 2010 to 2011) as two of the highest daily circulating newspapers in the United States with national reach (Alliance for Audited Media, 2010; Ibid, 2011).

Coding and Analysis

The data were analyzed through an inductive process of coding and analysis. The media content and press releases within the sample were analyzed separately through the processes of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. This section first describes the framing analysis during each phase, and then provides separate examples of how media and public relations data were coded.

In the open coding phase, the data were analyzed without the use of the framing matrices (e.g. Appendix A; Appendix B). The raw data were examined to develop broad, initial categories, which were noted, and highlighted in the data. Other key observations were also noted (e.g., clusters of framing devices, reasoning devices, or framing models). The framing categories and elements identified during the open coding phase were examined again during the axial coding phase for patterns and links to overarching ideas and themes. During this phase, framing matrices for public relations (e.g. Appendix A) and media content (e.g. Appendix B) were created in Microsoft Excel to organize and classify the frames that arose from both the open and axial coding processes. This involved looking for connections between items, rather than solely examining individual units of text. To distinguish between a source's point of view and the overall frame of a news article, the coding process also involved asking whether the journalist agreed with the point of view articulated by their sources¹⁹. Finally, it should be noted that while repetition is not necessary for a framing device to have an impact, there were cases where

¹⁹ Elements within news reporting, such as scare quotes (Deacon et al., 2007) were used to indicate whether a journalist agreed with the statements of its sources, or if they were being sourced critically. Other indicators included a predominance of one source in reporting, either through lengthy citations present in the news article, or the selection of particularly salient comments (e.g. emotional).

the impact and salience of a frame stemmed from the repetition of a framing device when this was used for emphasis²⁰.

Selective coding followed the axial coding process to narrow down the existing categories to the most meaningful and mutually exclusive frames, and identify further logical combinations between elements. To understand key events that could have resulted in a frame shift, this phase of coding limited the analysis to ensure that the matrices were comprised of mutually exclusive frames. Simple “yes or no” questions were used to minimize the need for interpretation and identify generic frames in the data²¹. To account for framing shifts, the framing models and devices that structured each framing package were subjectively “weighted” based on salience²², source selection, and prominence in the article. As mutually exclusive frames were uncovered, framing packages were coded within the matrix, comprising typical framing and reasoning devices. This phase also involved looking for clustered framing devices and models, which repeatedly referred to the same core frame, rather than separately analyzing each framing model and device. Some elements from axial coding were excluded at this stage, while others that strongly reflected the overall frame of an article/press release were included. The reasoning devices (i.e. definition of problems, causal responsibility, moral evaluations, and suggested remedies) were evaluated for common themes. The end result of this step was a list limited to the most meaningful and key frames observed in the data.

²⁰ While this study took note of “counts” of framing devices in this sense, it is still considered qualitative in nature, as it focuses primarily on the analysis of the underlying meaning behind frames.

²¹ For example, questions such as “does this story suggest that the government is somehow responsible for providing a remedy to the problem?” and “does this press release suggest that Toyota is denying the presence of defects in their vehicles?” were asked.

²² In accordance with the literature on news values (e.g. Galtung & Ruge, 1965), certain features within a given frame are considered more salient than others to consumers of news content, such as appeals to morality or emotion, or negative evaluations of a person or organization.

As stated, media and public relations content were coded separately. For media content, the raw data were coded to identify framing and reasoning devices, as well as the emergence of key patterns and themes. A framing analysis coding sheet was developed for media relations data to guide the process of identifying and coding the sources cited within articles (RQ1.1), and the ways in which cultural frames (RQ1.2) structured reasoning devices²³ in media content (e.g. Appendix A). For example, the following paragraph from a news article was coded according to these guidelines:

Comfortably preoccupied with rooting out internal weakness, the Toyota Way is lost when it comes to contending with outside threats . . . The drawbacks of the Toyota Way are unique, but the experience of rising to a peak in business, only to suffer a precipitous fall, isn't. In the early '90s, America Online leveraged its Everyman attitude toward the intimidating Internet into a dominant position, only to almost destroy itself in a disastrous merger with Time Warner. An aggressive Web pioneer couldn't sustain innovation while simultaneously being the No. 1 destination for digital media.

(DeBord, February 6)

- **Source (RQ1.1):** N/A (Journalist's own description)²⁴
- **Cultural Frame (RQ1.2):** Toyota's corporate culture (e.g. "Toyota Way")
- **Framing devices:** Exemplar: Peaked success (e.g. America Online's failed merger with Time Warner)
- **Reasoning devices:** Problem definition: Damage to sales and reputation;
Diagnosis of causes: Internal weakness; Toyota Way

²³ As discussed, these included problem definitions, diagnosis of causes, moral evaluations, and suggested remedies in media content.

²⁴ In cases where sources were cited, they were categorized by the identity of the source (e.g. driver; industry expert; government representative; Toyota spokesperson). In cases of imbalanced frame negotiation within an article (i.e. particularly related to the causes of SUA), the excerpt of text including both sources was noted and the more prominent source was indicated. The rationale for selecting this source was also briefly stated in the coding sheet (e.g. emotional statements; long quotation). This information was useful during the selective coding phase.

Public relations data were coded to identify and examine the attributes of Toyota's image (RQ2.1) and the image repair strategies (RQ2.2) within this content (e.g. Appendix B). Press releases were coded for framing of attributes, as well as frames of image repair. Framing of attributes involves the accentuation of particular aspects of an issue or individual by public relations practitioners. Image repair strategies involved the framing of the issue, and Toyota's framing of its responsibility. For example, the following excerpted press release contained both of these elements:

Although most of these reports have yet to be verified, Toyota has been and remains committed to investigating all reported incidents of sudden acceleration in its vehicles quickly. Toyota wants to hear directly from its customers about any problems they are experiencing with their vehicles. The results of the evaluations have been submitted to NHTSA for review. Though these reports involve a tiny fraction of the more than one million vehicles dealers have repaired to date, Toyota takes them extremely seriously.

(Toyota, March 4)

- **Attribute frames (RQ2.1):** Responsive; communicative (e.g. "wants to hear directly from its customers")
- **Image Repair frames (RQ2.2):** Minimization (e.g., "most of these reports have yet to be verified"; "tiny fraction"); Corrective action (e.g. "Toyota has been and remains committed to investigating all reported incidents")
- **Reasoning devices:** Problem definition (e.g. "unverified reports")

Concerns about the reliability and validity of framing research largely stem from the difficulty in demonstrating the relationship between the abstract frame, and the framing elements within a text that evoke this frame on the side of the receiver (Van Gorp, 2010). Taking a systematic approach to analysis helps to avoid the "arbitrary" identification of frames (Tankard, 2001: 99). Furthermore, conditions of reliability are

measured differently in a qualitative and quantitative research. In qualitative studies, the researcher's relationship with the data is interpreted within an evolving setting where measures cannot be exactly replicated, in contrast to the rigid and positivistic terms of quantitative research. (Neuman, 2011). As qualitative research focuses on soft data such as words and symbols, rather than numbers, it is impossible to exactly replicate research in the quantitative sense (Ibid: 135).

Reliability refers to dependability, or consistency in research. While reliability in quantitative studies refers to replication, qualitative studies are not confined to these same positivist ideas. This is an advantage of qualitative studies, as they can account for aspects of diversity in the social world without risking oversimplification or overlooking fundamental observations. (Neuman, 2011). This study maintained reliability by constantly comparing the data with the concepts and definitions of the study during the coding process. The data were also coded three times through open, axial, and selective coding to gather a complete picture of the data, and ensure that it accounted for the most important frames.

Validity generally refers to truthfulness, although there is no single version of the truth in qualitative studies. Instead, research aims toward authenticity, which strives to reflect a “fair honest, and balanced account of social life” where the focus is on capturing an in-depth and accurate view of how events are actually understood (Neuman, 2011: 181). To be considered valid, a researcher claims need to be plausible, meaning that while they are not the only “truths” that exist in the world, they are powerful and persuasive representations that reveal meaningful and noteworthy interactions with the data. As research claims gain more validity as the diversity of content increases, the content for

this study includes empirical data from a variety of media to understand connections between the diverse data (Neuman, 2011). This study takes these measures to maintain validity, as it includes empirical data from a variety of sources, including both Toyota's press releases and three newspapers. When considered together, this creates a substantial weight of evidence towards understanding the connections between the diverse data (Ibid).

This chapter has described the qualitative research design and methodology used to examine the framing of Toyota's corporate image between September 2009 and January 2012. Chapter 4 discusses the findings of the qualitative framing analysis in response to the research questions of the study. Through an analysis and discussion of framing within the data, the following chapter establishes how framing of the crisis impacted Toyota's corporate image, and provides a foundation for strategic recommendations and implications for communicating effectively to media stakeholders during a crisis.

Chapter 4

Findings and Discussion

The findings of the qualitative framing analysis reveal a rich perspective of Toyota's image repair between September 2009 and January 2012. Several important frames and framing shifts were observed in both public relations and media content. These findings were highly revealing of how the crisis was framed in the media (i.e. through source selection and culturally embedded themes), as well as how Toyota framed attributes, issues, and its responsibility for the crisis. This chapter is organized in response to the research questions, and discussion is focused on the analysis of frames identified as most fundamental to the research questions of the study. The theoretical framework outlined in the literature review anchors and guides this discussion.

Media Framing

The following section discusses the findings of the qualitative news framing analysis, with reference to the issues framing cycle (i.e. Miller & Riechart, 2001). To contextualize the discussion of media framing within the timeframe of the analysis (i.e. September 2009-January 2012), this section begins by identifying each phase of the framing cycle in relationship to the data.

As the first phase in the framing cycle, the emergence phase was first determined by the first mention of SUA in the media sample, followed by uncontested problem definitions by Toyota (e.g. misplaced floor mats). The emergence phase was brief within the sample (e.g. September 2009-November 2009), as frame negotiation related to the

cause of the accidents began quickly (e.g. November 2009), when media began to suggest electronics as a possible cause of SUA, in contrast to Toyota's insistence that the floor mats were the source of the problem. The definition phase involved frame negotiation regarding the causes of SUA between public relations and the media, in addition to various stakeholders cited in media coverage (e.g. drivers, industry experts, and government lawmakers and regulators). This period lasted roughly from November 2009 until March 2010. In the resonance phase (e.g. December 2010-February 2011), driver error was generally established as the cause of SUA in media coverage. This was impacted by the findings of a joint National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and NHTSA study that supported Toyota's claims that the problems were not mechanical. In the resolution phase (e.g. February 2011-January 2012), media coverage of policy began to conform to the dominant frame²⁵. While Toyota did not escape blame, news coverage also looked to NHTSA's role in the crisis, and suggested remedies related to improving its regulatory standards.

Source Selection Practices

Responding to RQ1.1 requires a discussion of the statements originating from external sources in media reporting. The sources selected in media coverage are a vital part of the framing process; this section examines the types of sources selected in media content, as well as how the content of their statements contributed to media framing of Toyota. The primary definers within the timeframe of the study included: drivers, industry and subject matter experts, government lawmakers and governmental agencies, and Toyota

²⁵ The March 2011 Japanese earthquake and tsunami also contributed to shift media framing of the problem to Toyota's reliance on Japanese production during this phase.

spokespersons. These sources served to define problems, diagnose causes, provide moral evaluations, and suggest remedies during the crisis.

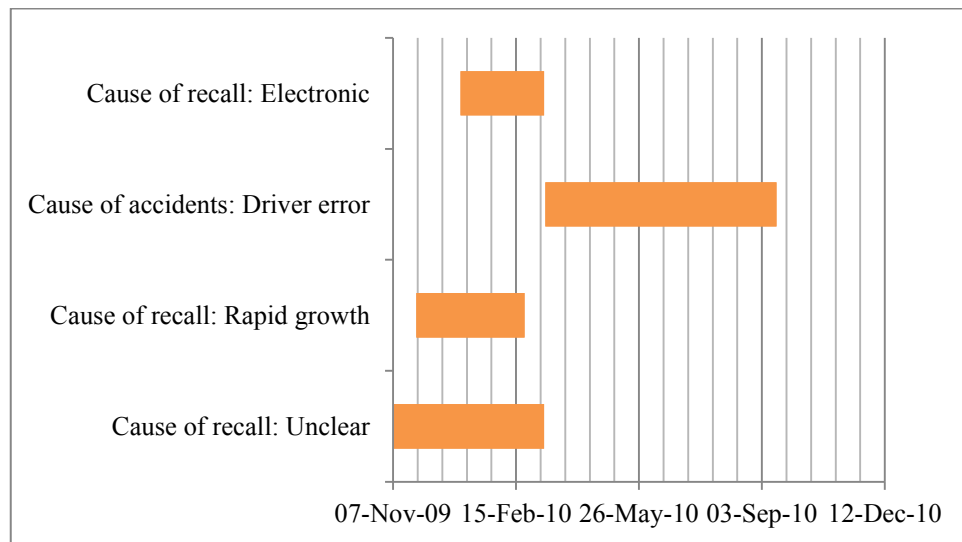
The findings of the study indicate that source selection played a key role in contributing to media framing of the Toyota crisis. Drivers and industry experts structured problem definitions, diagnosed causes, and moral evaluations during the definition phase. Furthermore, government sources structured media framing related to attributing responsibility and suggesting remedies during the resolution phase of the framing cycle. While Toyota sources were also cited during the definition phase and contributed to framing, the media typically focused on driver or expert statements. The following section details the contribution of each source to the framing of the crisis through a discussion of key framing and reasoning devices.

Toyota Drivers

The “drivers” category included owners of Toyota vehicles, family members of victims, and other individuals personally affected by the Toyota recalls and accidents. These sources were an integral part of media framing of the Toyota crisis from January 2010-March 2010, contributing mainly to audience identification (i.e. Galtung & Ruge, 1965) and diagnosing causes in news reporting of the crisis. The media in the sample speculated heavily about the causes of SUA from November 2009 to March 2010 (i.e. definition phase), until driver error emerged as a more likely cause of the accidents (e.g. Figure 1). During the definition phase, driver statements about the causes of the accidents were

based on anecdotal and experiential²⁶ evidence, which contributed to diagnoses of causes and moral evaluations. Certain reasoning devices, such as moral evaluations by drivers, were important to the framing of Toyota's image; relatable stories presented from a "human" perspective are generally more newsworthy and salient aspects of media content (Ibid; Gamson and Modigliani, 1989). As media framing moved towards the resolution phase, driver sources were not cited as prominently in news framing of the problem or its causes.

Figure 1: Diagnosed Causes in News Articles²⁷



First, drivers' anecdotal and emotional statements structured the diagnosis of an electronic problem in the early definition phase. Anecdotal evidence (i.e. Toyota drivers' personal experiences) structured counter-frames against Toyota's explanations for the

²⁶ It should be noted that industry experts (e.g. engineers) were also cited in articles during the definition phase; their role is detailed further in the following section. Industry experts structured the diagnosis of causes, but unlike driver sources, they did not contribute to salient moral evaluations in news articles.

²⁷ This figure is reflective of the qualitative frames observed in the analysis, and is not quantitative. As such, the purpose of this figure is to represent the qualitative frames and framing shifts that emerged across the timeframe of the study.

recalls. For example, “Doubt Cast on Toyota's Decision to Blame Sudden Acceleration on Gas Pedal Defect” focused on driver explanations of the problems in their vehicles, rather than those of industry experts, NHTSA, or Toyota (Bensinger & Vartabedian, January 30). Toyota was not cited in the article; a brief statement from NHTSA claiming, “[NHTSA] looks into all possible defects with these vehicles” was followed by a series of detailed stories from drivers of Toyota vehicles. One driver, for example, claimed to have “hooked his toe under the pedal to pull [the brake] up. It was not stuck and the floor mat was not interfering with the pedal” (Ibid). Toyota’s use of strategic communication, rather than principles of communicative action (e.g. transparency) ultimately impeded its image repair efforts. The absence of a clear statement by Toyota or effective corrective action by the company only worsened the situation; media reports during this period cited Toyota drivers that were uncertain about the specific technical cause of the problem, but were positive that it was not related to the floor mat issue. Toyota’s denial and unresponsiveness fuelled speculative media coverage during this period.

During this period, driver sources also structured moral evaluations related to Toyota’s responsibility to correct the situation. Articles focused on the human impact of the recalls, where drivers had “no choice” but to continue driving potentially unsafe vehicles (Bennett & Linebaugh, January 28). Frames of Toyota’s responsibility for the crisis included emotional appeals as a result of Toyota’s inaction such as, “[t]he dealer says there is nothing they can do and can't give us a loaner car. We feel like we can't drive it because what happens if we drive it again and someone gets killed?” (Ibid). Moral evaluations like this added an emotional frame to articles regarding Toyota’s failure to respond during the early stages of the crisis. First-hand accounts of drivers

provided a personal perspective of the ramifications of Toyota's failure to respond quickly to driver concerns. The driver's statement, "what happens if we drive it again and someone gets killed?" is an example of how sourcing practices coloured articles with emotional elements that impacted the overall framing of the article (Ibid). These statements by Toyota drivers generally functioned to provide a human-interest aspect in coverage of the cause of the recalls. Quotations expressing fear through experiential evidence played an important role in structuring the overall framing package, particularly when juxtaposed with unemotional corporate statements. These emotional driver statements were weighted more heavily in determining frame packages, in accordance with the recommendations in the literature reviewed (e.g. Hall et al., 1978).

Drivers were prominently sourced as the causes of SUA were defined in media coverage. From the perspective of frame negotiation during the early phases of the framing cycle, the presence of moral evaluations influenced the saliency and news value of a given statement. Media relied more heavily on driver sources to diagnose causes of the recalls during the definition phase; drivers structured causal frames in the media sample from November 2009 to March 2010. Toyota's initial unresponsiveness and vague communication did little to correct the situation. Once driver error became more widely accepted in media coverage as the cause of the accidents (i.e. March/April 2010), media reports used industry experts and Toyota to structure frames, rather than driver accounts.

Industry Experts

Industry experts cited in media coverage included experts in the automotive industry (e.g. analysts, academics, consultants, and engineers), as well as public relations and marketing experts. The most common reasoning devices in statements by industry experts were related to defining problems, diagnosing causes, and suggesting remedies. Expert sources contested Toyota's framing of the cause of SUA during the definition phase of the framing cycle. Once the resonance phase was completed, the "electronic cause" theory largely ceased to dominate debate; problem definitions shifted to issues such as Toyota's recovery and safety regulation standards at NHTSA. The type of industry source cited, such as experts on Japanese business and culture, also impacted the overall frame structure of media articles.

In addition to drivers, industry experts (e.g. engineers) structured frames of technology in articles during the definition phase and contributed to the diagnosis of an electronic cause. This can be seen through Toyota's failed impression management in media coverage during the early phases of the crisis:

Company officials first put the blame on floor mats that could entrap the accelerator, later amending that to include gas pedals themselves that could stick. But they have vigorously asserted that there is no evidence of a glitch in the electronics or software . . . "Cars are moving computers, and the electronics are the very heart of the car," said Ian Mitroff, emeritus professor of US Congress' Marshall School of Business and a consultant on crisis management. "Unlike a mechanical problem, like a sticking pedal, the fix is not easily understood," he said.

(Bensinger & Vartabedian, February 14)

Juxtaposed with the engineer's more comprehensive and detailed statements, Toyota's simple denial is an example of failed impression management. An academic source is directly cited to structure the overall diagnosis of causes in this article, in contrast to the

journalist's paraphrase of Toyota's position on the issue. While Toyota has a vested interest in "put[ting] the blame" (Ibid) on floor mats, which are easier to fix, the professor is used to provide balance and impartiality. To counter Toyota's one-line statement that "there is simply nothing there to say electronic controls are causing the problems", an electrical engineer within the same article adds that the technology is so complex that it can be difficult to spot defects, and "when you can't spot it, it's just as dangerous and deadly as a major mechanical problem" (Ibid). The function of industry experts in this article is to provide expertise, in contrast to Toyota's repeated denial of electronic issues. This example of counter-framing is representative of Toyota's loss of control over the diagnosis of causes in media content. When juxtaposed with these expert statements, media framing positioned Toyota sources as unclear and self-interested, in contrast to impartial, "expert" sources. This directly opposed Toyota's denial of electronic defects at the time, and its corrective action efforts to repair floor mats and sticking accelerator pedals.

Industry experts later concurred with Toyota's diagnosis of mechanical causes during the resolution phase. Media adopted the mechanical cause frame following the definition phase, and expert sources shifted their position. For example, following the release of NASA and NHTSA's 10-month investigation into the allegations of SUA in Toyota vehicles, a media report cited an engineer who affirmed that, while it was difficult to completely disprove an electronic problem, it was highly unlikely:

An engineer from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, brought in to help conduct the inquiry, was slightly less categorical but still emphatic. "It's very difficult to prove a negative," said Michael T. Kirsch, a principal engineer with NASA's Engineering and Safety Center. But the electronic system for throttle controls in Toyotas would require

two separate sensors to fail simultaneously in such a way that neither created an “error code” in the vehicle’s onboard computer.

(Wald, February 9)

The engineer’s statement does not categorically support the impossibility of an electronic cause, but it is framed in such a way that emphasizes the unlikelihood of its occurrence. This example reflects the general framing of issues during the resonance phase: even in instances when expert statements did not reflect the dominant frame (e.g. the mechanical or driver error cause), they are contextualized in such a way that they do not directly contest it.

Media sourcing practices also supported culturally embedded frames uncovered in the data. As discussed in the literature review, cultural framing is a central aspect of media framing. Journalists use these commonly established beliefs to contextualize and explain phenomena to readers through these frames, which can contextualize public opinion and discourse . In particular, “expert” sources supported the cultural framing of Toyota as a Japanese company. For example, media commonly consulted experts in Japanese business and cultural norms to assess Toyota’s crisis communication activities:

Ulrike Schaefer, a professor of Japanese business at UC San Diego, said she was impressed with the skill in which Toyoda and Toyota Motor North America President Yoshimi Inaba fielded the questions. “They’re in there and answering questions in detail,” she said. “They’re very calm, not defensive. They’ve been apologetic and informative.”

(Vartabedian & Bensinger, February 24)

In this statement, the expert’s identity as a professor of Japanese business contextualizes her assessment of Toyota’s communication activities from a cultural perspective, reinforcing the Japanese cultural frame. The professor explains Toyota’s image repair activities in the context of her knowledge of Japanese culture. She specifically focuses

on the causal link between Toyota's culture and its communication: Toyota's calm, apologetic demeanour is juxtaposed with a potentially defensive reaction. Her expression of being "impressed" by Akio Toyoda and Yoshimi Inaba's "detail" in responding to questions implies a general expectation that Japanese business executives would be more defensive and vague in their communication (Ibid). These experts generally functioned to interpret Toyota's image repair actions from a cultural perspective during the definition phase of the crisis.

Similar to drivers, industry experts were most prominently sourced during the definition phase of the crisis. Experts provided a more impartial perspective in news reports defining problems, diagnosing causes, and suggesting remedies related to the Toyota recall. In addition, journalists cited experts in Japanese business to structure these reasoning devices within a broader cultural frame. Toyota's actions were interpreted through the lens of its identity as a Japanese company. Experts in Japanese business interpreted Toyota's image repair actions through this cultural context. Furthermore, Toyota's shift to more transparent communication was viewed in opposition to this Japanese cultural frame. This paralleled findings that Toyota was later perceived to focus more strongly on the American public, both by issuing recalls in the United States more proactively, as well as tailoring its image repair efforts to the American public.

Government Sources

Government regulators and lawmakers cited in media reporting primarily evaluated Toyota's image repair efforts and allocated responsibility during the during the definition

and resolution phases²⁸. This specifically included government agencies (e.g. NHTSA), members of the United States Congress, and the United States Secretary of Transportation. NHTSA initially claimed responsibility for holding Toyota accountable, but later shifted the blame to Toyota when Members of Congress pointed to their inability to assess Toyota's electronics. Members of Congress also focused on NHTSA's responsibility as a regulator, and its failure to hold Toyota accountable during the resolution phase of the framing cycle.

Members of the United States Congress and House of Representatives criticized both Toyota and NHTSA for their role in responding to the accidents and issuing recalls. This was slightly positive for Toyota, as NHTSA shared some of the burden of responsibility for failing to respond during the resolution phase. Members of Congress held NHTSA accountable in statements to the media, focusing attention on NHTSA's responsibility as a regulatory body, "at issue . . . is when the company and NHTSA first learned of the problems and whether they responded appropriately" (Bensinger & Vartabedian, January 30). In this respect, Toyota and NHTSA were jointly held responsible, in contrast to earlier in the crisis, when Toyota faced the full burden of responsibility. In February and March 2010, the focus of responsibility shifted to NHTSA in statements such as, "NHTSA's actions really trouble me" (Mitchell, February 17). Although NHTSA investigated the need for a black box to monitor vehicles in the event of SUA, it was commented that the "agency's response to safety defects on automobiles has been 'sluggish'" (Maynard, March 12). Like Toyota, NHTSA faced harsh criticism for failing to act quickly to rectify the situation, even despite early assertions of corrective

²⁸ Media coverage still remained critical of Toyota during the resolution phase, even though speculation had stopped. News articles regarding Toyota's continuing litigation resulted in negative coverage, although it declined in volume, compared to February 2010.

action. Members of Congress also drew attention to the conflict of interest between NHTSA and Toyota in statements like, “the safety agency has become too close to the industry it is charged with regulating, as a number of agency employees have gone to work for Toyota” (Lichtblau & Vlasic, February 10). While this coverage was generally negative, the fact that the NHTSA was also a focus of criticism was determined to be more favourable for Toyota than during the definition phase, when it was solely held responsible for the crisis response.

The link between perceptions and reality examined in the literature review can be observed through the framing negotiations that occurred between sources in media coverage across the issues cycle, particularly between NHTSA and Toyota. Frame negotiations between Toyota and NHTSA ended during the resonance phase of the issues cycle because NHTSA could not compete with the dominant “driver error” frame. Toyota faced the majority of negative coverage from September to late February 2010, but there was a shift in accountability from Toyota to NHTSA in 2011. For example, in 2011, NHTSA completely reversed its earlier criticisms of Toyota and concurred with its denial of an electronic cause, “the verdict is in. There is no electronic based cause for sudden unintended acceleration in Toyotas. Period” (Wald, February 9). This affirmative statement sharply contrasted previous criticism of Toyota, and is indicative of the general consensus of the “driver error” cause in media coverage in 2011. A performer can attempt to define a situation, but ultimately the reality of the impression lies with the audience: once driver error was generally accepted by the public, NHTSA was forced to concede with Toyota, ending the frame negotiation.

Governmental sources mainly structured problem definitions by pointing to Toyota and NHTSA's responsibility for the lack of accountability during the crisis. Members of Congress and the House of Representatives most commonly appeared in media articles during the February 2010 congressional hearings. While Toyota did not escape criticism during the resonance and resolution phases, Members of Congress and the House of Representatives also pointed to NHTSA's responsibility as a regulator, and their failure to adequately investigate the issue of SUA. Ultimately, this was not unfavourable for Toyota; the company was no longer the primary focus of attacks in later news articles about the NHTSA's role in the crisis. NHTSA also eventually supported Toyota's framing of the causes of the crisis, conceding that driver error was the root of the SUA issue.

Toyota Spokespersons

Miller and Riechart (2001) note that the emergence phase is characterized by a predominance of public relations sources (i.e. in the event of a corporate crisis). While early reports (e.g. Mitchell, September 30) accepted Toyota's framing of the floor mats as the cause of SUA, the emergence phase was very brief. Toyota essentially missed the opportunity to gain credibility and the issues cycle progressed to the uncertain definition phase. Toyota was generally vague and unresponsive until February/March 2010, continually denying an electronic cause and failing to propose an effective remedy. Toyota was ultimately unable to convince the public of its control or authority over the situation in 2009.

Toyota sources initially denied any possible cause of the accidents outside of floor mats and sticking brake pedals. While this was initially accepted by the media, news articles began to doubt Toyota's interpretation of the causes of SUA as early as November 2009. The news media began to report on the issue using competing frames from Toyota and other sources to diagnose the cause of the problem. For example, an article in the *New York Times* illustrated these framing negotiations between industry experts, Toyota, and consumers:

Independent vehicle-testing firms have found that acceleration problems can occur in Toyotas even when floor mats were not present . . . A spokesman for Toyota, Irv Miller, said the company had "no indication" that acceleration problems were caused by anything other than floor mats jamming gas pedals . . . Some consumers question the floor-mat explanation.

(Vlasic & Bunkley, November 26)

This is another example of framing negotiation intended to criticize Toyota's crisis communication efforts, as well as its failed strategic communication. While the inclusion of multiple sources is generally intended to give articles a balanced impression, this article uses competing sources to structure critical framing of Toyota's explanations of SUA. Toyota's credibility is put into question, as the journalist surrounds Toyota's claims with doubts from both a vehicle testing firm as well as consumers. Irv Miller's claims that Toyota has "no indication" of an alternative cause casts general doubt on its claims, as they are highlighted through scare quotes that generally imply journalistic distance or sarcasm (Deacon et. al, 2007). Toyota's attempt to manipulate opinion through the use of denial and vague communication are ultimately undermined by the journalist's critical framing.

During the definition phase, unnamed Toyota sources were used to discredit and cast doubt on Toyota's management and corporate identity. Anonymous "managers" and "engineers" from Toyota were cited in articles criticizing Toyota's actions or presenting a glimpse into the internal discord within the company's communication in citations such as, "[t]he only way we find out anything about the crisis is through the media," said a high-ranking Toyota chief engineer in Japan. 'Does Mr. Toyoda have the ability to lead? That's on every employee's mind' " (Shirozu & Sanchanta, February 23). Internal emails were also leaked to the media, where employees made statements like, "if the engineer who knows the failures well attends the meeting, NHTSA will ask a bunch of questions about the [electronics] . . . I want to avoid such situations" (Pfeifer & Bensinger, August 3). These statements exposed internal weaknesses, and structured overall negative framing of Toyota's corporate identity and culture. While the Toyota Way was framed positively during the initial phase of the crisis, these sources cast doubt on the strength of Toyota's internal operations. In this sense, Toyota's corporate identity became framed as a cause of the problems, rather than a suggested remedy.

Toyota used various appeals to American cultural values in their impression management during the crisis. In February 2010, Toyota sources defensively attempted to structure problem definitions and suggested remedies through an American cultural framework. Defining Toyota as an American car and a contributor to the United States economy was an important aspect of Toyota's image repair strategy, particularly during the February 2010 congressional hearings. Toyota spokespersons defensively projected an image of the company as attentive to American drivers and as committed to producing

vehicles in the United States. News reports selected Toyota's defensive responses in excerpts of heated exchanges during the congressional hearings, such as:

In one testy exchange, Mr. Inaba seemed to chafe at the notion that Toyotas aren't American vehicles. "You are driving an American car," Mr. Inaba replied, later adding, "The Camry hybrid is produced here. And vast majority of the parts are coming from the United States."

(Linebaugh & Mitchell, February 25)

The inclusion of these statements is particularly important when considering the cultural frames that emerged in the media framing analysis. Toyota's insistence that its cars were American, and that a significant amount of its manufacturing occurred in the United States structured a counter-frame to external attacks claiming the opposite. The presence of these quotations helped to implicitly define the tone of the article, as well as the overall implications of the recalls on the United States. These statements also shaped Toyota's image in media frames; Toyota's statements reflected its strong disagreement when portrayed as unconcerned with its American drivers. This appeal to American cultural sentiments and downplaying of Toyota's identity as a Japanese car company showed Toyota's shift in response to public opinion in the United States (i.e. media coverage).

The role of Toyota sources in news framing is highly important in understanding Toyota's initial mistakes in their public relations strategy — and the limitations of using the principles of strategic, rather than communicative action in crisis communication. As stated, news coverage during the emergence phase of a public relations crisis is generally characterized by primarily public relations sources. Toyota had the opportunity to respond to reports of other issues in their vehicles, but instead continued to deny them and insist on the floor mats as the cause of the problem. Later on in the crisis, anonymous internal sources revealed fundamental weaknesses in internal communication and

operations, which further impeded image repair efforts by Toyota. Finally, defensive responses from Toyota sources were also cited in news reports criticizing their response in the United States, and were an important part of framing negotiations in articles during the 2010 congressional hearings. Toyota's most effective communication was in its more comprehensive and transparent response to the crisis, which ultimately shifted frame negotiations between sources and worked in its favour.

The findings reveal in response to RQ1.1, that source selection had a fundamental role in defining the causes of the crisis in media content, as well as framing responsibility during the recall period. The different sources that were selected (e.g. drivers, industry experts, and government sources) played different roles in structuring media framing at different points in the issues framing cycle. Ultimately, drivers and industry experts structured problem and causal definitions during the definition phase, competing with Toyota sources. Drivers created a human-interest frame for articles, while industry experts may have provided a more impartial perspective than Toyota's public relations spokespersons. Governmental sources structured framing of Toyota and NHTSA's responsibility when a recall is necessitated as well as communicating transparently and cooperating with safety regulations. Finally, "leaked" Toyota sources contributed to negative framing of Toyota's corporate identity and culture. Defensive statements by Toyota sources were included in articles regarding its commitment to American consumers, indicating a shift in response from Toyota based on public opinion. Toyota's efforts to establish the causes of SUA and establish credibility were ultimately impacted by these sourcing practices, which influenced problem definitions, diagnosis of causes, moral evaluations, and suggested remedies during the crisis.

Culturally Embedded Themes

Frames are located not only in the communicator, the text, and the receiver, but also in the culture at large (Kuypers, cited in Reese, 2010). In this sense, frames act as central organizing ideas that provide interpretive cues to the reader by contextualizing stories through pre-accepted cultural frames. The following section addresses RQ1.2 by identifying and discussing key culturally embedded frames uncovered in the news framing analysis. The following frames were determined to be the most important in the data analyzed: corporate image, cultural identity, and modern technology. Media reporting focused heavily on frames with cultural resonance, and established a series of culturally embedded frames through the definition of problems, diagnosis of causes, and suggestion of remedies related to Toyota's corporate image, Japanese and American culture, and the technology in Toyota vehicles. News framing of Toyota's corporate image initially diagnosed the cause of the problem as Toyota's loss of its traditional values, and later shifted to definitions of Toyota's corporate culture as the cause of the recall problems. The American media in the sample used Japanese and American cultural frames to define problems, diagnose causes, and suggest remedies related to physical proximity, communication, and American production and jobs. Finally, technology was initially framed as a problem, and later as a suggested remedy when driver error was established as the root cause of the SUA accidents. The following sections discuss these key frames, and contextualize the analysis with news values (i.e. Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Hall et al., 1978) and issue framing (i.e. Miller & Riechart, 2001) discussed in the literature review.

Corporate Image

The following discussion of corporate image is rooted in the shifting, subjective understanding of reality (i.e. James, 1981a; 1981b; Goffman, 1974) discussed in the theoretical framework. In this sense, corporate image is examined as a shifting concept based on factors including socially embedded cultural themes and the influences inherent in the issues cycle.

Toyota's corporate image was a culturally embedded theme in itself, as its branding as a safe and reliable car was commonly recognized and accepted in media coverage. As such, news framing of the Toyota crisis attempted to reconcile Toyota's previous image related to the safety and quality of its vehicles with the widespread reports of vehicular defects. To address this issue, the American media frequently referenced Toyota's prior image in contrast to the current recalls as a point of interest, and attempted to reconcile the gap between the two through different explanations related to Toyota's corporate values. Toyota's rapid global expansion was specifically framed as the cause of the loss of Toyota's focus on safety and quality. Later, problem definitions shifted to defining these same values as the root of the problem. Media reporting began to doubt the competency of Toyota's internal processes and sincerity of its corporate values, and focused on the foundations of Toyota's production and management as potential causes of the vehicular defects. Toyota's lack of transparency and prioritization of profits over the safety of its customers were also framed as a consequence of corrupt corporate interests.

During the early definition phase, the media consistently framed Toyota's current recalls as a departure from the values that led to their previous success. This finding was consistent with news values criteria in the literature reviewed (e.g. Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Hall et al., 1978), as unexpected events increase the impact of a news article. Initial media framing of the crisis focused on the surprising contrast between Toyota's former image regarding its safety and reliability, and Toyota's series of accident reports and recalls. For instance, an article suggested that the scrutiny was rooted in the higher expectations for Toyota vehicles, "if this were Chrysler would the recall get this much attention? No, because they're not known for making great cars" (Segal, February 7). This statement contextualizes the crisis in relation to Toyota's prior success, and implies the resulting impact on Toyota's current image and reputation. While the recalls already met other criteria for news values, they were consistently framed in this way as unexpected events, in contrast to Toyota's prior safe and reliable image. In this respect, the crisis heavily undermined aspects of Toyota's image in relation to the safety and reliability of its vehicles. News articles further referred to Toyota's recalls in the context of its reputation in statements such as, "the recalls were a significant blow to Toyota, the world's biggest auto company, which had built its sales on a reputation for quality" (Maynard, January 29). This article emphasizes the particular impact of the recalls, due to Toyota's role as the world's biggest auto company, and as a company that had built its reputation on the quality of its vehicles. The fact that it was Toyota facing widespread complaints of safety and quality was newsworthy and unexpected in itself, and news articles commonly framed the crisis in this way.

Beyond the “unexpected” aspect of the crisis, media reporting looked to pinpoint a cause of the shift from Toyota’s prior image in light of the series of global recalls. Toyota’s rapid, global expansion from 2003-2008 was defined as the main cause of its safety and quality issues during the definition phase. Numerous articles pointed to Toyota’s perceived past success in its global expansion as the reason for the diminished quality that might have led to the recalls. For example, one article directly associated Toyota’s global expansion and increased sales with the consequence of diminished quality:

Three or four years ago, senior Honda executive demanded to know . . . how arch rival Toyota could expand its production and sales so quickly and still keep quality intact . . . now they're getting the answer: Toyota's once-vaunted quality actually was eroding.

(Ingrassia, January 29).

This article implies that Toyota had a “once-vaunted” reputation for quality in the past (Ibid), but identifies its expansion as the cause of the now eroding quality in Toyota vehicles causing the 2009-2010 global recalls. A potential source of Toyota’s quality problems was identified as Toyota’s loss of its corporate values. The shift in Toyota’s priorities (i.e. producing quality vehicles to rapid global expansion) was identified as another reason for the quality and safety problems associated with the recalls. As such, the media identified Toyota’s dissociation from its corporate identity as a result of the rapid growth that characterized Toyota’s global expansion (i.e. from 2003-2008). Toyota’s desire to be “number one” was symptomatic of their subsequent downfall, as quality was viewed as a sacrifice in Toyota’s push to be the world’s biggest automaker. Reasoning devices in news articles implied remedies of returning to Toyota’s core values, “many say the automaker privately set aside its ‘Toyota Way’ mantra of quality,

becoming less cautious and more aggressive” (Glionna & Masters, January 29)²⁹. This aggression was ultimately symptomatic of Toyota’s departure from the Toyota Way, and resulted in a lack of focus and attention to detail. In numerous statements to American media, Toyota responded to this media frame by framing a corrective action approach to address its loss of touch with the values of the Toyota Way (e.g. Toyota, November 25). As such, Toyota framed its recovery as a return to these core principles, which is discussed further in the section on public relations framing.

Furthermore, Toyota’s portrayal as focused on expansion and profits rather than safety was ultimately a reflection of failed impression management. Toyota’s defensive claims of prioritizing customer safety were undermined by leaked internal documents hailing the benefits of saving costs on limited recalls and fixing floor mats rather than electronics:

The company blamed incidents on floor mats, instead of a potentially more costly defect with the car itself. The PowerPoint also lists among ‘wins’ NHTSA’s decision to close safety investigations of the Toyota Tacoma truck without ordering recalls, and delays to new safety rules that saved the company hundreds of millions of dollars.

(King & Mitchell, February 22)

These leaked documents supported media framing of the recalls as cost-cutting measures, and supported the framing of Toyota’s corporate identity as focused primarily on saving money rather than addressing potentially life-threatening defects in its vehicles. This directly opposed Toyota’s image repair efforts, which described issuing “voluntary” recalls in the interests of preserving the safety of Toyota drivers. Within this critical

²⁹ The defects in Toyota vehicles did not occur suddenly during the phase of Toyota’s rapid growth; they were made over a wide period of time and in different parts of the organization. The high volume of the recalls also did not constitute the number of errors in Toyota vehicles, but rather the size of the manufacturer, despite media reports that emphasized the scale of the recalls (Liker & Ogden, 2011).

frame, the floor mat excuse was viewed as an attempt to find an easy and cost effective solution to the problem, rather than address the actual safety risk of SUA. Despite Toyota's continued denial of an electronic cause, and framing of the recalls as "voluntary" (e.g. Toyota, May 19), the limited recalls were framed in media coverage as indicative of Toyota's concern for its financial recovery, rather than the safety of their customers.

Ultimately, Toyota's early image repair efforts were impeded by its "strategic" efforts to preserve its image and distort the truth. The company faced criticism regarding its lack of transparency with the public and its initial unresponsiveness to public concern about the recalls. Toyota's initial reluctance to communicate about the situation was framed as dishonest and immoral in numerous articles. This even impacted Toyota once it began to recall vehicles, as articles portrayed the company as being "dragged screaming and kicking to disclose the truth about potentially lethal defects in its products" (Lazarus, February 11). As such, Toyota was ultimately forced to communicate more transparently with the American public. Media framing became more favourable when Toyota admitted fault, took action to inform the public quickly, and demonstrate transparency in communication. Numerous articles including "Doubt Cast on Toyota's Decision to Blame Sudden Acceleration on Gas Pedal Defect" referred to Toyota's efforts to correct the situation and inform the public as "more responsive" than its earlier denials (Bensinger & Vartabedian, January 30). Toyota's use of more open and transparent image repair through corrective action efforts were generally perceived as positive steps forward, and an indication that it was starting to prioritize customers (Ibid).

In March 2010, media coverage began to decline slightly in volume and in negative tone, but the framing of Toyota's corporate identity remained critical. To preserve its reputation, Toyota began to distance the "Toyota Way" of management from its mistakes during the crisis. An example of this negative media framing can be seen through explanations of Toyota's failure to communicate³⁰ with the American public through the comparison to its once-renowned corporate identity and culture:

Tendency to dismiss customer complaints and lack of a clear procedure for handing safety problems were among flaws identified...the very culture that works so well for them when things are stable and predictable really doesn't work when you're dealing with a fast-paced crisis.

(Bunkley, May 24)

While these qualities made Toyota globally renowned for the quality and safety of its vehicles, the philosophy of the Toyota Way was doubted for its sustainability in a crisis situation. The benefits of the Toyota Way were largely undisputed for their role in facilitating Toyota's past success, but the media questioned whether it was a better philosophy for smaller production, rather than global expansion. This is particularly interesting from the perspective of SCCT, which states that an organization's prior image decreases the overall reputational impact of the crisis (Coombs, 2007). In Toyota's case, it was unable to draw upon its prior image to recover because it was put under such high scrutiny. As discussed, Toyota focused its communication on returning to its traditional values, claiming that the company had lost sight of the Toyota Way admit rapid global expansion. From a strategic perspective, this allowed Toyota to defend its past reputation

³⁰ This failure to communicate was heavily criticized during the crisis, and explicitly stated in a New York Times article even after media criticism had subsided, "the very culture that works so well for them when things are stable and predictable really doesn't work when you're dealing with a fast-paced crisis" (Bunkley, May 24).

and focus corrective action on returning to its image related to the safety and reliability of its vehicles.

Cultural Identity and Nationalism

Cultural identity and nationalism were important aspects of media framing of Toyota's self-presentation. In general, cultural proximity to a given issue in the news increases its news value (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). Consistent with the literature reviewed, Toyota's Japanese roots were emphasized in news reporting to interpret and explain their actions during the crisis. Definitions of Toyota as a "Japanese" company did not constitute a positive or negative frame, but provided a culturally embedded frame from which American media applied reasoning devices to interpret, justify, and explain Toyota's crisis decision-making.

Toyota's Japanese roots were a consistent part of media coverage during the crisis, but Japan was used differently in media frames as the crisis progressed. Media linked problems within Toyota as a symptom of the flaws in Japanese management. As discussed, returning to the core values of the Toyota brand was suggested early into the crisis (i.e. September 2009-January 2010), and shifted to a criticism of Toyota's corporate culture. This extended to a scrutiny of Japanese management in general. It was reported that "[Toyota] had cultural stereotypes working in its favour—the image of the disciplined Japanese corporation with uncompromising quality standards" (Goodman, August 22). In media coverage in the sample, Toyota was consistently defined as "Japanese", and did not necessitate the overall tone of the frame in itself. Frames were coded to account for this aspect, but articles were not defined as cultural frames unless

several framing and reasoning devices supporting an overall cultural frame were found within the article.

Toyota was consistently identified across the crisis as a “Japanese” company in news articles, but this frame transitioned from a neutral, descriptive tone of the company to highly critical framing of its internal operations and processes. As such, the Japanese cultural frame became defined as a cause of the recall problems. The media framed Toyota’s inability to listen to the concerns of internal workers as a symptom of the Japanese culture of deference within corporations. The Japanese corporate culture was typically described as a heavily bureaucratic atmosphere where it was difficult to raise issues and concerns. For example, one article stated that the Toyota Way “makes it hard for those lower in the hierarchy to question their superiors or inform them about problems . . . [and] to challenge what has been decided or designed” (Kingston, February 5). Toyota’s corporate culture became commonly interpreted as effective in its success to date, but as a rigid structure that made Toyota vulnerable when faced with problems. While once an asset to Toyota’s image, this aspect of its corporate identity became identified as a weakness in media coverage.

Suggested remedies in American media included focusing image repair efforts to an American audience, particularly during Toyota’s congressional hearings. Recommendations centered on facing the United States-based crisis by conforming to American expectations of behaviour. American newspapers overwhelmingly stressed the importance of Toyota’s physical presence at the United States Congress hearings in statements like, “The person who's accountable is the CEO . . . he needs to be here” (Tabuchi & Vlasic, February 6). Toyota’s reluctance to visit the United States was a

subject of particularly heavy criticism in the American media. Toyoda's appearance did not go smoothly, and was dissected in detail in American media but ultimately it was a positive move for the company. Facing the crisis and congressional questioning was essential, and the beginning of more transparent and open communication by Toyota.

As established in the literature review, a given impression by an actor is dependent on the perceptions of the audience judging the impression. Akio Toyoda's Japanese culture was used to anchor various reasoning devices in coverage of the congressional hearings. News articles depicted Akio Toyoda in culturally oppositional terms; as Toyoda used a translator for the majority of the proceedings, the language barrier framed problem definitions in media reporting:

Mr. Toyoda, who answered questions in Japanese after reading a statement in English, struggled to convince lawmakers that the company had fixed all the problems behind incidents of sudden acceleration.

(Linebaugh & Mitchell, February 25)

The connection of responding to questions in Japanese is connected to Toyota's perceived struggle to convince lawmakers that the problems behind SUA had been resolved. The journalist implies that Toyota's inability to communicate directly in English is connected to its failure to assert its credibility on the issue of SUA. Second, beyond the language barrier, Toyoda was also criticized for crying during his public apology. While crying is accepted in Japanese culture as a form of apology, the American media described these actions unfavourably. Articles in the American media defined and explained his actions in the Japanese context, "*otoko naki*, crying while maintaining masculinity" (Inada & Sanchanta, February 26). Despite this, articles applauded Toyoda for adapting to other American cultural norms of apology. Toyoda did not bow, which is

typical behaviour in Japan, “when in Rome, do as the Romans do . . . he didn't bow. He did absorb the blows” (White & Landers, February 25). This was reported positively, although the article notes the cultural differences between American and Japanese executives with a critical tone, “[in Japan, they] bow deeply. They express regret. Often they resign...[Americans] don't bow. Instead, they . . . brace to endure humiliating interrogations by lawmakers” (Ibid). Akio Toyoda’s emotional response to his apology was explained in media coverage by his Japanese culture. Regardless of whether this was accurate, Toyoda’s stereotypical “Japanese” actions were framed negatively, while “American” actions (e.g. shaking hands rather than bowing) were framed more positively.

Media framing throughout the timeframe of analysis continued to respond more positively to American cultural behaviour, and diagnose Toyota’s Japanese actions and behaviour as problematic. As Toyota began to recover from the crisis, suggested remedies became firmly located within the American cultural frame. Articles including “At Toyota, a Cultural Shift” structured a more favourable description of Toyota’s actions in the context of increased collaboration with its American operations:

Instead of Japanese engineers telling Toyota's American executives only the information they felt was necessary for them to know, the engineers are now seeking the Americans out for suggestions on how to improve.
(Maynard, June 3)

The implied suggested remedy indicates that Toyota continue involving its American executives in decision-making. American media framed this more favourably in contrast to Toyota’s insular Japanese management model. These frames followed Toyota’s repeated commitment to globalizing decision-making, and its appointment of a Quality

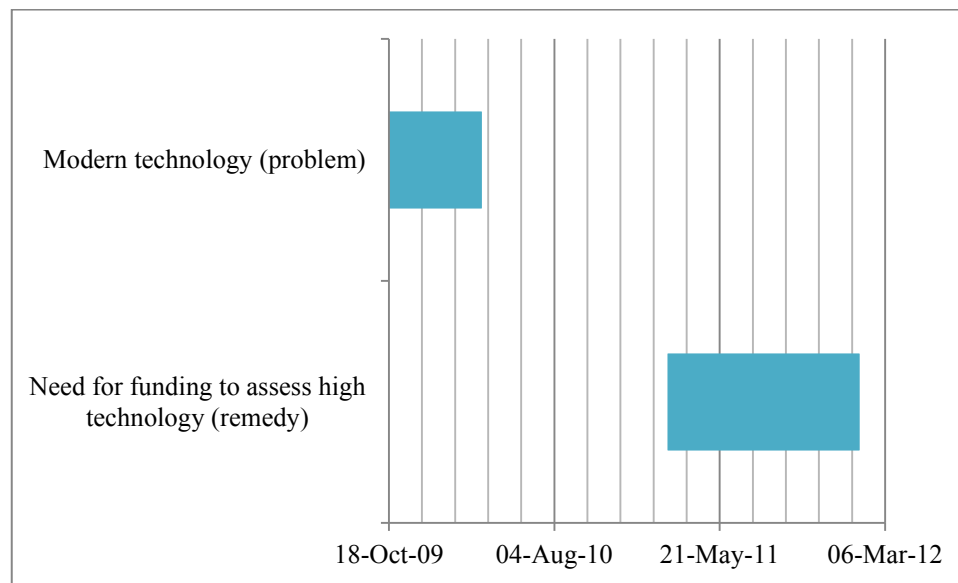
Task Force (Toyota, May 19). Finally, media coverage following the 2011 Japanese tsunami and earthquake used this event to continue this cultural frame. The media continued to suggest remedies that Toyota move its production out of Japan. Toyota faced criticism for its “insistence on making almost half of its cars in Japan and shipping them overseas . . . Still, Mr. Toyoda said the company was committed to keeping production—and jobs—in Japan” (Tabuchi, April 23). While the events of the tsunami and earthquake added a new component to the cultural frame, this was coded as a continuation of the suggested remedy of conforming to American culture.

As discussed in the literature review (e.g. Van Gorp, 2010), cultural framing appeals to ideas and values that are already accepted by the readers of news content. As such, these frames promote a certain logical framework from which readers can interpret an article and gain an opinion about a concept or idea. The findings suggest that problems were defined and explained by the American media from the perspective of generally accepted cultural norms and attitudes about Japanese culture. While Toyota did not actively project a “Japanese” image to the American public, the media were sensitive to this issue and framed reporting of the recalls in light of Toyota’s Japanese identity. Ultimately, Japanese and American cultural frames contributed to both positive and negative framing of Toyota at respective points during the issues framing cycle. These cultural frames identified Toyota’s Japanese management style as problematic during the definition period, but Toyota was able to begin repairing its image through its insistence on its contribution to American employment and the United States economy. American cultural framing was an important aspect of Toyota’s image repair, and was an important turning point in media framing of the crisis.

Technology as Problem and Remedy

The inclusion of technology within media framing provided insight into how modern technology functions within culturally embedded framing, particularly during a recall. Media coverage included frames of modern technology as both a problem and a suggested remedy. The modern technology frame experienced a sharp shift during the crisis (e.g. Figure 2), as the media framed technology as a problem and later suggested as a remedy to improve safety. Articles such as “Bring Back the Off Switch” (Jenkins, December 1) focused on the unreliability of complex technologies (e.g. a sudden electrical failure resulting in unintended acceleration), while articles published when driver error was accepted as a cause framed new brake override software as a remedy to Toyota’s problems. When electronic defects were ruled out as a potential cause, news articles turned to technology as a remedy for increasing the safety of vehicles.

Figure 2: Technology as a Problem and Remedy in News Articles³¹



Media framing regarding the electronic cause of the Toyota accidents began as early as October 2009, where this frame intersected with the modern technology frame. The failure of complex technology provided a potential explanation to clarify public confusion surrounding the cause of the accidents. The media used the technological frame to diagnose causes of the sudden acceleration problem, linking complex technological features to risk and danger. For example, in an early article about the recall, a reporter posed the rhetorical question, “might a vehicles complex electronic features make it hard for drivers to react quickly when accelerating out of control?”, drawing attention to the potential dangers of using complex technology (Vartabedian & Bensinger, October 18). The complex electronic features of the car were framed as problematic, rather than the drivers of Toyota vehicles. In this sense, technology was framed as unreliable and

³¹ This figure is reflective of the qualitative frames observed in the analysis, and is not quantitative. As such, the purpose of this figure is to represent the qualitative frames and framing shifts that emerged across the timeframe of the study.

difficult to control in emergency situations. Diagnosis of electronic causes of SUA continued in 2010, where other reports noted the potential for automotive software to fail. Likewise, other early coverage, such as “Toyota Set to Recall some Hybrids in Japan” directly linked software to technological failure: “when there's software there's often bugs” (Maxwell & Shirouzu, February 9). This frame was consistent across the sample during the emergence phase, suggesting that technology may be subject to blame in media coverage when alternate explanations are unavailable. Electronic features associated with technology, rather than driver error, were commonly linked to the incidents of SUA during the emergence phase of the crisis.

The findings further suggest that technology was used as a cultural frame to resonate strongly with the public, particularly during the uncertain definition phase of the crisis. News values (e.g. Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Hall et al., 1978) state that the media are more likely to emphasize aspects of a story that will resonate with the public in order to increase the saliency of a story. While Toyota claimed that the floor mats were to blame for SUA, news reporting of the Toyota crisis suggested a possible electronic cause within just two months of Mark Saylor’s fatal accident. Technology is not specifically included within news values theory, but Marks and colleagues (2007) note that in general, individuals tend to overemphasize the risks of unknown phenomena (i.e. complex technologies, natural disasters), while familiar risks are largely underestimated.

As discussed in the previous section, technology was identified as the cause of SUA and was structured as such primarily through emotional driver reports during the early definition phase. The modern technology frame criticized technological

advancement in modern vehicles for taking away control from drivers; frames of the uncertainty of modern technology also explicitly included the element of fear:

With each model year, vehicles are morphing into powerful, computerized machines that substitute electronic brains for the brawn of heavy bodies . . . the downside . . . cars are becoming scary again. The new, electro-digital automobiles are difficult for laymen to comprehend or repair. These failures can be impossible for even experts to diagnose.

(Maxwell & Shirouzu, February 9)

As discussed in the section on driver sources, emotional framing commonly accompanied the technological frame. The complex features of vehicles were linked to descriptions of technology as a “scary” element of the unknown, where even mechanics and other experts were unable to appropriately identify problems and repair them. However, as frames of the cause shifted to driver error, the American media generally stopped framing the problem in relation to modern technology and electronics. The advantages of these electronic features were not discussed within the technology frame from the onset of the crisis until March 2010.

In March 2010, the framing of technology shifted in media reporting; technology was framed as a suggested remedy, rather than as a problem (e.g. Figure 2). This coincided with the emergence of driver error as a cause, rather than electronics (e.g. Figure 1). Features such as brake override software were viewed in a positive light as a potential way to remedy the problem of defects in vehicles. For example, one article reacted favourably to the fixes, “a decade ago, Toyota's relatively low cost Lexus fix probably wouldn't have been available...consumers are better off” (White, April 21). The potential risks associated with the technology in Toyota vehicles were not discussed during this phase of the framing cycle. Toyota was even criticized for being behind other

companies with regard to safety-related technology and innovation (e.g. Glucker, November 5; Puzzanghera & Bensinger, March 3). Suggested remedies within technological frames in 2010 and 2012 also included the government's role as a safety regulator, "NHTSA investigators . . . would rather focus on floor mats than microchips because they understand floor mats" (Puzzanghera & Bensinger, March 3). Other suggested remedies even included the need for increased governmental funding for Toyota to keep up with new automotive technologies (e.g. Vartabedian & Bensinger, February 7). These findings indicate that while public relations actions are important during a crisis, various external factors (e.g. the issues cycle; news values) also play a critical role in how problems and remedies are framed.

Overall, the findings from the qualitative analysis of media framing of technology support the finding that modern technology was defined as both a problem and a suggested remedy at different points of the crisis. This presents important implications for crisis planning and management from the perspective of the framing cycle. While technology was blamed as the cause of the crisis during the emergence phase of the framing cycle (i.e. a time of high uncertainty), it was also used as a solution as coverage declined, and the framing cycle began to reach the resonance phase. While Toyota's initially vague communication did not help media framing of its electronic features, this observation may be reflective of even broader media framing patterns. As technology was a particularly salient cultural frame during both phases of the crisis, this suggests that technology is used for different purposes depending both on the particular stage of the crisis, and the attitudes of the public. These findings suggest that technology is a cultural

frame that connotes fear during times of uncertainty, and offers potential hope and solutions once these issues are resolved.

As established in the literature review, an examination of media framing sheds light onto how everyday reality is organized by the public. Understanding patterns in media framing through the framing cycle and general news values is important to a study of corporate image and image repair, as it helps to understand the climate of public opinion beyond corporate activities to repair image. The findings in this section detailed the ways in which different sources were used to structure culturally embedded frames in news reporting of Toyota. The discussion also addressed the ways in which media framing of a crisis interacts with public relations strategies, and how this can impact corporate image. Identifying how corporate identity, cultural identity, and modern technology were framed in media reporting is central to contextualizing the following discussion of Toyota's image repair activities in the next section of this thesis.

Public Relations Framing

As discussed in the literature review, corporate image is comprised of the impression given by an organization, and the impression that is actually made upon the public. It is important to examine both aspects of corporate image in order to respond to RQ2, which asks how Toyota framed its image during the crisis. Informed by the discussion of media framing, this section addresses the ways in which Toyota framed its corporate image in press releases during the timeframe of the study.

The framing analysis revealed the ways in which Toyota framed various attributes of its corporate image, as well as the image repair strategies that were used to frame

issues and attribute responsibility during the crisis. The major frames observed in Toyota's projected image included its corporate identity, corporate brand, and the use of image repair strategies; particularly denial, corrective action, and mortification. Overall, there were no dramatic shifts in projected framing by Toyota during the crisis, which focused consistently on safety, although it began to emphasize quality in addition to the safety of its vehicles when media coverage reached the resolution phase. Toyota began to focus on its identity as a global, rather than "Japanese" company approximately six months into the crisis, and emphasized its commitment to quality as media scrutiny of the safety of its cars decreased. Toyota also began to defensively stress its commitment to transparency with consumers and the American public following intense media criticism of its vague communication. While Toyota's consistently employed a corrective action strategy, this approach to image repair was only effective once it had demonstrated these efforts.

Framing Attributes of the "Toyota" Image

Responding to RQ2.1 of what attributes of corporate image were framed, and when required investigating the ways in which Toyota described its own corporate image in press releases during the crisis, which aspects of corporate image were discussed, and whether this shifted during the crisis. The findings showed that Toyota's press releases discussed the Toyota Way, its corporate identity as a "global" company (i.e. rather than Japanese), and stressed the values of quality, safety, and transparency. During the crisis, Toyota began to emphasize the specific importance of its American customers and improving its global operations, and stopping framing its corporate identity (i.e. the

Toyota Way) through Japanese cultural references and words. This shift happened amid media criticism that Toyota was not committed to the safety of its American customers, which indicated that Toyota was beginning to monitor framing in media coverage and actively respond to it. With regard to Toyota's brand of safety and quality, it exhibited a consistent emphasis on safety throughout the crisis period studied, and focused on articulating steps to improve the quality of its vehicles beginning in February 2010.

Figure 3: Framing of Attributes in Press Releases³²



³² This figure is reflective of the qualitative frames observed in the analysis, and is not quantitative. As such, the purpose of this figure is to represent the qualitative frames and framing shifts that emerged across the timeframe of the study.

Corporate Identity: Japan, and the Toyota Way

Toyota emphasized global attributes of its corporate image beginning in February 2010. Toyota projected this through a series of actions, including the creation of a global quality assurance team and allocating more decision-making authority to Toyota executives outside of Japan and improving its internal communication on a global scale. These strategies coincided with harsh media criticism regarding Toyota's commitment to transparency with the American public, and the unwillingness of Toyota's Japanese executives to confront the crisis in the United States.

To remedy the problem, Toyota focused communication on its efforts to allocate more decision-making authority in its American operations. Toyota was conscious of the need to allocate more authority in North America, using the phrasing, "[we are] giving Toyota's North American leaders a greater voice in safety decision-making" in numerous press releases in May 2010 (Toyota, May 19). In addition to asserting the increased role of its North American offices, Toyota emphasized the company's American attributes in press release statements such as:

Toyota established operations in the United States in 1957 and currently operates 10 manufacturing plants . . . Toyota directly employs nearly 34,000 in the United States and its investment here is currently valued at more than 18 billion.

(Ibid)

Toyota is self-described as a well-established feature of American production, and as a contributor to employment and investment in the economy to further emphasize its commitment and role in the United States. These statements are indicative of Toyota's overall defensive response to accusations that the company was not "American", and a part of its strategy to establish its commitment to the American economy and

employment (e.g. Linebaugh & Mitchell, February 25). More importantly, this defensive response indicates that Toyota was aware of the culturally embedded themes in media framing at this time, and shifted its image repair activities to respond to its framing as an insular company primarily focused on their base in Japan. Toyota's iteration of the company's well-established history in the United States, contribution to employment and investment, commitment to improving safety and quality on a global scale, and willingness to cooperate with American authorities was a defensive response to this scrutiny.

Toyota's framing of its corporate identity and values later shifted in response to media criticism³³ of its commitment to responding to the crisis in the United States. In response, Toyota initially framed the loss of its core corporate values as a cause of the problems, framing the remedy to the situation as returning to the Toyota Way values. However, in response to this shift in media framing, Toyota began to frame attributes of the Toyota Way differently in press releases. For example, in press releases during the definition phase of the crisis, Toyota directly referred to the Toyota Way in its original Japanese (i.e. "genchi genbutsu"³⁴), in statements like, "we are sincerely taking to heart customer feedback through genchi genbutsu" (Toyota, February 17). While this indicated an attempt to rely on the Toyota Way's previous reputation, Toyota's use of Japanese words in press releases directed to its American customers was not an effective response to media framing at the time. As discussed in the media framing section, Toyota's

³³ The Toyota Way (i.e. the principles guiding Toyota's management and corporate philosophy) was initially framed in media coverage as an important aspect of Toyota's past success, but media framing later shifted to its flaws during the definition phase of the crisis.

³⁴ *Genchi genbutsu* is a key pillar of the Toyota Way, and directly translates as "go and see for yourself". It involves approaching decision-making from the root of the problem. (Liker & Ogden, 2011).

Japanese style of management and safety standards were framed negatively in comparison to American standards. In later public statements, Toyota maintained their commitment to the Toyota Way, but did translate references to its corporate philosophy into English in public relations material beginning in March 2010. Numerous press releases referred instead to Toyota's "core values" rather than specifically articulating their Japanese roots in statements such as, "the pillars of the Toyota Way are 'respect for people' and 'continuous improvement'. These remain core values—and we'll adhere closely to them as we make vehicle safety our top priority" (Toyota, March 2). In these statements, Toyota articulated its core values in English instead, and pledged to be attentive to quality assurance across all global operations (i.e. not just those in Japan). This indicated that Toyota's image repair strategy remained centered on returning to the basics of the Toyota Way, but their communication became more inclusive and directed towards a global audience. This contributed to Toyota's overall framing of its commitment to the United States and its identity as an American, or global company.

Toyota's shift in the framing of its Japanese attributes (e.g. the Toyota Way) as well as its emphasis on the importance of its global operations also indicated that the company was monitoring media coverage and formulating a response based on their characterization in the public sphere. Toyota's shift in its crisis communication (e.g. using American-centric language) was a positive step forward in its image repair because it was a direct response to public discourse. Taking steps to improve communication across its global operations and communicate about Toyota in culturally sensitive terms were effective in combating criticism in the media (e.g. Maynard, June 3). This finding supports this thesis' recommendation of maintaining cultural sensitivity in crisis

communication with international audiences, and tailoring all aspects of messaging to affected publics accordingly.

Corporate Brand: Safety and Quality

While media framing during the early stages of the crisis contrasted the recalls with Toyota's previous reputation for safety and quality, Toyota continued to insist that these values remained its top priorities in its press releases. Safety continued to be stressed as one of Toyota's core values, but Toyota emphasized this attribute most strongly during the issues definition phase. There were no major attempts by Toyota to re-brand or emphasize different brand values; the company relied on their previous reputation to recover from the crisis. It insisted that safety and quality remained important values, in addition to customer satisfaction. In this sense, Toyota's external communication included a particular emphasis on safety as the crisis reached its peak³⁵, and later shifted to quality and transparency as it started to recover and faced ongoing concerns about the quality of its products. Through image repair strategies beginning in February 2010, Toyota admitted that they needed to improve their communication and transparency with regulators, lawmakers, and the American public.

Toyota framed its past reputation defensively in its early response to the crisis. In early statements to the public, Toyota tried to bolster its reputation for safety when framing the problem:

We believe our vehicles to be the safest on the road today...we are instructing all of our Lexus and Toyota dealers to immediately inspect

³⁵ This period is defined as January, 2010-March, 2010. News articles remained critical after March 2010, but this point is defined as the period where coverage began to decrease slowly both in frequency and in negative tone.

their new, used, and loaner fleet vehicles and we urge all other automakers, dealers, vehicle owners, and the independent service and car wash industries to assure that any floor mat, whether factory or aftermarket, is correct for the vehicle and properly installed and secured.

(Toyota, September 14)

At this stage of the crisis, Toyota's past reputation was not under scrutiny. In this statement, the problem is defined as the floor mat placement, rather than defects in the vehicles themselves. Toyota emphasizes safety as a key attribute of its vehicles, maintaining that it manufactures the "safest" cars on the road (Ibid). As Coombs and Holladay (2002) note, companies with favourable reputations prior to a crisis, like Toyota, have an easier time establishing credibility and recovering from them. While SCCT (Coombs, 2007) states that companies can lean on a strong past reputation during a crisis, Toyota found it difficult to do so when its entire reputation was put into question. However, in the early stages of the crisis, emphasizing positive attributes, rather than admitting responsibility was a commonly used strategy.

Toyota was ultimately forced to communicate more transparently, and less defensively in order to repair its image. Although the company was never motivated by the intrinsic principles of communicative action, targeting its communication efforts towards mutual understanding rather than manipulation and deceit were important its recovery. Toyota stopped defensively framing its positive attributes as scrutiny increased. It began to acknowledge its responsibility to improve by returning to its core values and regaining the trust of its customers and American regulators. Open communication and transparency were key aspects of this frame. For example, a press release stated that Toyota had made changes in its operations in order to improve the safety of its vehicles, in addition to its openness with customers and regulators:

we've made fundamental changes in the way our company operates in order to ensure that Toyota sets an even higher standard for vehicle safety and reliability, responsiveness to customers, and transparency with regulators.

(Toyota, March 25)

In this sense, Toyota emphasized these positive attributes but acknowledged that it needed to make “fundamental changes” in its standards for safety and reliability, as well as improving its communication with customers and regulators in order to meet expectations and address issues related to its accountability for safety. Media coverage even reflected this in framing Toyota’s recovery (Ibid). For example, a Toyota spokesperson commented on their failure to communicate during the crisis, “while it looked to the outside world that we weren't moving fast enough, our engineers were working hard to find the root cause” (Vranica, December 30). Implicit in this statement is Toyota’s failure to communicate to the public about its efforts to address the situation, which had a negative impact on their corporate image during the definition phase of the issues framing cycle. In this sense, communication was acknowledged as a central aspect of crisis management; while Toyota was working to find the source of the problem, its failure to provide clear communication to the public further exacerbated its image problems.

Toyota shifted the framing of attributes from improving safety to emphasizing its commitment to quality as it began to recover, although both aspects of the brand remained present in external communication. New quality leadership initiatives were announced in February 2010, when Toyota announced the creation of a Quality Task Force to improve quality around the world. In May 2010, Toyota appointed a new Chief Quality Officer for North America, and stated that quality assurance was its “top priority”

(Toyota, May 19). This addressed criticisms of Toyota's ability to maintain quality on a global scale, particularly with its North American customers. Rather than continuing to emphasize its positive attributes, Toyota refocused its strategic communication to admitting responsibility for improving its internal communication and quality processes through corrective action. As discussed in the media framing section, this resulted in more positive framing of Toyota as transparent in media coverage. Toyota's image repair activities are discussed in detail in the following section, which addresses the specific framing of issues and responsibility in press releases during the crisis timeframe.

Framing Issues and Responsibility Through Image Repair

Framing issues and responsibility has implications for public relations, particularly in the context of issues and crisis management (Hallahan, 1999). How stakeholders interpret these aspects of a crisis has ramifications for the degree of reputational threat, financial implications, and the image repair strategies needed to respond to the crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2010).

The following section responds to RQ2.2 by detailing how Toyota used image repair strategies to frame its corporate image. First, Toyota's denial of the electronic cause is discussed, as well as its ineffectiveness in convincing the public of this cause during the definition phase of the framing cycle. Next, other image repair strategies, such as reducing offensiveness and evading responsibility, corrective action, and mortification are discussed. Ultimately, Toyota's combination of corrective action and mortification was most successful in repairing its image, allowing the company to express honesty and sincerity while working to resolve the problem. This section discusses Toyota's framing

of issues and responsibility in press releases in the context of media framing of these image repair activities.

Denying an Electronic Cause

Information about the causes of an accident or technical error crisis can help to shift stakeholder beliefs about the crisis, and as such it is important to establish credibility in external statements. Reporting of potential electronic causes of SUA began as early as October 2009 (e.g. Vartabedian & Bensinger, October 18). Toyota used several image repair strategies to define the issue and restore its credibility and image through responsibility framing, which will be detailed in this section. It is important to address the inefficacy of Toyota's early denials and the role they played in fuelling speculation in the media.

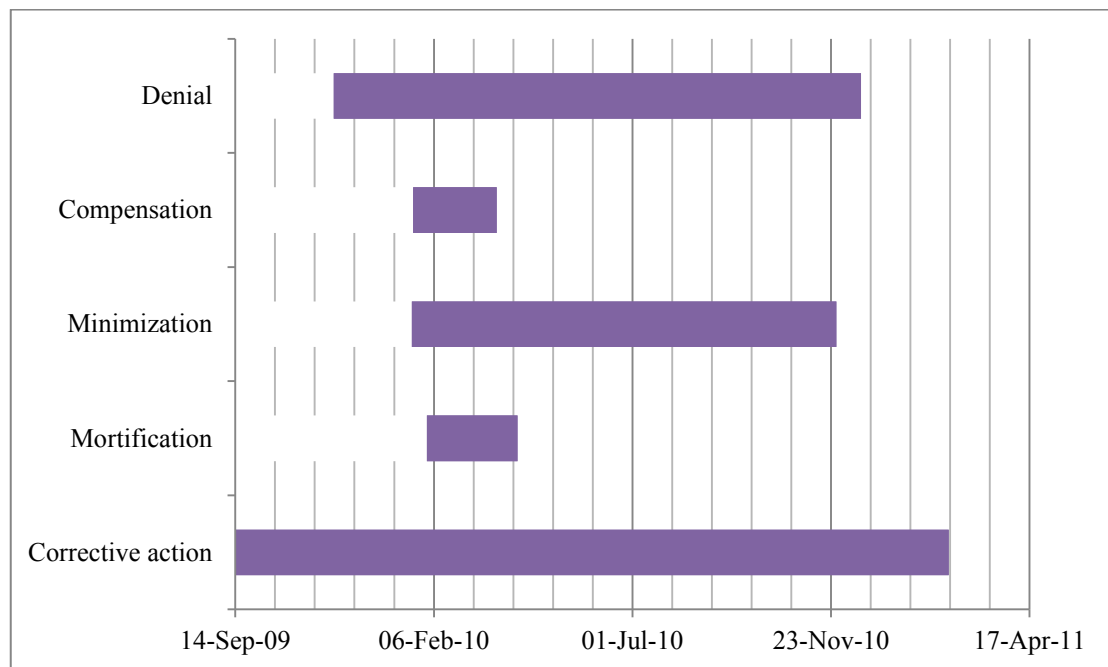
Toyota denied the electronic cause frame by directly denying this rumour in early press releases (e.g. Figure 3). Rather than using a more transparent image repair strategy (e.g. mortification; corrective action), Toyota focused its early issues framing on the denial of an electronic cause:

a series of media reports circulated, stating that there was growing suspicion by some Toyota and Lexus owners, that a glitch of some kind in the electronic engine management system was the cause of reports of unintended acceleration . . . the question of unintended acceleration involving Toyota and Lexus vehicles has been one of the most thoroughly and repeatedly investigated issues by Toyota, as well as by the engineering experts at the [NHTSA]. Six times in the past six years NHTSA has undertaken an exhaustive review of allegations of unintended acceleration on Toyota and Lexus vehicles and six times the agency closed the investigation without finding any electronic engine control system malfunction to be the cause of unintended acceleration.

(Toyota, November 25)

Claims of an electronic defect overshadowed Toyota's press releases during the early definition phase, which mainly concentrated on denying these media reports. For example, this statement detailed the allegations against Toyota, and directly mentions "growing suspicion" on behalf of their customers, as well as allegations of a "glitch of some kind" (Ibid). This press release is focused on denial, rather than providing corrective action to address the situation, or mortification. In response, Toyota claimed that NHTSA had investigated allegations of SUA in Toyota vehicles "six times in the past six years" and each time no malfunction had been found (Ibid). The fact that its communication was structured in the denial of electronic cause focused attention on the rumour, rather than the floor mats. It should also be noted that Toyota misquoted NHTSA in a prior press release to support their denial of the presence of electronic flaws, and they were also forced to apologize in this press release statement. This inaccuracy worked to Toyota's disadvantage, further undermining its credibility during the definition phase of the framing cycle.

Figure 4: Toyota's Image Repair in Press Releases³⁶



Toyota's denial of electronic defects remained consistent throughout the crisis (e.g. Figure 4), although it was not accepted or verified in media coverage until driver error began to take precedence as a potential cause. Like mortification, denial was also combined with the corrective action frame to show that "even though our own testing shows full compliance with federal fuel system integrity standards, we are working intensely to duplicate the non-compliance issue that NHTSA identified" (Toyota, March 25). Toyota also used denial to frame its defense of the validity of Exponent's investigations, but combined this with corrective action. When fined \$32.425 million by the United States government, Toyota clarified that the payment of the fine was not an

³⁶ This figure is reflective of the qualitative frames observed in the analysis, and is not quantitative. As such, the purpose of this figure is to represent the qualitative frames and framing shifts that emerged across the timeframe of the study.

admission that their electrical systems were flawed but a part of their corrective action strategy to alleviate public concern (Toyota, December 26).

Reducing Offensiveness and Evading Responsibility

As discussed in the literature review, reducing offensiveness aims to reduce negative public perceptions of an organization. The reducing offensiveness strategies used by Toyota included minimization and compensation. Neither reducing offensiveness strategy was very effective; Toyota's minimization efforts were criticized in media coverage, and its compensation of Toyota owners was not the focus of media coverage.

Toyota attempted to minimize the issue by downplaying the scale of the crisis. The findings suggest that minimization strategies may not be as effective when they are used vaguely, and an organization's credibility has been affected. It is important to include this strategy in a discussion of Toyota's image repair because they were among its early unsuccessful efforts to define the issue, and present a good example of how crisis communication should not be handled when an organization has lost its credibility. Minimization was employed to frame the minor impact of the recalls (i.e. January-December 2010), as well as the rare instances in which they could occur, in statements such as, "[we] want to reassure Toyota owners that instances of sticking pedals are rare and generally do not occur suddenly" (Toyota, January 28). This strategy intersected with several reports of corrective action by Toyota stating that it had identified the cause of the problem, and was actively testing remedies and implementing fixes. The minimization frame did not appear to mitigate the situation when coupled with corrective action, in light of the media framing analysis. Toyota's efforts to minimize the scale of the crisis

were highly unsuccessful; media generally emphasized the amount of recalls, which was a particularly salient element of reporting³⁷. The minimization frame was not found in the majority of media coverage of the recalls, apart from in a critical tone, “the company said the problem was ‘rare’ ” (Bunkley, January 22)³⁸. Toyota’s vague language was ineffective, as it was unqualified and relied on credibility that they did not have at the time of this statement.

Corrective Action and Mortification

Corrective action was the most commonly and consistently projected image repair frame employed by Toyota. Corrective action is usually advised as an appropriate strategy when an organization is found to be responsible for an event (Benoit, 1997). An organization can claim responsibility while demonstrating its efforts to repair the situation. While Toyota articulated corrective action strategies beginning in 2009, it was heavily criticized in media coverage for its speed in identifying and responding to the problem. As Toyota faced difficulty framing the issue (i.e. specifically the cause of the recall), its initial corrective action efforts were relatively unsuccessful in impacting media frames. Later external communication included mortification, which was instrumental to Toyota’s recovery and helped to support corrective action efforts.

In the first press release issued after the accident that sparked the recall crisis, Toyota demonstrated responsibility for investigating the issue, using a corrective action frame, “we are investigating all of our Lexus and Toyota dealers to immediately inspect

³⁷ Despite this, Liker and Ogden (2011) note that the size of the recalls was not indicative of the number of defects in the vehicles, but of the scale of Toyota’s production.

³⁸ Consistent with the recommendations of Deacon and colleagues (2007), scare quotes were included as framing devices to indicate rebuttal or criticism on the part of the journalist.

their new, used, and loaner fleet vehicles” (Toyota, September 14). While it firmly maintained that no defect existed in vehicles with properly installed floor mats, Toyota expressed its actions to prevent floor mat interference with the pedals. Statements like this did constitute a corrective action response, but Toyota’s corrective action efforts were widely criticized as vague and questionable in media reports. For Toyota, the real issue was not in communicating corrective action efforts, but in demonstrating to the public that they had identified the true cause of the accidents and reported of SUA. As discussed, the gap between Toyota’s identification of the problem and the perceived authenticity and credibility of these statements was evident in statements by NHTSA such as, “Toyota stopped sales ‘because we asked them to’ ” (Bensinger & Hsu, February 2). Toyota struggled to establish credibility at this point in the crisis, largely because they were perceived as motivated by profits rather than safety. From this perspective, Toyota had to be forced to stop the sales of its vehicles, and did not prioritize customer safety.

Toyota consistently employed a corrective action frame in its external communication materials for the duration of the crisis, but the most fundamental aspect of its recovery was the shift in the company’s approach to corrective action. Initial corrective action frames were vague, while frames towards the resonance period were more specific and focused on concrete actions that had been taken by Toyota. Toyota also combined different image repair strategies in its public response to the crisis. These findings support criticisms (e.g. Schultz & Raupp, 2009) that call for more complex applications of crisis communication strategies³⁹. The corrective action frame was present for Toyota’s 2009-2012 image repair activities, but it was combined with other strategies

³⁹ As described in the literature review, Benoit (1997) details applications of crisis communication theory for only one type of crisis response at a time.

to varying degrees of success. The most successful image repair strategy was a combination of specific corrective action and mortification, while the least successful involved corrective action and bolstering.

Toyota continued to use corrective action as a dominant image repair strategy as the crisis progressed, but its press releases and statements to the media indicated a combination of corrective action with other image repair strategies, such as mortification as public scrutiny increased. In February 2010 press releases, Toyota shifted its strategy of bolstering its past reputation for safety and quality and corrective action to include mortification as well. For example, Toyota cited Akio Toyoda's apology for Toyota's lack of customer service and attentiveness, and the importance of changing this behaviour, "it is clear to me that in recent years we didn't listen as carefully as we should . . . recognize that we must do better—much better—in responding to safety issues" (Toyoda, February 23). In this sense, Toyota acknowledged that it had made mistakes, and used this as an opportunity to identify areas where they needed to improve customer service and communication. Later news articles reflected favourably on the implementation of corrective action efforts in reports such as, "the decision to call back the vehicles follow promises by Toyota to be swifter" (Tabuchi, January 27). It was important to image repair efforts that Toyota acknowledge its responsibility for the crisis, demonstrate action to resolve the problem, and show that these remedies had been successful. This was instrumental in the company's recovery, and was only possible when it appeared to be truthful and genuine in both its assertion of the problem, and its remedy.

Toyota's recovery ultimately depended on the clarity, sincerity and observed success of its corrective action strategies. While public relations naturally follows the logic of strategic action, the findings suggest that integrating key concepts of communicative action should be considered a best practice in corporate crisis communication. Successful corrective action involved the delivery of services and demonstration to the public that the problem was being fixed. Image repair strategies, such as bolstering its reputation and issuing "voluntary" recalls were less effective than actually demonstrating improvements and success. As such, the most instrumental image repair strategies to Toyota's recovery appeared to be a combination of corrective action and mortification. While Toyota consistently employed a corrective action frame throughout the crisis, the tone of corrective action shifted as Toyota began to admit their mistakes and apologize for them. Toyota's initial corrective action efforts were vague and did not acknowledge the possibility of actual defects within its vehicles. When combined with corrective action, mortification was a more responsive image repair strategy. Unlike emphasizing its positive attributes, this strategy allowed the company to begin to recover from the crisis. Mortification also allowed Toyota to demonstrate transparency by publicly identifying their weaknesses, and combine this admission of error with the identification of appropriate corrective action strategies to rectify the problem.

The chapter's discussion of source selection, culturally embedded themes in media reporting as well as the various framing of attributes and image repair in Toyota's press releases points to the importance of using culturally informed, clear, and transparent communication whenever possible during a crisis. As a Japanese company, Toyota faced

several obstacles with regard to its communication with the American public. Ultimately, Toyota's image repair strategies were more effective when they addressed the crisis in the United States by issuing recalls more promptly and responsively, and specifically tailoring the language of their public statements to an American audience. While prominent public relations scholars (e.g. Coombs, 2007) caution against general policies of transparent communication, particularly in the early stages of a crisis, the findings of this study indicate that open, truthful, and transparent image repair strategies (e.g. corrective action, mortification) are more effective and carry less risk for organizations than employing vague or deceptive image repair (e.g. denial). Toyota was initially vague in image repair activities, but it was ultimately forced to change its strategic efforts and communicate clearly with the American public when it became apparent that a vague and evasive communication strategy would not be effective. Strategies such as mortification allowed Toyota to communicate truthfully with the public and express sincerity. In principle, strategic communication is not founded in equal and truthful communication, but for Toyota, the open and truthful aspects of their public relations strategy were the most effective during the recall crisis. The following chapter discusses the most important findings of the study, and proposes strategic recommendations for corporate crisis communication.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Key Findings

This thesis sheds light on the range of image repair activities employed by Toyota during the recall of “suddenly accelerating” vehicles from September 2009 to January 2012, and how these activities were framed in media content. The examination of image repair strategies and media framing through qualitative framing analysis led to findings specifically related to Toyota’s recovery, as well as more broadly to the field of crisis communication and media reporting of a crisis.

There were several key findings related to source selection, particularly during the emergence phase of the crisis. The emergence phase was the shortest in the issue framing cycle of the Toyota crisis, as media framing of the cause began roughly two months after the first report of misplaced floor mats. During the definition phase, the causes of SUA were contested between Toyota and the media. An examination of sourcing practices in media coverage revealed that commonly cited sources during this phase were drivers, industry experts, government regulators and lawmakers, and Toyota spokespersons. Drivers were most influential in defining the causes of the crisis and provided emotional and moral judgments in news articles. While government lawmakers initially focused on Toyota’s responsibility, the focus of responsibility later shifted to regulator NHTSA. Although Toyota spokespersons were included in media sourcing during the definition phase, they were not primary definers of content during the early definition phase.

The combination of corrective action strategies was another key finding, as Toyota's efforts to repair its image involved external communication activities that employed multiple image repair strategies at once. Based on media coverage of Toyota's image and reports of its activities, the findings indicate that the most successful combination of strategies was corrective action and mortification, as this showed the public that Toyota had admitted fault, and was formulating a course of action to directly address this. The least effective combination of corrective action included bolstering, where Toyota relied on its past reputation to diffuse the situation and did not demonstrate adequate investigation into all possible causes of the recalls beyond the floor mats.

While a strong cultural frame was observed in media coverage of Toyota during the recall period, analysis of Toyota's external communication did not indicate an emphasis on Japan or its identity as a Japanese company in its projected image. Cultural frames in media content pertained to Toyota's corporate culture and identity, Japanese culture, and American culture. Media reporting continued to emphasize the cultural frame, and varied only in its application of reasoning devices to each frame throughout the crisis. Another cultural frame encountered in media coverage discussed modern technology as a potential cause of the Toyota crisis, and a potential solution to avoid future accidents. The dominant frames observed in media coverage can be applied to understand general media coverage of other similar corporate crises. Frames such as modern technology were anchored in reasoning devices that defined technology as a problem and suggested it as a remedy at different points in the crisis. Similarly, the prominent cultural focus of reasoning devices highlights fundamental implications on research on media framing during a crisis. These findings suggest that certain frames,

such as technology and culture, may be common features in media reporting of a crisis, rather than simply specific to the Toyota case study. As such, this finding illuminates a potential opportunity for further academic exploration.

Findings in Light of Theory

The epistemology of William James (1981a; 1981b) and Jurgen Habermas (1964; 1984) provided a foundation from which to explore both image and communication from a broad perspective. These philosophers ultimately inspired and guided the ideas, theories and concepts that grounded the methodology and findings of the study. For this reason, it is important to delineate the specific link between their philosophy and the key findings.

The use of select concepts from William James' (1981a; 1981b) ideas of perception and consciousness and self were integral to understanding Toyota's image and impression management strategies during the crisis. Understanding reality as individually mediated based on external impressions guided the media framing analysis. Key findings (e.g. the news media's cultural framing of Toyota as a "Japanese" company, as well as Toyota's use of impression management) were grounded in the premise that reality is ultimately dependent on the perceptions of the audience receiving a given impression. Beyond understanding Toyota's intended impressions during the crisis, the study examined the reasoning devices through which media interpreted its impression management activities. Interestingly, the analysis revealed several key themes in media reporting related to nationalism and technology, suggesting that while image repair strategies are important to corporate crisis communication, the media ultimately follows

patterns of reporting external to corporate activities. For example, framing is often dependent on the cultural norms of the audience, or the given stage in the issues cycle.

Jürgen Habermas (1964; 1984) provided a foundation from which to understand the function of communication by both public relations and media during a crisis. Toyota's most successful response to the crisis involved its shift from vague and deceptive communication (e.g. denial) to openness about its failed crisis response (e.g. corrective action; mortification). This was a key finding in light of the study's Habermasian framework. Although Toyota was consistently motivated by the goals of strategic action, and focused its communication efforts in the aim of improving its public image, the company was obligated to employ principles of communicative action in order to successfully repair its image. This suggests that while transplanting Habermasian concepts directly onto the practice of public relations communication is impractical, employing aspects of communicative action can benefit public relations, particularly in a crisis.

The Habermasian framework of the study also contextualized the analysis of media reporting, given the central role of news values in determining news framing of Toyota. As discussed in the findings section, the framing analysis of source selection in media coverage of Toyota revealed the key role of drivers in defining electronics as the cause of the SUA incidents. While the actions of public relations are primarily subject to scrutiny during a corporate crisis, the role of the media is significant. In light of Habermas' (1964) public sphere, the findings confirmed that both public relations and media employed strategic, rather than communicative action during the early phases of the crisis. Media sourcing practices obscured truthful and accurate reporting in the early

stages of the crisis. Source selection was used to increase the saliency of reporting; emotional statements by driver sources played a prominent role in fuelling speculation about the causes of the crisis. While the main recommendation of the study is related to transparent corporate crisis communication, the media play a vital role and should report content based on truth, rather than salience.

Strategic Recommendations

The findings of this study are applicable to organizational crisis management at the issue management, crisis decision-making, and post-crisis phases of a corporate image crisis. The outcomes of the framing analysis provided an insight into the strengths and weaknesses of Toyota's public relations activities in the broader context of the issues framing cycle (e.g. Miller & Riechart, 2001), and how Toyota was perceived in media coverage. As the recommendations flow from the timeframe of the study, the following section addresses the issue management phase, followed by crisis communication, and post-crisis reflection.

Organizations should closely monitor media content to understand the tone of public opinion during a crisis. Media monitoring can help organizations to tailor messaging to the public and clarify speculation. As part of crisis management, organizations should plan to update their customers and other key stakeholders with very specific, clear, and factual statements before an issue emerges in the media. It is important to establish the organization as highly informed at this stage of the crisis to mitigate frame negotiation during the definition phase. Toyota's inconsistent diagnosis of causes (i.e. a floor mat advisory was initially issued, and was later followed by a sticking

accelerator pedal recall) coupled with its continued denial of the electronic cause did not help to assuage media frames of electronic defects. Establishing credibility during this phase is essential to the success of later corrective action efforts. While organizations have to be perceived as actively looking to remedy the situation, the public must believe that these remedies will be effective in solving the issue. Toyota eventually regained their credibility in the resonance phase of the crisis, and their later decision to halt production of vehicles until a solution was implemented was received positively in media coverage.

Organizations should have a comprehensive crisis management plan, which delegates the responsibilities of internal employees in addressing the crisis, and the skills required in each role. First, it is essential at the issue management stage to delegate specific roles to each public spokesperson, and coordinate communication among them. Having clearly defined rules for communication with the media is essential for consistent and clear messaging to the public. Drawing upon the findings of this study, the leader of the organization should consistently act as the main spokesperson for the organization, rather than an array of executives. They should receive clear guidance from an expert regarding appropriate communication with stakeholders, particularly in situations where the leader is from a different culture or country. Furthermore, employees should be instructed not to comment publicly and direct all concerns to the media relations division of the corporation. While Toyota instructed its dealers not to comment to media, internal employees were often cited in media coverage. Furthermore, as noted in the findings section, some comments from internal Toyota sources cited leaked emails from employees celebrating the money Toyota saved by issuing a limited recall, which was very damaging to the company's image. As such, it is necessary for companies to have

regulations regarding what content is acceptable to communicate in emails, phone calls or in-person meetings.

Next, communication during the emergence and definition phases should be decisive, clear, and highly responsive. Although complaints of SUA dated back to 2007, Toyota exhibited delayed and inconsistent communication to the media that indicated a lack of planning before the crisis occurred. Preventative actions through issue management should be put in place to reduce the threat of reputational damage. A plan should identify key stakeholders, such as media contacts, in addition to governmental agencies and subject matter experts, preferably who are not employed by the organization (e.g. external engineers, academics). The analysis of media sourcing practices revealed a discrepancy between public relations statements and those by NHTSA and industry experts in media coverage during the emergence and definition phases. Industry experts are particularly important to providing an impartial opinion, in situations where the credibility of the organization is jeopardized. As a mechanical problem would have been easier and less costly to fix, Toyota was perceived as having motives for finding a mechanical, rather than electronic cause. Having the endorsement of an expert source would have provided additional proof to support Toyota's claims during the emergence and definition phases.

As discussed, media framing of alternate SUA causes began very shortly after Akio Toyoda publicly apologized and issued their first recall of floor mats in the wake of the Saylor accident. The definition phase of the issues framing cycle involves competing frames between an organization and various stakeholders in the media, as well as media framing in itself. Toyota's press releases focused on the electronic cause of SUA during

the issues definition phase, when communication should have been focused on gaining credibility for their claims that the problem was mechanical. Toyota was more focused on denying an electrical cause of SUA than on actually resolving the problem. As discussed in the issue management recommendations, in instances when credibility is threatened, external sources such as experts can be utilized to provide additional support for claims during the crisis stage. Furthermore, Toyota should have also focused on limiting the scope of the crisis in response to the media. As noted in the findings section, media reporting sensationalized the high volume of the recalls, but this was an indicator of the size of Toyota's manufacturing, rather than the number of errors in the vehicles (Liker & Ogden, 2011). Toyota never clarified or defended this despite numerous articles focusing on the large scale of the crisis to differentiate between Toyota and other car recalls.

The findings of this thesis also support the general recommendation of exercising cultural normativity in crisis communication with affected customers in different countries. This can be implemented in a communications plan involving research on the cultural norms of customers in different regions, and how they impact a crisis communication strategy. Toyota struggled with image repair during the crisis, largely as a result of its inability to understand and resolve cultural differences in its application of crisis communication to Americans. Akio Toyoda appeared reticent to travel to the United States to testify before Congress, which was viewed negatively in American news reporting. When Toyoda finally appeared before Congress, his emotional demeanour conveyed a sense of insecurity to the American public. While the Japanese media received Toyoda's emotional display positively, describing Toyoda as "crying while maintaining masculinity", numerous American news articles directly stated that Toyoda

needed to respond to the crisis in accordance with American cultural norms and values (Inada & Sanchanta, February 26).

Finally, organizations should propose measures for moving forward during the resolution phase of the framing cycle. For example, Toyota mobilized a Quality Task Force to show that they were actively taking measures to improve and move on from the crisis, which was received positively in media coverage. This demonstrated its resiliency after the crisis, and a willingness to repair any mistakes an organization may have made during the issues and crisis management stages. While Toyota made several mistakes throughout the crisis, the company had a clear vision of how to move forward from the crisis and learn from its mistakes.

Limitations, Implications, and Lessons Learned

Framing provides an indication of the level of salience an issue receives in media content, as well as the ways in which public opinions are formulated within the public sphere. The findings of this thesis suggest that while public relations activities are important during a crisis, media framing follows its own patterns, which may be irrespective of public relations activities. The cultural frames observed in the media framing analysis provide valuable insights into general media framing patterns during a corporate image crisis, which can be applied to crisis planning and management. The analysis of public relations content provided insight into Toyota's preferred framing during the crisis; furthermore, examining corporate image repair in the context of media framing contributed a new perspective reflective of the framing cycle and general news values in media reporting.

In particular, the observation of culturally embedded themes in media framing highlighted important implications for journalists, as well as for research in organizational crisis communication. First, the strong presence of culturally embedded themes in media framing during the Toyota crisis identified an additional factor beyond Toyota's initial silence, which may have obscured accurate and truthful reporting of the Toyota crisis. While this study is mainly focused on public relations and strategic communication, it is important to consider the responsibility of journalists during a corporate crisis to provide truthful and accurate information. Moreover, the contextualization of public relations activities within media framing shifts provided a perspective relevant to developing an issue management strategy or managing a crisis. Media monitoring remains a key aspect of crisis management, and public relations departments should be aware of general themes in media reporting, as well as the ways in which public relations strategies can anticipate and complement them. This research is relevant to both crisis preparation and crisis response, as it highlights important frames within media reporting that Toyota should have taken note of during the early phases of the issues framing cycle, as well as successful crisis management activities later on.

A limitation of this study lies in its analysis of culturally embedded themes within media content from a Western perspective. As the media's ability to define issues within a culture often remains unnoticed within the news culture, it follows that some frames may remain latent when a member of that culture is conducting the research (Van Gorp, 2010). As such, it is important to acknowledge a potential cultural bias as a limitation when evaluating a researcher's ability to detect the presence of culturally embedded frames within media reporting (Ibid). While the literature review helped to sensitize the

researcher to potential emergent cultural themes, future research might benefit from the use of multiple coders from different cultures to increase reliability. This limitation is ultimately due to the exploratory, rather than exhaustive scope of the study.

As the Toyota recall is a case study primarily based in the United States, the recommendations are drawn from normative American cultural values observed in media framing. This is consistent with the bulk of scholarly literature on communication during a corporate image crisis, which is generally focused on communication from a Western perspective. This highlights an opportunity for research on cross-cultural crisis communication in an internationally based corporate crisis. It is highly important for global companies to be aware of how certain image repair strategies are received by different cultural groups and different countries in tailoring a crisis communication strategy. It is recommended that future studies in the field examine the transferability of existing strategic crisis communication theory and practices to other cultures.

Finally, given that this study draws upon a rich theoretical framework, including the philosophical underpinnings of William James (1981a; 1981b) and Jürgen Habermas (1984), it is important to note that its use of philosophy and theory is not intended to be exhaustive. The purpose of the study's epistemology is to inspire and guide the focus of this study in a general, rather than specific way. As such, the most relevant threads of knowledge were drawn from William James (1981a; 1981b) and Jürgen Habermas (1984), although that the scholarship of these two thinkers is much wider than the scope of this thesis. Selected concepts and ideas were drawn from the scholarship of these philosophers to anchor and guide the methodological application and analysis of the findings. The theoretical framework also highlights an additional avenue of further

exploration for future studies. The philosophical framework is too broad to completely dissect in a Masters thesis, but this could be studied in more detail in a PhD program of research.

Thesis Summary

This thesis synthesizes and assesses the strategic activities that Toyota took part in to repair its image at different stages of the crisis, and assesses how these strategies were framed in American media content. More specifically, it explores image repair from a broad perspective that encompasses framing strategies by public relations professionals, important frames that emerge in news reporting over time, and how and why certain sources are selected in media reporting of a crisis.

By tracing the role and impact of image repair strategies and media coverage on Toyota's image as the crisis progressed, the introduction establishes the importance of understanding crisis communication and corporate image from the perspectives of both Toyota and the American media. The Toyota crisis is identified as an important case study in applying this multifaceted perspective to prominent theories of image repair (e.g. Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2007). The shifts in Toyota's crisis management approach and its initial indecision regarding its approach to the crisis provide a rich case study for understanding the application of various strategies over the course of a crisis. The framing analysis of media content provides a nuanced view of how these strategies were reported in news coverage, as well as how other aspects of Toyota's image were perceived during the crisis. Theories and concepts such as impression management, framing analysis, media theory, and crisis communication form the theoretical framework

and ultimately guide the analysis of image repair strategies, media framing of the crisis, and media sourcing practices during the crisis.

The literature review details and deconstructs the theoretical framework by drawing on William James and Jürgen Habermas to establish the foundations of perception and strategic communication. From this point, the literature review discusses theories stemming from these scholars, such as impression management, primary and secondary definers, theories of crisis communication, framing analysis, and theories of framing in the public relations and media context. William James was selected for his philosophy on the subjectivity of perception, and the individual's agency in creating meaning. This established a framework from which to approach theories of impression management and framing, which are both founded in the subjectivity of meaning based on how ideas are presented and perceived by a given individual. This framework also guided the application of media theory to the literature review, which focused on the impact of source selection on the overall interpretation of a news article. Jürgen Habermas was selected to anchor the thesis' focus on the act of communication, and its understanding of strategic communication. This thesis drew on theories of crisis communication that applied Habermasian principles of strategic communication to effective communication with key publics (e.g. Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2007). The literature review establishes a lens from which to approach the structuration of the thesis' methodology and the discussion and analysis of key findings.

The methodology section conceptualizes the most relevant concepts and ideas discussed in the literature review for application to the research. The research questions are informed by the theoretical framework, and guide the analysis of Toyota's projected

and perceived image during the crisis, through the lens of both public relations and media content. This thesis justifies the selection of framing analysis to investigate the research questions, as these methods provide a means to understand both manifest and latent meanings of texts. The goals of this research are to uncover both explicitly stated themes, as well as the ways in which messages are framed. As such, framing analysis was deemed appropriate for the interests of this project. Next, this section details the procedures of data collection and analysis, sample selection, and coding frames. Finally, a discussion of reliability and validity concludes the chapter, in order to mitigate potential risks in the data analysis phase.

The findings indicated the emergence of several key frames, as well as important framing shifts within the data. The cultural frames observed in media coverage pointed to the need for exercising cultural normativity in international communication activities. Other dominant themes included modern technology both as problem and remedy, as well as sourcing practices that favoured moral evaluations and anecdotal evidence in frames structuring the causes of the crisis. Public relations framing remained consistent across the timeframe of the study, although Toyota emphasized different aspects of its image as the crisis progressed. Toyota's extensive use of corrective action led to a thorough examination of the effectiveness of this strategy during the crisis. The findings showed that corrective action was only effective when Toyota was able to successfully remedy the situation through corrective action; "empty" statements of intention were ineffective and damaging. Further, corrective action and mortification were effective when combined, and when employed sincerely. The findings support this study's recommendation of using clear and direct communication, particularly in an environment

of uncertainty and intense public speculation. Additionally, targeting the language of crisis communication to the cultural norms of consumers was found to be important, particularly for international organizations.

This investigation of framing during the Toyota recall crisis looked beyond the initial phase of the crisis to reveal important shifts in public relations and media framing as Toyota continued to repair its image. Ultimately, Toyota's shift to clear and direct communication helped to decrease media speculation of the causes of the accidents. Toyota also became more responsive and attentive to public opinion, and began to tailor its communication to the American public. Toyota's efforts to bridge this communication gap helped in their recovery, although it did not quell negative reporting. As one of the biggest public relations crises in history, it took time for Toyota's image to recover. Despite this, the news framing shifts observed in this study revealed the effectiveness of various public relations strategies, which can be applied to the planning, crisis, and post-crisis stages. It was found that cultural sensitivity and ethical, transparent communication are essential aspects of communication when a corporate crisis necessitates image repair.

Bibliography

- Allen, Myria & Caillouet, Rachel. (1994). Legitimation endeavors: Impression management strategies used by an organization in crisis. *Communication Monographs*, 61(1), 44-62.
- Alliance for Audited Media. (2010). Average circulation at the top 25 U.S. daily newspapers. *Audited Media*. Retrieved May 3, 2014, from <http://www.auditedmedia.com/news/research-and-data/top-25-us-newspapers-for-september-2010.aspx>.
- Alliance for Audited Media. (2011). Average circulation at the top 25 U.S. daily newspapers. *Audited Media*. Retrieved May 3, 2014, from <http://www.auditedmedia.com/news/research-and-data/top-25-us-newspapers-for-september-2011.aspx>.
- Bapuji, Hari. (2012). *Not just China: The rise of recalls in the age of global business*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bateson, Gregory. (1972). *Steps to an ecology of mind*. New York: Ballantine.
- Bennett, Jeff & Linebaugh, Kate. (2010, January 28). The Toyota recall: Acceleration mishaps worry vehicle drivers. *Wall Street Journal*, p. A8.
- Benoit, William. (1995). *Accounts, excuses and apologies: A theory of image restoration strategies*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Benoit, William. (1997). Image repair discourse and crisis communication. *Public Relations Review*, 23(2), 177-186.
- Benoit, William. (2000). Another visit to the theory of image restoration strategies. *Communication Quarterly*, 48(1), 40-44.
- Bensinger, Ken & Hsu, Tiffany. (2010, February 2). Toyota hopes to fix image along with gas pedals. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved May 3, 2014, from <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/feb/02/business/la-fi-toyota2-2010feb02>
- Bensinger, Ken & Vartabedian, Ralph. (2010, February 14). For Toyota, the crucial question is the electronics. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved May 3, 2014, from <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/feb/14/business/la-fi-toyota-electronics14-2010feb14>
- Bensinger, Ken & Vartabedian, Ralph. (2010, January 30). Doubt cast on Toyota's decision to blame sudden acceleration on gas pedal defect. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved May 3, 2014, from <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/jan/30/business/la-fi-toyota-pedal30-2010jan30>

- Berg, Bruce. (1998). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Berg, Bruce. (2011). An introduction to content analysis. In Mahmoud Eid (Ed.), *Research methods in communication* (pp. 209-233). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Bernstein, David. (1984). *Company image and reality: A critique of corporate communications*. London: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Berry, David & Kamau, Caroline. (2013). *Public policy and media organizations*. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company.
- Brennan, Bernard. (1968). *William James*. New York: Twayne Publishers.
- Bunkley, Nick. (2010, January 22). Toyota issues a second recall. *New York Times*, p. B8.
- Bunkley, Nick. (2011, May 24). Recall study finds flaws at Toyota. *New York Times*, p. B1.
- Burkart, Roland. (2007). On Jürgen Habermas and public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 33(3), 249-254.
- Burleson, Brant & Kline, Susan. (1979). Habermas' theory of communication: A critical explanation. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 65(4), 412-428.
- Burns, Judith & Bruner, Michael. (2000). Revisiting the theory of image restoration strategies. *Communication Quarterly*, 48(1), 27-39.
- Calhoun, Craig. (Ed.). (1992). *Habermas and the public sphere*. Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- Claeys, An-Sofie, Cauberghe, Verolien & Vyncke, Patrick. (2010). Restoring reputations in times of crisis: An experimental study of the situational crisis communication theory and the moderating effects of locus of control. *Public Relations Review*, 36(3), 256-262.
- Comello, Maria. (2009). William James on "possible selves": Implications for studying identity in communication contexts. *Communication Theory*, 19(3), 337-350.
- Coombs, Timothy & Holladay, Sherry. (2002). Helping crisis managers protect reputational assets: Initial tests of the situational crisis communication theory. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 16(2), 165-186.
- Coombs, Timothy & Holladay, Sherry. (2010). *The handbook of crisis communication*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Coombs, Timothy & Schmidt, Lainen. (2000). An empirical analysis of image restoration: Texaco's racism crisis. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 12(2),

163-178.

- Coombs, Timothy. (1998). An analytic framework for crisis situations: Better responses from a better understanding of the situation. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 10(3), 177-191.
- Coombs, Timothy. (2007). Protecting organization reputations during a crisis: The development and application of situational crisis communication theory. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 10(3), 163-176.
- Cornelissen, Joep. (2000). Corporate image: an audience centered model. *Corporate Communications*, 5(2), 119-125.
- Czinkota, Michael & Ronkainen, Ilkka. (2012). *International Marketing*. Cengage: Boston.
- D'Angelo, Paul. (2002). News framing as a multiparadigmatic research program: A response to Entman. *Journal of Communication*, 52(4), 870-888.
- Dawson, Chester. (2011, November 29). For Toyota, patriotism and profits may not mix. *Wall Street Journal*, Retrieved from <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052970203733504577025523618197732>
- Deacon, David, Pickering, Michael, Golding, Peter & Murdock, Graham. (2007). *Researching communications*. London: Hodder Education.
- DeBord, Matthew. (2010, February 6). Toyota's blind spot. *New York Times*, p. 19.
- Edgar, Andrew. (2006). *Habermas: The key concepts*. Abington: Routledge.
- Edie, James. (1987). *William James and phenomenology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Eid, Mahmoud. (2008). *Interweavement: International media ethics and rational decision-making*. Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Entman, Robert. (1993). Framing: Towards a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51-58.
- Erickson, Sheri, Weber, Marsha & Segovia, Joann. (2011). Using communication theory to analyze corporate reporting strategies. *International Journal of Business Communication*, 48(2), 207-223
- Fairhurst, Gail & Sarr, Robert. (1996). *The art of framing: Managing the language of leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Fan, David, Geddes, David & Flory, Felix. (2011). *The Toyota recall crisis: Media*

- impact on Toyota's corporate brand reputation*. Alexandria, VA: American Statistical Association.
- Fearn-Banks, Kathleen. (2007). *Crisis communications: A casebook approach*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Fenton, Natalie. (Ed.). (2010). *New media, old news: Journalism and democracy in the digital age*. London: Sage Publications.
- Foreman, Peter, Whetten, David & Mackey, Alison. (2012). An identity-based view of reputation. In Michael Barnett and Timothy Pollock (Eds.). *The Oxford handbook of corporate reputation* (pp. 179-200). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Galtung, Johan & Ruge, Marie. (1965). The structure of foreign news: The presentation of the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus crises in four Norwegian newspapers. *Journal of Peace Research*, 2(1), 64-91.
- Gamson, William & Modigliani, Andre. (1989). Media discourse and public opinion on nuclear power: A constructionist approach. *American Journal of Sociology*, 95(1), 1-37.
- Gamson, William. (1984). *What's news: A game simulation of TV news*. New York: Free Press.
- Gilpin, Dawn. (2010). Organizational image construction in a fragmented online media environment. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 22(3), 265-287.
- Gitlin, Todd. (1980). *The whole world is watching: Mass media in the making & unmaking of the new left*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Glionna, John & Masters, Coco. (2010, January 29). Toyota recalls undermine Japanese confidence in an industrial titan. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved May 3, 2014, from <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/jan/29/world/la-fg-japan-toyota29-2010jan29>
- Glucker, Jeff. (2010, November 5). Allstate sues Toyota over sudden-acceleration-related insurance claims. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved May 3, 2014, from <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/oct/05/business/la-fi-autos-toyota-20101005>
- Goffman, Erving. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Doubleday.
- Goffman, Erving. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Goodman, Peter. (2010, August 22). In case of emergency: What not to do. *New York Times*, p. BU1.
- Gower, Karla. (2006). Truth and transparency. In Kathy Fitzpatrick and Carolyn

- Bronstein (Eds.). *Ethics in public relations: Responsible advocacy* (pp. 89-105). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Habermas, Jürgen. (1964). The public sphere: An encyclopedia article. *New German Critique*, 3(1), 49-55.
- Habermas, Jürgen. (1984). *The theory of communicative action: Volume 1*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen. (1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen. (1998). *The pragmatics of communication*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Hall, Stuart, Critcher, Chas, Jefferson, Tony Clarke, John, Clarke & Roberts, Brian. (1978). *Policing the crisis: Mugging, the state, and law and order*. New York: Holmes & Meier.
- Hallahan, Kirk. (1999). Seven models of framing: Implications for public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 11(3), 205-242.
- Hauser, Gerard. (1999). *Vernacular voices: The rhetoric of publics and public spheres*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.
- Heller, Victor & Darling, John. (2012). Anatomy of crisis management: Lessons from the infamous Toyota case. *European Business Review*, 24(2), 151-168.
- Ihlen, Oyvind & van Ruler, Betteke. (2007). How public relations works: Theoretical roots and public relations perspectives. *Public Relations Review*, 33(3), 243-248.
- Inada, Miho & Sanchanta, Mariko. (2010, February 26). Japanese show support for Toyota's expressiveness. *Wall Street Journal*, p. B4.
- Ingrassia, Paul. (2010, January 29). Toyota: Too big, too fast. *The Wall Street Journal*, p. A15.
- James, William. (1956). *The will to believe and other essays in popular philosophy*. New York: Dover.
- James, William. (1981). The consciousness of self. In Frederick Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas Skrupskelis (Eds.). *The principles of psychology: Volume I* (pp. 279-380). London: Harvard University Press.
- James, William. (1981). The perception of reality. In Frederick Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas Skrupskelis (Eds.). *The principles of psychology: Volume II*, (pp. 651-951). London: Harvard University Press.
- Jenkins, Holman. (2009, December 1). Bring back the "off" switch. *Wall Street Journal*.

- Retrieved May 3, 2014, from
<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052748704107104574569722440774200>
- Johannson, Catrin. (2007). Goffman's sociology: An inspiring resource for developing public relations theory. *Public Relations Review*, 33(3), 275-280.
- Kazoleas, Dean & Teigen, Lars Georg. (2006). The technology-image expectancy gap: A new theory of public relations. In Carl Botan and Vincent Hazleton (Eds.), *Public Relations Theory II* (pp. 415-433). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- King Jr., Neil & Mitchell, Josh. (2010, February 22). Toyota document hails limited recalls. *Wall Street Journal*, p. B1.
- Kingston, Jeff. (2010, February 5). A crisis made in Japan, *Wall Street Journal*, p.W1.
- L'Étang, Jacquie. (2007). *Public relations: Concepts, practice and critique*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Lamberth, David. (1999). *William James and the metaphysics of experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lazarus, David. (2010, February 11). Toyota, what's so hard about doing the right thing?, *Los Angeles Times*, Retrieved May 3, 2014, from
<http://articles.latimes.com/2010/feb/11/business/la-fi-lazarus11-2010feb11>
- Leeper, Roy. (1996). Moral objectivity: Jürgen Habermas' discourse ethics, and public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 22(2), 133-150.
- Lichtblau, Eric & Vlasic, Bill. (2010, February 10). As Toyota's recall expands, safety agency is in cross hairs. *New York Times*. P. B1.
- Liker, Jeffrey & Ogden, Timothy. (2011). *Toyota under fire*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Linebaugh, Kate & Mitchell, Josh. (2010, February 25). The Toyota hearing: Hearings escalate fight for reputation. *Wall Street Journal*, p. A7.
- Maier, Craig. (2005). Weathering the storm: Hauser's vernacular voices, public relations and the Roman Catholic Church's sexual abuse scandal. *Public Relations Review*, 31(2), 219-227.
- Marcus, Alfred & Goodman, Robert. (1991). Victims and shareholders: The dilemmas of presenting corporate policy during a crisis. *Academy of Management Journal*, 34(2), 281-305.
- Marks, Leonie, Kalaitzandonakes, Nicholas, Wilkins, Lee, & Zakharova, Ludmila. (2007). Mass media framing of biotechnology news. *Public Understanding of Science*, 16(2), 183-203.

- Maxwell, Kenneth & Shirouzu, Norihiko. (2010, February 9). Toyota set to recall some hybrids in Japan. *Wall Street Journal*.
- Maynard, Micheline. (2010, January 29). Toyota Meets More Pressure, Now From Congress, *New York Times*, p. B1
- Maynard, Micheline. (2010, June 3). At Toyota, a cultural shift. *New York Times*, p. B1.
- Maynard, Micheline. (2010, March 12). Agency weighs the need for a 'black box' in cars. *New York Times*, p. B4.
- Miller, Mark & Riechert, Bonnie. (2001). The spiral of opportunity and frame resonance: Mapping the issue cycle in news and public discourse. In Stephen Reese, Oscar Gandy, and August Gran (Eds.). *Framing public life: Perspectives on media and our understanding of the social world* (pp. 107-122). Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Mitchell, Josh. (2009, September 30). Floor mats prompt largest Toyota recall. *Wall Street Journal*, p. B3.
- Mitchell, Josh. (2010, February 17). US intensifies Toyota probe. *Wall Street Journal*, p. B1.
- Morley, David. (2011). Industrial conflict and the mass media. *Sociological Review*, 24(2), 245-268.
- Mueller, Barbara. (2011). *Dynamics of international advertising: Theoretical and practical perspectives*. Peter Lang Publishing: New York.
- Neuman, W Lawrence. (2011). Qualitative and quantitative research. In Mahmoud Eid (Ed.), *Research methods in communication* (pp. 133-207). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Nisbet, Michael. (2010). Knowledge into action: Framing the debates over climate change and poverty. In Paul Angelo & Jim Kuypers (Eds.). *Doing news framing analysis: Empirical and theoretical perspectives*. (pp. 43-83). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Olins, Wally. (1991) Corporate identity and the behaviour dimension. *Design Management Journal*, 2(1), 42-45.
- Pawelski, James. (2007). *The dynamic individualism of William James*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Pearson, Christine & Mitroff, Ian. (1993). From crisis prone to crisis prepared: A framework for crisis management. *Academy of Management Executive*, 7(1), 48-59.
- Pfeifer, Stuart & Bensinger, Ken. (2010, August 3). Toyota sudden acceleration reports

- date to 2003. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved May 3, 2014, from <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/aug/03/business/la-fi-0803--toyota-lawsuit-20100803>
- Putnam, Ruth. (1997). *The Cambridge companion to William James*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Puzzanghera, Jim & Bensinger, Ken. (2010, March 3). Calls grow for throttle safeguard. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved May 3, 2014, from <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/mar/03/business/la-fi-toyota-hearing3-2010mar03>
- Reese, Stephen. (2010). Finding frames in a web of culture: The case of the war on terror. In Paul D'Angelo and Jim Kuypers (Eds.). *Doing news framing analysis* (pp.17-42). Routledge: New York.
- Reynolds, Larry. (1993). *Interactionism: Exposition and critique*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Salter, Lee. (2005). The communicative structures of journalism and public relations. *Journalism*, 6(1), 90-106.
- Schlenker, Barry. (1980). *Impression management: The self-concept, social identity, and interpersonal relations*. Monterey: Brooks Cole Publishing.
- Schlesinger, Philip & Tumbler, Howard. (2000). Reporting crime: The media politics of criminal justice. In Howard Tumbler (Ed.). *News: A reader* (pp. 257-266). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schultz, Friederike & Raupp, Juliana. (2009). The social construction of crises in governmental and corporate communications: An inter-organizational and inter-systemic analysis. *Public Relations Review*, 36(2), 112-119.
- Schultz, Friederike, Kleinnijenhuis, Oegema, Dirk, Utz, Sonja & van Attevelde, Wouter. (2012). Strategic framing in the BP crisis: A semantic network analysis of associative frames. *Public Relations Review*, 38(1), 97-107.
- Schütz, Alfred. (1945). *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 5(4), 533-576.
- Segal, David. (2010, February 7). The A-student flunks: Oh, what a feeling. *New York Times*, p. WK1.
- Seigfried, Charlene. (1978). *Chaos and context: A study in William James*. Athens: Ohio University Press.
- Seon-Kyoung, Ana & Gower, Karla. (2009). How do the news media frame crises? A content analysis of crisis news coverage. *Public Relations Review*, 35(2), 107-112.

- Shirozu, Norihiko & Sanchanta, Mariko. (2010, February 23). Support wavers at Toyota for chief. *Wall Street Journal*, p. A1.
- Smith, Greg. (2006). *Erving Goffman*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Stevenson, Nick. (2002). *Understanding media cultures*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Sturges, David. (1994). Communicating through crisis: A strategy for organizational survival. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 7(3), 297-316.
- Tabuchi, Hiroko & Vlasic, Bill. (2010, February 6). Toyota's top executive under rising pressure, *New York Times*, p. B1.
- Tabuchi, Hiroko. (2011, April 23) Production cuts at Toyota to last until year's end. *New York Times*, p. B1.
- Tabuchi, Hiroko. (2011, January 27). Toyota, citing fuel lines, recalls 1.7 million vehicles. *New York Times*, p. B3.
- Tankard, James. (2001). The empirical approach to the study of media framing. In Stephen Reese, Oscar Gandy, and August Grant (Eds.), *Framing public life*. (pp. 95-106). Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Taylor, Maureen & Kent, Michael. (2006). Taxonomy of mediated crisis responses. *Public Relations Review*, 33(2), 140-146.
- Toyoda, Akio. (2010, February 23). Back to basics for Toyota. *Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved May 3, 2014, from <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052748704454304575081644051321722>
- Toyota, (2010, October 4). *Toyota Announces New Quality Leadership Initiatives, Building on Significant Accomplishments to Date* [Press Release].
- Toyota. (2009, November 25). *Our Point of View: Unintended Acceleration: Toyota Addresses the Issues* [Press release].
- Toyota. (2009, September 14). *Lexus ES 350 accident investigation* [Press release].
- Toyota. (2010, February 17). *Toyota Motor Corporation press conference on quality: Shinichi Sasaki* [Press release].
- Toyota. (2010, January 28). *Toyota update regarding recalls* [Press release].
- Toyota. (2010, March 2). *Our pledge to Toyota drivers* [Press release].
- Toyota. (2010, March 25). *St. Angelo to Lead Toyota's North American Quality Assurance* [Press release].

- Toyota. (2010, May 19). *Jim Lentz provides progress report to Congress on steps taken by Toyota to become a more responsive, safety-focused organization* [Press release].
- Toyota. (2010, May 19). *Toyota progress report* [Press release].
- Toyota. (2012, December 26). *Toyota Announces Settlement of Economic Loss Litigation That Provides Value to Customers* [Press Release].
- Tuchman, Gaye. (1978). *Making news: A study in the construction of reality*. New York: Free Press.
- Ulmer, Robert, Sellnow, Timothy & Seeger, Matthew. (Eds.). (2014). *Effective crisis communication*. Thousand Oaks: California.
- Van Gorp, Baldwin. (2010). Strategies to take the subjectivity out of framing analysis. In Paul Angelo and Jim Kuypers (Eds.). *Doing news framing analysis: Empirical and theoretical perspectives*. (pp. 84-109). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Vartabedian, Ralph & Bensinger, Ken. (2009, October 18). Toyota's runaway car worries may not stop at floor mats. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved May 3, 2014, from <http://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-toyota-recall18-2009oct18,0,739395.story>
- Vartabedian, Ralph & Bensinger, Ken. (2010, February 24). Toyota president Akio Toyoda apologizes for safety lapses. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved May 3, 2014, from <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/feb/24/business/la-fi-toyota25-2010feb25>
- Vartabedian, Ralph & Bensinger, Ken. (2010, February 7). Congressional committees gearing up for Toyota hearings. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved May 3, 2014, from <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/feb/07/business/la-fi-toyota-congress7-2010feb07>
- Vincent, Laurence. (2012). *Brand real: How smart companies live their brand promise and inspire fierce customer loyalty*. New York: American Management Association.
- Vlasic, Bill & Bunkley, Nick. (2009, November 26). Gas pedals that stick force recall of Toyotas. *New York Times*, p. B1.
- Vranica, Suzanne. (2010, December 30). The year of crisis management, *Wall Street Journal*, p. B6.
- Wald, Matthew. (2011, February 9). US inquiry finds no electronic flaws in Toyotas. *New York Times*, p. B1.
- Welch, Michael, Fenwick, Melissa & Roberts, Meredith. (1998). Primary definitions of crime and moral panic: A content analysis of experts' quotes in feature newspaper articles on crime. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 34(4), 474-494.

- White, Joseph & Landers, Peter. (2010, February 25). Toyoda is wary star of Kabuki at capitol. *Wall Street Journal*, p. A1.
- White, Joseph. (2010, April 21). Why Toyota rolled over for its SUVs. *Wall Street Journal*, p. D1.
- White, Judith. (2012). The communicative action of journalists and public information officers. *Journalism Practice*, 6(4), 563-580.
- Zoch, Lynn & Molleda, Juan-Carlos. (2006). Building a theoretical model of media relations using framing, information subsidies, and agenda-building. In Carl Botan and Vincent Hazleton (Eds.). *Public relations theory II* (pp. 279-309). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Appendices

Appendix A: Media Framing Matrix⁴⁰

Title of Article: _____			
Newspaper: _____			
Date of Publication: _____			
URL: _____			
	Text⁴¹	Sources cited (RQ1.1)	Cultural Frames (RQ1.2)
Problem definition			
Diagnosis of cause			
Moral evaluation			
Suggested remedy			

⁴⁰ This table is intended as a visual representation. The complete list of frames and corresponding samples of text observed in the data analysis exceed page limits of the thesis (i.e. more than 10 pages).

⁴¹ This column included a sample of text that defined the problem, diagnosed causes, provided moral evaluations, or suggested remedies. Framing devices were listed before the text excerpt, e.g. *metaphor*: “cars are moving computers, and the electronics are the very heart of the car” (Bensinger & Vartabedian, February 14).

Appendix B: Public Relations Framing Matrix⁴²

Title of Press Release: _____			
Date of Publication: _____			
URL: _____			
	Text⁴³	Attribute Frames (RQ2.1)	Image Repair Frames (RQ2.2)
Problem definition			
Diagnosis of cause			
Moral evaluation			
Suggested remedy			

⁴² This table is intended as a visual representation. The complete list of frames and corresponding samples of text observed in the data analysis exceed page limits of the thesis (i.e. more than 10 pages).

⁴³ This column included a sample of text that defined the problem, diagnosed causes, provided moral evaluations, or suggested remedies.