Title: Effects of Crisis Response Tone and Spokesperson's Gender on Employer Attractiveness

Author names and affiliations:

Grzegorz Kapuscinski Oxford Brookes University, Oxford Brookes Business School, Clerici 2.33, Headington Campus, Oxford, UK, OX3 0BP

Nathan Zhang Oxford Brookes University, Oxford Brookes Business School, Clerici 2.33, Headington Campus, Oxford, UK, OX3 0BP

Liting Zeng, Beijing Hospitality Institute, China

Aihua Cao, Beijing Hospitality Institute, China

Corresponding author: Grzegorz Kapuscinski, e-mail: gkapuscinski@brookes.ac.uk, Tel no. 07402039125

Highlights:

- The purpose of this study is to determine the effect of tone of apology and disclosure of spokesperson's gender on hospitality organisations' employer attractiveness
- The study tests theories of crisis communication in a social media employer branding context of hospitality
- The study used a 2 (apology tone: formal/corporate vs informal/human) by 2 (spokesperson gender: male vs female) between-subjects experimental design to determine the effect of apology of potential employees employer brand attractiveness
- The findings demonstrate a moderated mediation effect. Account acceptance mediates the relationship between message tone and organisational attractiveness, and this effect is conditional on gender of the spokesperson.

Title: Effects of Crisis Response Tone and Spokesperson's Gender on Employer Attractiveness

Abstract:

Timely apologies to key publics on social media are becoming an important aspect of crisis recovery but little is known of how the spokesperson's characteristics and the tone of apology may influence the outcome. Recognising the importance of the need to attract quality workforce, this study examines the impact of social media response to a preventable crisis on organisational attractiveness. Specifically, a 2 (message tone: corporate/formal vs. human/informal) x 2 (spokesperson's gender: male vs. female) between-subjects factorial design was used to test the effectiveness of an apology. The results suggest a significant moderated mediation effect. We find that account acceptance mediates the relationship between message tone and organisational attractiveness, and this effect is conditional on gender of the spokesperson. The results are relevant to crisis managers and brand managers that seek to attract and retain talents.

Keywords: Crisis Communication; Organisational Attractiveness; Social Media; Framing; Gender

1. Introduction

The environment in which today's hospitality companies operate has become increasingly uncertain (Georgiadis et al., 2019), as changes in the political, economic, social-cultural, technological and environmental landscapes are constantly threatening the performance and viability of companies (Zhang et al., 2019). While such a turbulent environment has led a growing number of companies to engage in risk and crisis management practices to help protect and preserve their value and reputation (Gjerald and Lyngstad, 2015; Waikar et al., 2016), it is no longer the question of 'if', but 'when', a company will be truly tested by a crisis. The proliferation of personal smart devices and the widespread use of social media have further increased the likelihood and magnitude of organisational crises (Liu et al., 2015), as a minor, local incident can quickly spread, therefore causing substantial, corporate-wide damage. For example, in April 2018, Starbucks found itself in crisis after one of its Philadelphia stores called the Police to remove two 'non-buying' African-American customers. The incident was video-recorded, which went viral on social media and led to a wave of protests and global calls for boycotting the world's largest coffee chain. In response, Starbucks closed all of its US stores for a half-day 'unconscious bias' training, which totalled an estimated loss of $30m just in revenue (Bissel-Linsk et al., 2018), let alone any other forms of damage the crisis might have inflicted, such as on company reputation. A crisis can be defined as 'the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organisation's performance and generate negative outcomes' (Coombs, 2007a, pp.2-3). Depending on the 'origin' of the crisis and attributed responsibility, existing research has distinguished three broad types of crises: *victim, accidental* and *preventable* crisis (Coombs, 2007b). A *preventable* crisis, which is often caused by misbehaviours or intentional wrongdoings of individuals or groups within a company and tends to result in the highest

reputational damage than *victim* or *accidental* crisis (Claeys et al., 2010), is the focus of our study.

When a crisis strikes, a swift and carefully designed response from the company is critical (Coombs, 2017a). Such a response usually manifests itself in the form of a formal 'message', designed to satisfy the information needs of the stakeholders, clarify the company's attitudes and communicate the measures being taken to address the crisis situation (Coombs and Holladay, 2009). Over the last decade, companies in crisis are increasingly making use of social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) to deliver such a response (Roshan et al., 2016; Stephens and Malone, 2010). Whilst social media offers a unique communication channel which allows the message to reach as many audiences and as quickly as possible, and may help a company to contain damage and restore investor confidence (Austin and Jin, 2017), an inappropriately crafted and delivered crisis response may provoke public resentment and, in extreme situations, could engender a 'collaborative brand attack' (Rauschnabel et al., 2016).

Nevertheless, the literature on what constitutes an effective crisis response on social media seems to have been patchy (Crijns et al., 2017a; 2017b). Whilst much existing research has explored the question of *'what'* should be said in a crisis response message (i.e. the message 'content') (Kiambi and Shafer, 2016), relatively little is known about *'how'* the message should be framed (e.g. the message 'tone') (Crijns et al. 2017b) and *'who'* is appropriately placed to deliver it (i.e. the message 'source') (Hill and Boyd, 2015; Wei and Ran, 2019). In the context of social media where communications primarily take place in a textual format, we argue that these two considerations in crafting and delivering crisis response messages, i.e. the message 'tone' and 'source', could play a vital role in determining response effectiveness. For example, should the message adopt an *informal*, *human* tone to signal a sense of empathy from the

company (e.g. Kelleher, 2009; Park and Cameron, 2014), or should it adopt a *formal*, *corporate* tone to underscore rationality and professionalism (Kerkhof et al., 2011), which may be expected in official company responses to a crisis (Barcelos et al., 2018). Similarly, it is unclear whether disclosing information about the characteristics of the 'spokesperson' within the social media message, such as gender, would affect the effectiveness of the crisis response, despite some studies (e.g. Crijns et al., 2017a; Wei and Ran, 2019) confirming that gender similarities between the spokesperson and the audience indeed influence response effectiveness, albeit in a traditional, face-to-face communications setting.

Moreover, the literature on crisis communications have predominantly conceptualised companies as providers of consumer products/services and examined the effect of crisis communication on *consumer* perceptions of the company, such as reputation (Crijns et al., 2017b; Lee and Atkinson, 2019) and trustworthiness (Chen and Jai, 2019). However, there appears to be limited studies that have viewed companies as 'employers' and explored the effect of crisis communication on *employee* perceptions of the company. This omission is surprising, as in addition to consumers, employees' evaluations of the company may also be affected by how well the company responds to a crisis (Rabl, 2015). Responded inappropriately, it may lead to a significant negative impact on company image as an attractive employer to work for (Carpentier and Van Hoye, 2020). Further, there appears to be an increase of organisational crises that particularly affects employees. For instance, in 2018 Marriott International were in crisis following employee strikes and protests on low pay and poor working conditions (Philip, 2018). We focus on such employer-specific organisational crises and argue that company crisis response needs to be tailored to address the needs of employees, both current and potential. Given that employee attraction and retention is a constant challenge for hospitality companies

(Deery and Jago, 2015), top management must be aware of the potential effects of their crisis management strategies on employee perceptions of the company.

Against this background, this study seeks to examine the effect of social media crisis response on employer attractiveness. We focus on potential employees and aim to understand if and how, in the context of social media, the tone of a crisis response message (i.e. human/informal tone vs. corporate/formal tone), as well as explicit information about the gender of the crisis spokesperson, would influence their evaluations of the attractiveness of an employer. Moreover, we consider the role of account acceptance in mediating the effect of tone and gender, and organisational attractiveness. Our study contributes to the literature in the following ways: First, we are the first study to link hospitality-specific literature on crisis management and talent attraction. Second, we refine the guidelines of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) by expanding the knowledge of the causal link between crisis response strategy (i.e. accommodative response) and organisational attractiveness, and showing why the effect takes place. Third, we contribute to the growing body of literature regarding the role of spokesperson's gender disclosure and gender-trait associations in effectiveness of crisis responses. The results of this study could help crisis and/or public relations managers and HR managers in designing appropriate crisis response messages on social media.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Crisis communication and the use of social media

Crisis communication is the use of words and actions to manage information and meaning during a crisis in order to shape stakeholders perceptions and to mitigate and repair

any reputational damage inflicted by the crisis (Coombs, 2010). Given the process nature of a crisis, at different 'phases' the needs and requirements for communication may vary (Coombs, 2019). This study focuses on communication at the 'post-crisis phase', which begins with the management's realisation that a triggering event is a crisis (Coombs and Holladay, 2009), e.g. a news report that employees are being treated poorly by the organisation. Coombs's (2007) seminal work on SCCT suggests that a *preventable* organisational crisis requires the most carefully designed and crafted communication strategies. Empirical evidence which explores such strategies (e.g. Crijns et al., 2017b; Liu et al., 2011) suggests that an *accommodative* response, which seeks to repair and rebuild the relationships with key stakeholders (e.g. customers), is more effective than a *defensive* response that either denies the crisis or seeks to play down the organisation's responsibility. This accommodative response often takes the form of an official message, through which the organisation expresses sympathy for those affected by the crisis, apologises for its wrongdoings, accepts full responsibility, and identifies corrective actions (Claeys et al., 2010; Kiambi and Shafer, 2016).

The increasing convenience and accessibility of the Internet and mobile technology has enabled organisations to move away from traditional to digital media channels, and to utilise social media (e.g. Twitter and Facebook) as a new official channel of communication for crisis responses (Coombs, 2017a; Eriksson and Olsson, 2016; Graham et al., 2015; Zhu et al., 2017). Compared with traditional media where organisations inform, and respond to, the public via journalists, social media enables organisations to reach and interact with stakeholders directly in an instant fashion (Cheng, 2018; Zheng et al., 2018). While such an openness and potential for high interactivity are clear advantages of social media as a communication channel, empirical studies examining the effectiveness of social media for crisis response in comparison to traditional media have produced mixed results (e.g. Liu et al., 2011; Schultz et al., 2011).

Rauschnabel et al. (2016) note that existing crisis communication theories were mostly developed to deal with crisis 'offline', whereby the 'best practice' provided may not help today's managers to manage crises within an increasingly interconnected world. Despite growing scholarly efforts to address this shortcoming (e.g. Crijns et al., 2017b; du Plessis, 2018; Eriksson and Olsson, 2016; Liu et al., 2015), further research is required to better understand how an effective crisis response message on social media may be designed. If messages are not crafted carefully and appropriately, social media may pose a serious risk to effective crisis communication and reputation management (Coombs, 2017b; Opitz et al., 2018).

2.2 Crisis communication from an employer brand perspective

Existing literature of crisis communication, particularly in the context of social media, has mostly conceptualised organisations as providers of products/services, i.e. consumer brands (Claeys et al., 2010; Crijns et al., 2017a), whereas the consideration of organisations from other conceptual perspectives, such as organisations as employer brands, has been rare (Rabl, 2015; Steiner and Byrne, 2019). The term 'employer brand' appears to have been first coined by Ambler and Barrow (1996, p. 187) who defined it as *'the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing organisation'*. Unlike consumer brand, the central concern of employer brand is the organisation's image as an employer (Bondarouk et al. 2014; Sivertzen et al., 2013) and its target audience is current and potential employees (Biswas and Suar, 2016). A strong or preferred employer brand sends a clear signal that the organisation is a distinctive and desirable workplace (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004), which helps the organisation to compete in the increasingly intensive War for Talent (Sommer et al., 2016).

A closely related concept to employer brand is employer attractiveness, which describes the extent to which a job-seeker is interested to be employed by an organisation (Ritz and Waldner, 2011). Berthon et al. (2005, p. 156) define employer attractiveness as 'the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organisation'. Scholars (e.g. Sivertzen et al., 2013) suggest that employer attractiveness is a dimension of employer brand, reflecting its strength and value. Research in this area has identified a positive relationship between an organisation's employer attractiveness and its success in attracting quality employees (Ritz and Waldner, 2011; Lievens and Slaughter, 2016). However, given that employer attractiveness is a perception which varies between different people (Moroko and Uncles, 2008), a plethora of studies have sought to explore the ways in which a positive or favourable perception of employer attractiveness can be created or enhanced (e.g. Carpentier et al., 2017; Frasca and Edwards, 2017; Klimkiewicz and Oltra, 2017; Priyadarshini et al., 2017; Rampl and Kenning, 2014).

Over the last few years, scholars in the fields of crisis management and talent management have begun to realise that an organisation's crisis management actions may have an impact on its image as an employer. Studies by Rabl (2015) and Steiner and Byrne (2019), for example, show that post-crisis organisational response strategies have an effect on the organisation's attractiveness to potential job-seekers. However, neither of these studies focused specifically on an accommodative response for a preventable crisis, nor did they examine the crisis response in the context of social media. This highlights a research gap that our study seeks to fill.

2.3. Hypothesis development

2.3.1 Tone of message – How to apologise?

A growing body of research investigates the potential impact of communication style used by an organisation online on the nature of relationship with stakeholders. In the context of social media, a brand may tailor its presence by adopting a human style versus a corporate communication style. The former is conceptualised in the literature as conversational human voice (CHV) and refers to an informal and natural style of communication that allows brands to be perceived as closer to its publics (Kelleher, 2009; Park and Lee, 2013; Park and Cameron, 2014). This stands in contrast to a corporate tone, traditionally used by companies to express a more reserved and formal stance.

Research has shown what an organisation says after a crisis (e.g. denial vs. apology) and the style of crisis response can affect key outcomes of crisis communication, for instance, apology acceptance and attitudes towards organisation (Coombs and Holladay, 2009; Park and Cameron, 2014). However, little is known about the effectiveness of response strategies in the recruitment context, and specifically, in influencing organisational attractiveness (Carpentier and Van Hoye, 2020). Signalling theory (Spence, 1973) suggests job seekers rely on general impressions to judge employer attractiveness, thus, cueing potential employees with strategic use of tone to emphasise organisational qualities and influence attitudes towards organisation, could be key in this context. We argue one important omission in the literature is a lack of studies examining the role of communication style (CHV versus formal/corporate tone) in apologies and organisational attractiveness.

Rabl (2015) found that a company's response after a corruption allegation can help to reduce the negative effect on potential applicants' attraction. However, an apology was not investigated as one of the crisis response strategies. Carpentier and Van Hoye (2020) examined the role of crisis response strategies (denial vs. apology) in reducing the impact of negative online employer reviews on organisational attractiveness. No difference in potential applicants' organisational attraction was found between an apology and lack of response. More importantly, neither studies (Rabl, 2015; Carpentier and VanHoye, 2020) considered the role of tone used in crisis response.

Outside of the context of brands as employers, a number of studies examine the role of CHV in communicating with consumers. It has been suggested that adopting a human tone to deliver official statements may be particularly appropriate in a social media environment as it mimics intimate communication and creates an illusion of interpersonal communication (Park and Cameron, 2014). A company that demonstrates CHV has been found to be associated with relational outcomes such as commitment to customers, trust, satisfaction (Kelleher, 2009; Sung and Kim, 2014), and positive corporate reputation (Dijkmans et al. 2015; Kim and Ko, 2012). With respect to apologies, Kerkhof et al. (2011) studied the effectiveness of brand's crisis response using a human/informal versus corporate/formal voice. They found participants who read a personal crisis response perceived the brand as more human and reported fewer negative thoughts about the brand compared to those who read a corporate/formal response.

Brands can use a number of communication strategies to express their humanness. For instance, some studies stress the importance of personalisation in communication (Crijns et al., 2017b; Steinmann et al., 2015), which may include practices such as addressing an individual or a community by name. Moreover, human tone is also expressed when the author of a

message uses a first-person perspective, ("I" or "We"), as opposed to a third-person, corporate tone (e.g. "the brand X", "the staff") (e.g. Barcelos et al., 2018). Human style is also signalled through emotional statements (Yang et al. 2010), that may include expression of shame, regret (van der Meer and Verhoeven, 2014), anger or sadness (Kim and Cameron, 2011). Expression of emotions is typically absent or limited in corporate messages which tend to be task oriented, and dominated by rational appeals (Choi and Lin, 2009).

In summary, the way employer brands tailor their style of communication may be important to relationships they seek to establish with their audiences, e.g. securing talent. However, it is not conclusive which tone should be used to apologise following a crisis, and no studies to date has examined the role of CHV in the recruitment context. The question is, should companies seek to keep distance and stress professionalism by being task-oriented and formal, or should they express human tone to signal collaborative commitment and emotional bond? Given the fact that social media is by design a platform that enable intimate, natural communication within a network of friends and family, following the logic of Kerkhof et al. (2011) we expect human/informal tone to be more suitable to an official statement of apology as it resembles such communication.

Specifically, we propose that using an appropriate tone of apologies will make apologies more acceptable, itself a key outcome of apology (Blumstein et al., 1974), and through this, increase organisational attractiveness. The following sections expand on this argument.

2.3.2. Mediating role of account acceptance

Account acceptance is key to restoring the relationship between transgressor and concerned publics (Blumstein et al., 1974). Acceptability of the account denotes the extent to

which people are satisfied and accepting of the accused party's response to a wrongdoing (Coombs and Holladay, 2008). How respondents feel about the crisis response offered is key to crisis managers as greater account acceptance indicates recipients believe the crisis response is appropriate, sincere and trustworthy (Coombs and Holladay, 2009; Yang et al. 2010).

According to Coombs and Holladay (2009), the use of CHV in crisis responses may increase the likelihood of accepting an organisation's account of a crisis. The reason for potential impact of CHV is underpinned by the social information processing theory (SIPT) (Walther, 2008). SIPT suggests that in absence of physical cues, typical to communication in computer-mediated spaces such as social media, people use available cues such as language, and written attitude, to make first-impression judgments and infer relationship qualities (Walther, 2008).

A number of studies demonstrate that adoption of CHV is associated with perceptions of organisations' relational commitment (Kelleher, 2009), transparency and openness to a dialogue with its publics, which, in turn, can increase publics' positive response to an organisation (Scoble and Israel, 2006). In a crisis situation, a more personal and dialogical tone is perceived more positively because it conveys sincerity and authenticity, which may be limited in formal communication (Bell and Zemke, 1987; Yang, Kang and Johnson, 2010). Kerkhof et al. (2011) investigated the use of CHV in corporate apologies and proposed measurement of recipients' attitude to response, such as appropriateness, sincerity etc., however, results were not reported. Park and Cameron (2014) found no difference between CHV and corporate/organisational tone used in crisis response on account acceptance.

Given these results and suggestions of SIPT, we propose that the use of CHV can signal a more positive and relationship-oriented approach to handling a transgression, and may increase acceptability of an apology by the affected stakeholders.

H1: Apology conveyed in a human/informal tone is more acceptable

Subsequently, because account acceptance is a key condition to restoring relationships (Blumstein et al., 1974), we expect greater degree of apology acceptance may help to absorb the negative effect of the wrongdoing on attractiveness of organisation as a potential employer. When an apology is accepted, the appeal for forgiveness is sympathetically heard by potential victims and represents a beginning of a restored relationship (Govier and Verwoerd, 2002). When an account is not accepted, the relationship between the parties cannot begin to be restored and the offending parties may suffer reputational damage (Coombs, 2006; Pfaffer et al. 2008). According to Carpentier and Van Hoye (2020), an apology offered to potential applicants signals an organisation's concern with its employees, hence demonstrating its trustworthiness, which may improve attitudes towards the organisation as a potential employer. Building on this argument, we suggest that if offering an apology may help organisations to regain potential applicants trust, and therefore, appear more attractive, then acceptability of account, as an outcome of apology, is particularly important to this relationship. The assumption in crisis research is that organisational responses are not equally accepted by the audience (Fediuk et al., 2010). Since greater account acceptance denotes positive evaluations of sincerity and trustworthiness of response (Wu and Cui, 2019; Coombs and Holladay, 2009), it may be an important first step in re-establishing the organisation as a caring employer that seeks to understand perceptions of existing and potential employees.

H2: Greater acceptance of apology results in higher organisational attractiveness

Based on the literature and hypotheses presented above, we expect that account acceptance mediates the relationship between tone of apology and organisational attractiveness. Acceptance of an apology is increased by virtue of adopting CHV, as opposed to corporate/formal tone, which signals a more positive and relationship-focused approach to potential employees. Subsequently, positive reception of an apology leads to greater organisational attractiveness, or, the reduction of a negative effect of a wrongdoing. Therefore, we hypothesise that account acceptance fully mediates the relationship between tone of apology and organisational attractiveness.

H3: Apology conveyed in a human/informal tone is more acceptable and, subsequently, results in higher organisational attractiveness.

2.3.3 Moderating role of gender – who should apologise?

We expect the tone of apology to affect organisational attractiveness through increased account acceptance. However, the mediation impact of tone might be moderated by the characteristics of the source of information. Job seekers tend to know little of potential employers, and they depend on signals to infer employer qualities (Cable and Turban, 2003). Characteristics of a spokesperson, such as gender, can act as cues to assist audiences in evaluating messages they are exposed to and influence their perceptions of an organisation. Gender is one of the most readily accessible pieces of information a person may use to interpret behaviour or form impressions of others (Crijns et al., 2017a; Kulich et al., 2007). Such seemingly peripheral or trivial cues may be particularly important when other relevant information about a spokesperson (e.g. attitudes, competence, values, and sincerity) are not readily available. Despite the importance of this issue, no studies to date applied the concept of

gender of a spokesperson as a potential determinant of crisis response effectiveness in the context of organisational attractiveness.

The influence of the spokesperson's gender is likely related to the recipient's social perceptions regarding what a social group typically does and what it should do (Eagly and Karau, 2002; Wei and Ran, 2019). Warmth (or communion) and competence (or agency) are two fundamental aspects of social perception (Fiske et al., 2007) and are central dimensions to gender stereotypes (Judd et al., 2005). Warmth is indicative of intentions and largely signals a reliable and trustworthy concern for others (Cuddy et al., 2008). It consists of traits such as helpfulness, friendliness, trustworthiness, sincerity and morality. In contrast, competence indicates one's ability to carry out these intentions, and includes traits such as assertiveness, intelligence, skill, and efficacy (Cuddy et al., 2008). Research on gender stereotypes suggests, women are perceived to possess traits associated with warmth, whereas men are perceived as more competent (Basow, 1986; Broverman et al., 1972; Eagly and Mladinic, 1989; Glick et al. 2004; Haines et al., 2016; Spence and Helmreich, 1972).

The stereotypical characteristics commonly ascribed to gender (Eagly and Karau, 2002) may come into play in determining publics' evaluations about the acceptability of the response. Research suggests that signalling communal qualities, or warmth, is associated with greater effectiveness of apologies. Differentiating between value-related and performance-related wrongdoings, Wei and Ran (2019) found that females, perceived as warmer than men, were found to garner more forgiveness when apologising to value-related crises, which suggest low warmth and ill-intentioned organisations. Conversely, men, perceived as more competent than women, achieved more consumer forgiveness when apologising to performance-related wrongdoings, typically indicative of low competence organisations. This trend was confirmed

by Cowen and Montgomery (2019) who found a positive effect of apologies issued by women CEOs (as opposed to men CEOs) was due to increased salience of communal norms, which are attributed to women (Eagly et al., 2000), and tend to increase effectiveness of apologies (Folkes, 1984).

While it is logical to expect that mere disclosure of a spokesperson's gender can affect recipients' evaluations, research also suggests that how spokespersons are evaluated depends on how they are described (Rudman and Glick, 1999). For instance, highlighting warmth (or communal qualities) can suggest to recipients that a spokesperson lacks competence (or agentic qualities). Gender-stereotype knowledge can be activated by numerous cues embedded in marketing communication, e.g. logos, product features etc. (Hess and Melnyk, 2016). This includes a style of communication, where competence is typically signalled by a formal, corporate style which does not allow an organisation to express humanness and warmth (Malone and Fiske, 2013), and commitment to staff that goes beyond profit. Conversely, a human and informal tone includes emotional tones which may cue sincere caring intentions (Malone and Fiske, 2013).

The extent to which these practices lead to positive organisational outcomes is contested. Research has established that violation of gender stereotypes i.e. perceived incongruence between gender stereotype and role requirement, can lead to prejudice and discrimination (Eagly and Karau, 2002). For instance, non-traditional women who exhibit agentic/competence traits (e.g. assertive professional women) elicit hostile prejudice (Glick and Fiske, 1996), dislike, and are less likely to be hired (Rudman et al., 2012). Likewise, men who exhibit warmth are perceived as too modest, showing weakness, and less suitable for leadership (Moss-Racusin et al., 2010). In contrast, Iseke and Pull (2019) provide evidence for the positive

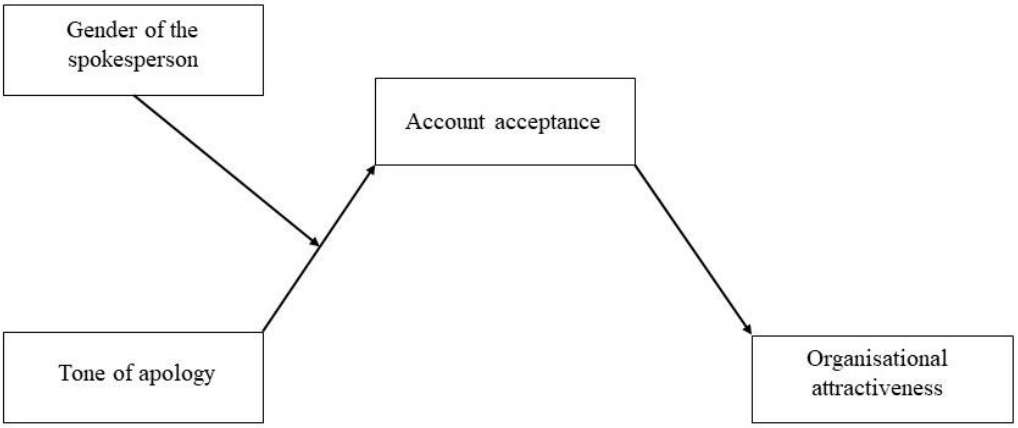
effect of challenging stereotypes. Young female job seekers are more attracted to an organisation with a female executive holding a non-stereotypical office compared to an organisation with an all-male management. Moreover, a female holding a stereotypical office (e.g. human resource director) reduces organisational attractiveness because it signals that stereotypes prevail in the organisation.

Based on the literature above, we propose moderated mediation. Specifically, we suggest that the indirect effect of tone of message on organisational attractiveness via apology acceptance, can be moderated by spokesperson's gender disclosure by virtue of signalling warmth or competence, and therefore, either reinforcing or challenging tone typically expected of male or female spokespersons. While evidence that presenting oneself as atypical (e.g. male stressing human/informal tone) may result in backlash, we argue that using a tone that challenges this stereotype allows the speaker to present himself or herself as balanced (i.e. warm and competent). Moreover, as found by Iseke and Pull (2019), organisations that challenge stereotypes signal they are free from biases, hence, are assessed more positively by potential applicants.

H4: When the organisational spokesperson is male, apology conveyed in a human/informal tone is more acceptable and, subsequently, results in higher organisational attractiveness than when the spokesperson is female. Conversely, we expect that when the organisational spokesperson is female, apology conveyed in a corporate/formal tone is more acceptable, and subsequently, results in higher organisational attractiveness.

The key paths of hypothesised moderated mediation are demonstrated in Fig 1.

Figure 1 Proposed conceptual model of moderated mediation



3. *Methodology*

3.1. Design, participants and procedure

An experiment was conducted to examine the causal link between crisis response and organisational attractiveness. A convenience sample of 628 third-year and final-year hospitality management students of a large university in China participated in the study. Given proximity to graduation, the participants were expected to be engaged actively in career design, hence, receptive of news regarding potential employers. Career engagement was determined with the scale of Hirschi et al. (2014), which comprises nine items measured on a five-point-Likert scale from 1 (almost never) to 5 (very often). This included items such as 'collected information about employers, professional development opportunities, or the job market in my desired area', and developed plans and goals for my future career'. Results indicated a high level of engagement (Mean=4.01, SD=.753).

Participants were placed in a scenario and asked to read a story about a fictitious hotel brand with strong employer reputation, a short fictitious news report of a 'preventable' (value-

related) crisis concerning poor working conditions in one of this brand's hotels in China, and a rebuild response from this brand posted on its official social media platform in China, Weibo. The scenario described a fictitious organisation to prevent any confounding effects of previous reputation (Laufer and Jung, 2010). To measure the impact of different approaches to crisis response, a between-subjects factorial 2 (tone of apology: corporate/formal tone vs. human/informal tone) by 2 (gender of spokesperson: male vs. female) design was deployed. Each of the four groups of respondents read only one version of an employer brand response i.e. formal male, formal female, informal male, or informal female (see treatments in appendix 1).

The experiment was conducted in a classroom setting and lasted a total of 30 minutes. To control for confounding variables, participants were assigned on a random basis to cards with links to an online version of the questionnaire (in Mandarin). The questionnaire comprised of the following sections: 1) Participant information sheet, 2) Description of a fictitious employer brand, 3) Fictitious news report about a preventable crisis, 4) Treatment – brand response, 5) Post-test - measurement of the dependent variable, and manipulation checks.

3.2. Measures

To manipulate gender of the speaker, fictitious male and female names and the titles 'Mr.' or 'Mrs.' were used in the crisis responses. In line with the conceptualisation of Kerkhof et al. (2011), formal tone of response was indicated by a third-person tone which included phrases such as "it was found today" or "a thorough investigation of why this occurred will take place". Conversely, responses with an informal tone were written from a first-person perspective which included phrases such as "I learned today". Next, recognising that human

tone seeks to personalise messages to target audience (Steinmann et al., 2015), this version of response addressed the community by name i.e. 'To all customers, staff, partners, friends and critics". In contrast, such personalisation was absent in formal response. Moreover, given emotional character of informal tone (e.g. Choi and Lin, 2009; Sparks et al. 2016), informal tone messages include emotional phrases such as "I find it deeply saddening". This was absent in formal response which stressed reason through listing of facts.

Employer attractiveness was assessed with a nine-item scale (α=0.96) of Highhouse et al. (2003) measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Manipulation checks involved a question about the gender of the spokesperson, and measured the extent to which the employer brand response was 'personal-impersonal' using a 5-point semantic differential scale. Account acceptance (α=0.81) was measured using three 5-point semantic differential scale items adopted from Blumstein et al. (1974) and Park and Cameron (2014) "the company response is inappropriate – appropriate", "insincere – sincere", and "unconvincing – convincing". Table 1 shows the means, standards deviations, and inter-correlations of the constructs measured in this study.

Table 1 Study measures

Variable	Account acceptance	Organisational attractiveness	*M*	SD
Account acceptance	-	.446**	2.72	0.83
Organisational attractiveness	446**	-	3.07	0.84

3.3 Methods of data analysis

Chi-square and independent samples T-tests were used to examine manipulation of independent variables. A univariate two-way ANOVA and Hayes' (2015) test of moderated mediation (Process model 7) was used to test the hypothesis.

4. Results

4.1. Profile of respondents

A total of 628 respondents completed the questionnaire with a near equal split of respondents in each of treatments (see details in Table 2). With respect to gender of participants, 197 (32%) were male, 333 (53%) female, and 97 (15%) chose 'prefer not to say' option. The sample is representative of the gender ratio of the participating university's population.

Table 2 Details of sample per treatment

		Treatment				Total
		A - Formal Female	B - Formal Male	C - Informal Male	D - Informal Female	
Respondents' gender	Male	50	47	52	49	197
	Female	78	89	84	81	333
	Prefer not to say	29	25	20	24	98
Total		157	161	156	154	628

4.2 Manipulation check

The study tests manipulation of independent variables through an independent samples T-test for tone of message, and Chi-square test for source of message. In the formal condition, respondents thought that the company response is less personal than in informal condition (M*formal*=2.8, SD=1.07 vs. M*informal*=3.1, SD=1.00, p<.000). This suggests that the manipulation of message tone worked as intended. With respect to manipulation of the source of message i.e. gender, respondents who read a crisis response from a male largely recognised this when asked about the gender of the author of the message (Male=256 of 311, p<.000). Similarly, respondents who read a message sent by a female mostly attributed this to a female author of the message (Female=250 of 317, p<.000). These checks gave authors confidence that manipulations of both independent variables were successful.

4.3 *Tests of hypotheses*

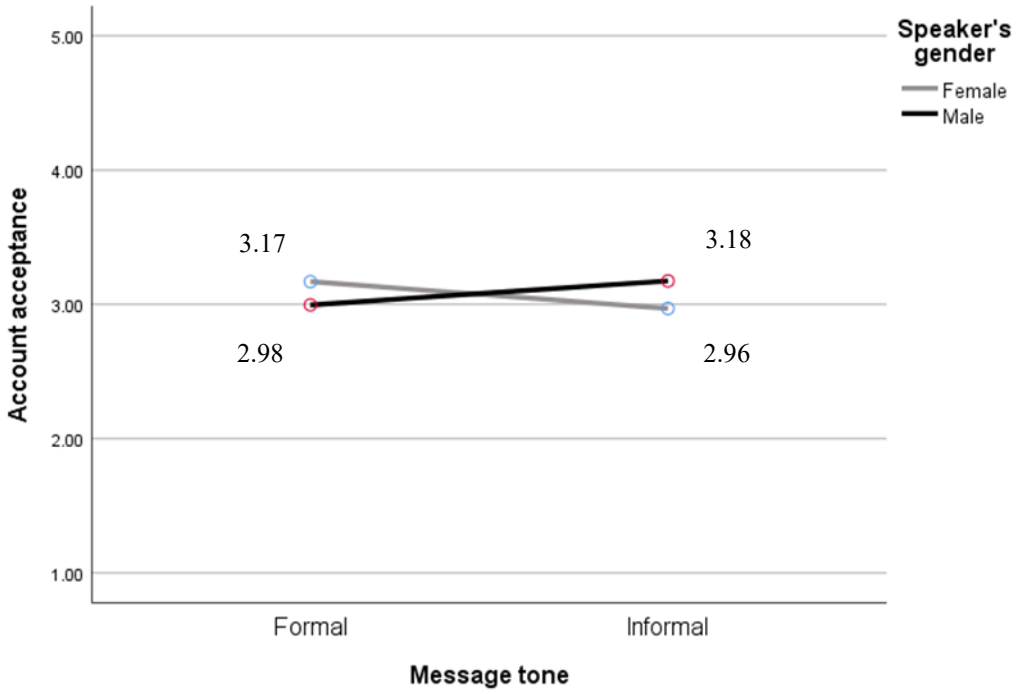
To examine hypotheses, a moderated mediation (i.e. model 7, 5000 bootstrap samples) analysis was conducted using Hayes' (2015) process macro. Tone of apology was added as an

independent variable, gender of the spokesperson as a moderator, account acceptance as a mediator, and organisational attractiveness as a dependent variable. Details of the output are presented in Table 3.

First, the analysis turned to mediator model, which demonstrated that impact of tone of apology on account acceptance was significant (β = .59, p = .005), therefore H1 was supported. To explore the potential moderation, at this point we also examined the interaction effect. The mediator variable model revealed a significant interaction between gender of the spokesperson and tone of apology on account acceptance (β = - 0.39, p = 0.002). Figure 2 portrays this interaction effect.

Figure 2 shows that when the spokesperson was male, human/informal tone of apology resulted in greater account acceptance (Minformal = 3.18, SD = .87) than in the case of corporate/formal tone (Mformal = 2.98, SD = .91, t = 2.06, p = 0.03). Conversely, when the spokesperson was female, corporate/formal tone of apology lead to more account acceptance (Mformal = 3.17, SD = .79) compared to human/informal tone (Minformal = 2.96, SD = .74, t = -2.18, p = 0.02). To explore this further, we tested the interaction effect between tone of apology and gender on account acceptance by means of ANOVA. The results demonstrated a significant interaction between these two factors on account acceptance (F (1, 628) =8.107, *p*=.005). Therefore, gender of the spokesperson moderates the impact of tone of apology on account acceptance.

Figure 2: Moderating role of speaker's gender



Subsequently, the analysis turned to the outputs of the dependent variable model. The model revealed that account acceptance positively predicted organisational attraction ($\beta = .44$, $p < 0.0001$), thus H2 was supported. Moreover, with respect to H3, the direct effect of tone of apology on organisational attraction was non-significant ($\beta = .06$, $p = .286$). This suggested that account acceptance mediates the relationship between tone of apology and organisational attraction.

Table 3. Results of the moderated mediation analysis (process, model 7)

Mediator variable model (Account acceptance)	β	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Constant	2.21	.33	6.67	<.0001
Tone of apology	0.59	.21	2.81	.005
Spokesperson gender	0.57	.20	2.75	.006
Interaction: Tone of apology x Spokesperson gender	-0.39	.13	-2.99	.002
Dependent variable model (Organisational attractiveness)	**β**	***SE***	***t***	***p***
Constant	1.24	.14	8.5	<.0001
Account acceptance	.44	.03	12.46	<.0001
Tone of apology (direct effect)	.06	.06	1.06	.286
Conditional indirect effects				
Mediator	**Moderating variable (spokesperson gender)**	**β**	***SE***	**95% CI**
Account acceptance	Male	.09	.046	[.0034, .1799]
Account acceptance	Female	-.09	.04	[-.1754, -.0164]

Given the interaction between gender of the spokesperson and tone of apology on account acceptance, the analysis then focused on H4 to test the moderated mediation. Specifically, the analysis moved to conditional indirect effects to determine whether the indirect effect (mediation) varies across different levels of the moderator variable (i.e. male versus female spokesperson). According to Hayes (2015), "index of moderated mediation" tests whether indirect effect depends on the moderator. Hayes (2015) showed that if the confidence interval does not includes zero, the indirect effect is conditional on the moderator (i.e.

moderated mediation). Conversely, if the conference interval does include zero, there is no substantial evidence of moderated mediation. The index of moderated mediation showed that the confidence interval did not include a zero (β = -.178, CI 95% [-.3082, -.0602]), therefore, suggested a moderated mediation. This was confirmed by the output of conditional indirect effects based on different levels of the moderator. Specifically, the interaction between the tone of apology and gender of the spokesperson on account acceptance meant that the conditional indirect effects on organisational attractiveness were statistically different between male as a spokesperson (β = .09, CI 95% [.0034, .1799] and female as a spokesperson (b - .09, CI 95% [-.1754, -.0164]. In short, account acceptance plays a relevant mediating role for understanding the impact of tone on apology on organisational attractiveness, but it is conditional on gender of the spokesperson.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1. Discussion

This study was set out to examine the influence of tone of message in apologies on organisational attractiveness. Specifically, we tested whether the impact of tone of apology on organisational attractiveness is mediated by account acceptance, and whether this indirect effect is conditional on gender of the spokesperson. We contribute to this stream of literature by expanding our understanding of the causal process by which the result of a higher organisational attractiveness following a crisis response comes about.

The results showed that tone of apology increased acceptability of account and this acceptance, in turn, positively influenced organisational attractiveness. This result supports the

SIPT (Walther, 2008), which suggests that in computer mediated-environments audiences make first-impression judgments on the basis of available cues, such as tone of message. Building on guidelines of SCCT (Coombs, 2007a) concerning appropriate content of response in preventable crises, we show that framing of apology as either human/informal or corporate/formal provided cues that go beyond the content of response, and allow stakeholders to evaluate organisational response, which makes apologies more acceptable. Our findings refine these guidelines by demonstrating that other factors, such as framing of apology, provide opportunities to further optimise the effectiveness of crisis response strategy. We confirm that human/informal tone plays an important role in a crisis context, and this extends to the context of brands as employers and social media. Tone of apology can increase organisational attractiveness repair, however, our study suggests that this effect operates via account acceptance, itself a key concern to crisis managers (Coombs and Holladay, 2009; Fediuk et al., 2010). In this sense, we shed more light to a link between offering apologies to potential applicants and organisational attractiveness (Carpentier and Van Hoye, 2020), by showing why the effect takes place. To our best knowledge this is the first study that examines this relationship with consideration of organisational attractiveness and the context of brands as employers.

In addition, this study contributes to a recent wave of studies (Crijns et al., 2017a; Wei and Ran, 2019) that consider the impact of disclosing gender of spokesperson and gender-trait associations on effectiveness of crisis responses. We found that disclosure of spokesperson's gender moderates the relationship between tone of apology and account acceptance. Human/informal tone was associated with greater account acceptance, and organisational attractiveness, when the spokesperson was male. Conversely, corporate/formal tone lead to greater account acceptance, and organisational attractiveness, when the spokesperson was female. Thus, we revealed a boundary condition of the tone of apology effect. This result stands

in contrast to findings of Wei and Ran (2019) and Cowen and Montgomery (2019). While disclosure of gender in apologies leads to activation of social perceptions that can increase effectiveness of apologies, it appears that reinforcing either warmth or competence by employing human/informal or corporate/formal tone, leads to an opposite effect.

Moreover, this finding is in line with the premise of signalling theory (Spence, 1973), which argue that due to limited knowledge of organisations, potential applicants evaluate potential employers on the basis of cues such as appearance of candidates or their communication style. We argue that disclosure of gender activates respondents' gender stereotypical knowledge which interacts with tone of apology typically ascribed to male (competent or agentic) or female (warm or communal) speakers. When tone of apology challenges the gender stereotypical knowledge i.e. male signals warmth though the use of human/informal tone, and female signals competence though the use of corporate/informal tone, crisis response is more effective. In addition, this finding is related to Rudman and Phelan (2008) regarding gender trait associations and impression management. Women aiming to thrive as a competent leader must challenge stereotypes and signal atypical traits. Yet, to avoid backlash from violating the prescriptive gender stereotype, they must soften the expression of agentic traits (Rudman and Phelan, 2008). As opposed to a backlash, our findings suggest that challenging stereotypes by employing atypical tone of response was more effective than perpetuating the gender stereotype. Thus, we find further evidence (Iseke and Pull, 2019) for positive effect of challenging stereotypes. Organisations that challenge stereotypes through consideration of tone of crisis response and gender of the spokesperson, may signal they are free from biases, hence, are evaluated positively and may appear more attractive to potential applicants. Further explanation of this result is a notion that, by employing this strategy, speakers demonstrate a balance between traits of warmth and competence. Although people can be perceived as either warm or competent, successful leadership often requires presenting

oneself as both e.g. presidential candidates (Wojciszke and Klusek, 1996). This is reinforced by Carli and Eagly (2001), who argue that in order to be socially influential, women must combine agentic qualities, such as competence and directedness, with communal qualities, such as warmth and friendliness.

5.2 Practical implications

In the age of the 'War for talents' (Sommer et al., 2016), many companies invest significant amount of resources in building strong and resilient employer brands to compete for high-quality workforce. As this increasingly involves communication campaigns on social media (Kissel and Buttgen, 2015), sound and timely crisis response strategies are required. Yet, according to The Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM, 2016a; 2016b), only 56% of organisations in 2011 and 59% in 2013 had a formal social media policy.

This study responds to the call of Ladkin and Buhalis (2016) to extend the body of work on the role of social media in hospitality recruitment context. Recognising the importance of organisations' ability to absorb potential harm that may result from serious allegations, we stress the need for formal social media policies that assist managers in formulating appropriate and timely response to key publics.

We recommend that beyond matching a preventable crisis with a rebuild response, organisations that seek to maintain their status of attractive employer among current and potential employees should consider who will represent the brand and how the response will

be framed. Both male and female spokespersons can be effective, however, when combined with tone of apology, account acceptance and organisational attractiveness are greater when this is done in a manner that challenges stereotypes. Brands should develop this style of communication by varying the degree to which they use in official responses the first person perspective, emotional tones, and personalisation (see example in appendix 1). Moreover, given that the theoretical effects we describe in this paper are based on gender stereotypes, organisations should carefully monitor any potential shifts in the public opinion. Monitoring sentiment on social media can be a powerful tool to gain insight to what matters to target audiences and how they react to a change in communication style. In addition, recognising that consistency is key to effective communications, we propose that organisations should also consider its past practice on social media to ensure that tone used is true to their established employer brand voice.

5.3 Limitations and future research

This study is subject to some limitations which deserve further research. First, as the experiment focused on university students, focus on other publics, such as general public job seekers, would enhance our understanding of their expectations. It is worth noting that besides being university students, participants in this study belong to an age group that remains important to hospitality industry as one solution to high labour turnover. Since hospitality industry often relies on workforce that is much younger than across the economy as a whole (Farrugia et al., 2018; People 1st, 2016), the sample of this study is relevant to the question addressed in this paper. With respect to ecological validity, participants read the news of a hotel on personal electronic devices which is likely how reading news of potential employers takes place in other contexts. Beyond this, we acknowledge that experimental design is artificial,

hence, using other methods may provide additional perspectives. Moreover, the current study used a convenience sample. Future studies could use a more systematic procedure to recruit participants.

Second, the crisis scenario introduced in this study described a generic employer transgression regarding working conditions such as long working hours. It would be interesting to examine whether the effects we explored in this study are moderated by employer wrongdoings that are specific to a gender.

Third, the current study focused on the response from the organisation. As social media frequently features response from community members e.g. brand fans, employees etc., it would be interesting to see how such response may impact upon brand attractiveness.

Finally, past studies suggest that culture may be an important determinant of effectiveness of corporate/formal and human/informal tone in social media environment (Steinmann et al., 2015). Indeed, expectations regarding appropriateness of human/informal tone may be a culture specific issue, hence, future studies may compare the effectiveness of such styles of communications on audiences from countries with different norms. Moreover, with respect to gender trait associations and prescriptive expectations of communication style, it would be interesting to consider audiences from countries with different degrees of masculinity/femininity (Hofstede et al., 1998).

References

Ambler, T. and Barrow, S. (1996). The employer brand. *Journal of Brand Management*, *4*(3), 185-206.

Austin, L. L., & Jin, Y. (2017). *Social Media and Crisis Communication*. New York: Routledge.

Backhaus, K., & Tikoo, S. (2004). Conceptualizing and researching employer branding. *Career Development International*, *9*(5), 501-517.

Barcelos, R. H., Dantas, D. C., & Sénécal, S. (2018). Watch your tone: How a brand's tone of voice on social media influences consumer responses. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *41*, 60-80.

Basow, S, A. (1986). *Gender Stereotypes: Traditions and Alternatives*. Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Bell, C.R. and Zemke, R.E. (1987). Service breakdown: the road to recovery. *Management Review*, *76*(10), 32-35.

Berthon, P., Ewing, M., & Hah, L. L. (2005). Captivating company: dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding. *International Journal of Advertising, 24*(2), 151-172.

Bissel-Linsk, J., Dye, J., & Nicolaou, A. (2018) Starbucks to close all US stores for racial bias training. Financial Times. Retrieved from: https://www.ft.com/content/8c3d4096-4274-11e8-803a-295c97e6fd0b [Accessed on 5 March 2019]

Biswas, M., & Suar, D. (2016). Antecedents and consequences of employer branding. *Journal of Business Ethics, 136*, 57-72.

Blumstein, P. W., Carssow, K. G., Hall, J., Hawkins, B., Hoffman, R., Ishem, E., & Zimmerman, D. L. (1974). The honoring of accounts. *American Sociological Review*, 551-566.

Bondarouk, T., Ruël, H., Axinia, E., & Arama, R. (2014). What is the future of employer branding through social media? Results of the Delphi study into the perceptions of HR professionals and academics. In M. Olivas-Lujan and T. Bondarouk (Eds.) *Social Media in Human Resources Management*. Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 23-57.

Broverman, I. K., Vogel, S. R., Broverman, D. M., Clarkson, F. E., & Rosenkrantz, P. S. (1972). Sex- role stereotypes: A current appraisal. *Journal of Social Issues*, *28*(2), 59-78.

Cable, D. M., & Turban, D. B. (2003). The value of organisational reputation in the recruitment context: A brand- equity perspective. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *33*(11), 2244-2266.

Carli, L. L., & Eagly, A. H. (2001). Gender, hierarchy, and leadership: An introduction. *Journal of Social Issues*, *57*(4), 629-636.

Carpentier, M., & Van Hoye, G. (2020). Managing organisational attractiveness after a negative employer review: company response strategies and review consensus. *European Journal of Work and Organisational Psychology*, 1-18.

Carpentier, M., Van Hoye, G., Stockman, S., Schollaert, E., Van Theemsche, B., & Jacobs, G. (2017). Recruiting nurses through social media: Effects on employer brand and attractiveness. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 73*(11), 2696-2708.

Chen, H.S, & Jai, T. (2019). Cyber alarm: Determining the impacts of hotel's data breach messages. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, *82*, 326-334.

Cheng, Y. (2018). How social media is changing crisis communication strategies: Evidence from the updated literature. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, *26*(1), 58-68.

Choi, Y., & Lin, Y. H. (2009). Consumer responses to Mattel product recalls posted on online bulletin boards: Exploring two types of emotion. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *21*(2), 198-207.

Claeys, A., & Cauberghe, V. (2014). Keeping control: The importance of nonverbal expressions of power by organisational spokespersons in times of crisis. *Journal of Communication*, *64*(6), 1160-1180.

Claeys, A., Cauberghe, V., & Vyncke, P. (2010). Restoring reputations in times of crisis: An experimental study of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory and the moderating effect of locus of control. *Public Relations Review*, *36*, 256-262.

Coombs, W.T. (2006). The protective powers of crisis response strategies: Managing reputational assets during a crisis. *Journal of Promotion Management, 12*, 241–260

Coombs, W. T. (2007a). *Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding (2nd ed.)*. Los Angeles: Sage.

Coombs, W. T. (2007b). Protecting organisation reputation during a crisis: The development and application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory. *Corporate Reputation Review*, *10*, 163-176.

Coombs, W. T. (2010). Crisis communication: A developing field. In R. L. Heath (Ed.), *Handbook of Public Relations* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 477-488.

Coombs, W. T. (2017a). Revising situational crisis communication theory. In L. Austin & Y. Jin (Eds.). *Social Media and Crisis Communication*. New York: Routledge, 21-37.

Coombs, W. T. (2017b). Digital naturals and the rise of paracrises: The shape of modern crisis communication. In S. Dehe (Ed.), *New Media and Public Relations* (3rd ed.). New York: Peter Lang, 281-290.

Coombs, W. T. (2019). Crisis communication: The best evidence from research. In R. Gephart, Jr., C. Miller and K. Helgesson (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Risk, Crisis and Emergency Management*. New York: Routledge, 51-66.

Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2008). Comparing apology to equivalent crisis response strategies: Clarifying apology's role and value in crisis communication. *Public Relations Review*, *34*(3), 252-257.

Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2009). Further explorations of post-crisis communication: Effects of media and response strategies on perceptions and interactions. *Public Relations Review*, *35*, 1-6.

Cowen, A. P., & Montgomery, N. V. (2019). To be or not to be sorry? How CEO gender impacts the effectiveness of organisational apologies. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *105*(2), 196-208.

Crijns, H., Claeys, A., Cauberghe, V., & Hudders, L. (2017a). Who says what during crises? A study about the interplay between gender similarity with the spokesperson and crisis response strategy. *Journal of Business Research*, *79*, 143-151.

Crijns, H., Cauberghe, V., Hudders, L., & Claeys, A. (2017b). How to deal with online consumer comments during a crisis? The impact of personalized organisational responses on organisational reputation. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *75*, 619-631.

Cuddy, A. J., Fiske, S. T., & Glick, P. (2008). Warmth and competence as universal dimensions of social perception: The stereotype content model and the BIAS map. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, *40*, 61-149.

Deery, M, and Jago, L. (2015). Revisiting talent management, work-life balance and retention strategies. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, *27*(3), 453-472.

Dijkmans, C., Kerkhof, P., Buyukcan-Tetik, A., & Beukeboom, C. J. (2015). Online conversation and corporate reputation: A two-wave longitudinal study on the effects of exposure to the social media activities of a highly interactive company. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *20*(6), 632-648.

du Plessis, C. (2018). Social media crisis communication: Enhancing a discourse of renewal through dialogic content. *Public Relations Review, 44*, 829-838.

Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, *109*(3), 573.

Eagly, A. H., & Mladinic, A. (1989). Gender stereotypes and attitudes toward women and men. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *15*(4), 543-558.

Eagly, A., Wood, W., & Diekman, A. B. (2000). Social role theory of sex differences and similarities: A current appraisal. In T. Eckes, & H. M. Trautner (Eds.), *The Developmental Social Psychology of Gender*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 123–174.

Eriksson, M., & Olsson, E. K. (2016). Facebook and Twitter in crisis communication: A comparative study of crisis communication professionals and citizens. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, *24*(4), 198-208.

Farrugia, D., Threadgold, S. & Coffey, J. (2018). Young subjectivities and affective labour in the service economy. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 21(3), 272-287.

Fediuk, T. A., Pace, K. M., & Botero, I. C. (2010). Crisis response effectiveness: Methodological considerations for advancement in empirical investigation into response impact. *The Handbook of Crisis Communication*, 221-242.

Fiske, S. T., Cuddy, A. J., & Glick, P. (2007). Universal dimensions of social cognition: Warmth and competence. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, *11*(2), 77-83.

Folkes, V. S. (1984). Consumer reactions to product failure: An attributional approach. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *10*(4), 398-409.

Frasca, K., & Edwards, M. (2017). Web-based corporate, social and video recruitment media: Effects of media richness and source credibility on organisational attraction. International *Journal of Selection and Assessment, 25*, 125-137.

Georgiadis, P., McCormick, M., & Samson, A. (2019). Thomas Cook: Collapse of UK's oldest travel group reverberates around the world — as it happened. Financial Times. Retrieved from: https://www.ft.com/content/18c6356f-d806-3fef-9ff7-29fb80a343c7 [Accessed on 8 May 2020].

Gjerald, O., & Lyngstad, H. (2015). Service risk perceptions and risk management strategies in business-to-business tourism partnerships. *Tourism management perspectives*, 13, 7-17.

Glick, P., & Fiske, S. T. (1996). The ambivalent sexism inventory: Differentiating hostile and benevolent sexism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *70*(3), 491-512.

Glick, P., Lameiras, M., Fiske, S. T., Eckes, T., Masser, B., Volpato, C., & Castro, Y. R. (2004). Bad but bold: Ambivalent attitudes toward men predict gender inequality in 16 nations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *86*(5), 713-728.

Govier, T., & Verwoerd, W. (2002). The promise and pitfalls of apology. *Journal of Social Philosophy*, *33*(1), 67-82.

Graham, M. W., Avery, E. J., & Park, S. (2015). The role of social media in local government crisis communications. *Public Relations Review*, *41*(3), 386-394.

Haines, E. L., Deaux, K., & Lofaro, N. (2016). The times they are a-changing… or are they not? A comparison of gender stereotypes, 1983–2014. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *40*(3), 353-363.

Hayes, A. F. (2015). An index and test of linear moderated mediation. *Multivariate Behavioral Research*, *50*(1), 1-22.

Hess, A. C., & Melnyk, V. (2016). Pink or blue? The impact of gender cues on brand perceptions. *European Journal of Marketing*, *50*(9/10), 1550-1574.

Highhouse, S., Lievens, F., & Sinar, E. F. (2003). Measuring attraction to organisations. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, *63*(6), 986-1001.

Hill, K. M., & Boyd, D. P. (2015). Who should apologize when an employee transgresses? Source effects on apology effectiveness. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *130*(1), 163-170.

Hirschi, A., Freund, P. A., & Herrmann, A. (2014). The career engagement scale: Development and validation of a measure of proactive career behaviors. *Journal of Career Assessment*, *22*(4), 575-594.

Hofstede, G. H., Hofstede, G., & Arrindell, W. A. (1998). *Masculinity and Femininity: The Taboo Dimension of National Cultures* (Vol. 3). Sage.

Iseke, A., & Pull, K. (2019). Female Executives and perceived employer attractiveness: On the potentially adverse signal of having a female CHRO rather than a female CFO. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *156*(4), 1113-1133.

Judd, C. M., James-Hawkins, L., Yzerbyt, V., & Kashima, Y. (2005). Fundamental dimensions of social judgment: understanding the relations between judgments of competence and warmth. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *89*(6), 899-913.

Kanar, A. M., Collins, C. J., & Bell, B. S. (2015). Changing an unfavorable employer reputation: the roles of recruitment message type and familiarity with employer. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *45*(9), 509-521.

Kelleher, T. (2009). Conversational voice, communicated commitment, and public relations outcomes in interactive online communication. *Journal of Communication*, *59*(1), 172-188.

Kerkhof, P. Beugels, D., Utz, S., & Beukeboom, C. J. (2011). Crisis PR in social media. An experimental study of the effects of organisational crisis responses on Facebook. Paper presented at the 61st Annual ICA Conference, Boston (USA), 26-30 May 2011.

Kiambi, D. M., & Shafer, A. (2016). Corporate crisis communication: Examining the interplay of reputation and crisis response strategies. *Mass Communication and Society*, *19*(2), 127-148.

Kim, H. J., & Cameron, G. T. (2011). Emotions matter in crisis: The role of anger and sadness in the publics' response to crisis news framing and corporate crisis response. *Communication Research*, *38*(6), 826-855.

Kim, A. J., & Ko, E. (2012). Do social media marketing activities enhance customer equity? An empirical study of luxury fashion brand. *Journal of Business Research*, *65*(10), 1480–1486.

Kissel, P., & Buttgen, M. (2015). Using social media to communicate employer brand identity: The impact on corporate image and employer attractiveness. *Journal of Brand Management*, *22*, 755-777.

Klimkiewicz, K., & Oltra, V. (2017). Does CSR enhance employer attractiveness? The role of Millennial job seekers' attitudes. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management, 24*, 449-463.

Kulich, C., Ryan, M. K., & Haslam, S. A. (2007). Where is the romance for women leaders? The effects of gender on leadership attributions and performance- based pay. *Applied Psychology*, *56*(4), 582-601.

Ladkin, A., & Buhalis, D. (2016). Online and social media recruitment. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, 28*(2), 327-345.

Laufer, D., & Jung, J. M. (2010). Incorporating regulatory focus theory in product recall communications to increase compliance with a product recall. *Public Relations Review*, *36*(2), 147-151.

Lee, S. Y., & Atkinson, L. (2019). Never easy to say "sorry": Exploring the interplay of crisis involvement, brand image, and message appeal in developing effective corporate apologies. *Public Relations Review, 45*, 178-188.

Lievens, F., & Slaughter, J. (2016). Employer image and employer branding: What we know and what we need to know. *Annual Review of Organisational Psychology and Organisational Behaviour, 3*, 407-440.

Liu, B. F., Austin, L., & Jin, Y. (2011). How publics respond to crisis communication strategies: The interplay of information form and source. *Public Relations Review*, *37*(4), 345-353.

Liu, B., Kim, H., & Pennington-Gray, L. (2015). Responding to the bed bug crisis in social media. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, *47*, 76-84.

Malone, C., & Fiske, S. T. (2013). *The Human Brand: How we relate to People, Products, and Companies*. John Wiley & Sons.

Moroko, L., & Uncles, M. (2008). Characteristics of successful employer brands. *Journal of Brand Management, 16*, 160-175,

Moss-Racusin, C. A., Phelan, J.E., & Rudman, L.A. (2010). When men break the gender rules: Status incongruity and backlash against modest men. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 11*(2): 140-151.

Opitz, M., Chaudhri, V., & Wang, Y. (2018). Employee social-mediated crisis communication as opportunity or threat?. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, *23*(1), 66-83.

Park, H., & Cameron, G. T. (2014). Keeping it real: Exploring the roles of conversational human voice and source credibility in crisis communication via blogs. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *91*(3), 487-507.

Park, H., & Lee, H. (2013). Show us you are real: The effect of human-versus-organisational presence on online relationship building through social networking sites. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, *16*(4), 265-271.

People 1st. (2016). Skills and workforce profile Hospitality and tourism. Retrieved from:

https://www.people1st.co.uk/getattachment/Insight-opinion/Latest-insights/Industry-profiles/Hospitality-tourism-skills-and-workforce-profile-2016.pdf/?lang=en-GB [Accessed on 5 May 2020]

Pfarrer, M.D., K.A. Decelles, K.G. Smith, & M.S. Taylor. (2008). After the fall: Reintegrating the corrupt organization. *Academy of Management Review,* 33: 730–749.

Philp, D. (2018). 'One job should be enough': Marriott hotel worker' strike hits eight US cities [online]. The Guardian. Retrieved from: https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/oct/26/marriott-hotel-workers-strike-hits-eight-us-cities [Accessed on 8 May 2019].

Priyadarshini, C., Kumar, Y., & Jha, R. (2017). Employer attractiveness through social media: A phenomenological study, *The Qualitative Report*, *22*(4), 969-983.

Rabl, T. (2015). When allegedly corrupt organisations are attractive. *Journal of Managerial Psychology, 30*(7), 771-785.

Rampl, L. K., & Kenning, P. (2014). Employer brand trust and affect: linking brand personality to employer brand attractiveness. *European Journal of Marketing, 48*(1/2), 218-236.

Rauschnabel, P., Kammerlander, N., & Ivens, B. (2016). Collaborative brand attacks in social media: Exploring the antecedents, characteristics, and consequences of a new form of brand crises. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, *24*(4), 381-410.

Ritz, A., & Waldner, C. (2011). Competing for future leaders: A study of attractiveness of public sector organisations to potential job applicants. *Review of Public Personnel Administration, 31*(3), 291-316.

Roshan, M., Warren, M., & Carr, R. (2016). Understanding the use of social media by organisations for crisis communication. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 63, 350-361.

Rudman, L. A., & Glick, P. (1999). Feminized management and backlash toward agentic women: the hidden costs to women of a kinder, gentler image of middle managers. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *77*(5), 1004-1010.

Rudman L. A., Moss-Racusin C. A., Glick P., & Phelan J. E. (2012). Reactions to vanguards: advances in backlash theory. In: P. Devine, A. Plant (Eds). *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, Vol. 45*, London: Elsevier, 167–227.

Rudman, L. A., & Phelan, J. E. (2008). Backlash effects for disconfirming gender stereotypes in organisations. *Research in Organisational Behavior*, *28*, 61-79.

Schultz, F., Utz, S., & Göritz, A. (2011). Is the medium the message? Perceptions of and reactions to crisis communication via twitter, blogs and traditional media. *Public Relations Review*, *37*(1), 20-27.

Scoble, R., & Israel, S. (2006). *Naked Conversations: How Blogs Are Changing the Way Businesses Talk with Customers*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley.

SHRM (2016a). SHRM survey findings: Using social media for talent acquisition recruitment and screening. January 7, 2016. Retrieved from: https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/trends-and-forecasting/research-and-surveys/pages/social-media-recruiting-screening-2015.aspx. [Assessed June 1, 2020].

SHRM (2016b). The SHRM body of competency and knowledge. Retrieved from: https://www.shrm.org/Documents/SHRM-BoCK-FINAL.pdf. [Accessed May 25, 2020]

Sivertzen, A. M., Nilsen, E. R., & Olafsen, A. H. (2013). Employer branding: employer attractiveness and the use of social media. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, *22*(7), 473-483.

Sommer, L., Heidenreich, S. and Handrich, M. (2016). War for talents - How perceived organisational innovativeness affect employer attractiveness. *R&D Management*, *47*(2), 299-310.

Sparks, B. A., So, K. K. F., & Bradley, G. L. (2016). Responding to negative online reviews: The effects of hotel responses on customer inferences of trust and concern. *Tourism Management*, *53*, 74-85.

Spence, M (1973). Job Market Signalling. *Quarterly Journal of Economics, 87*, 355-374

Spence, J. T., & Helmreich, R. (1972). Who Likes Competent Women? Competence, Sex-Role Congruence of Interests, and Subjects' Attitudes Toward Women as Determinants of Interpersonal Attraction 1. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *2*(3), 197-213.

Steiner, Z., & Byrne, Z. (2019). Employer Postcrisis Image Restoration: Implications for Recruitment. *International Journal of Business Communication*, doi.org/10.1177/2329488419864712.

Steinmann, S., Mau, G., & Schramm- Klein, H. (2015). Brand communication success in online consumption communities: An experimental analysis of the effects of communication style and brand pictorial representation. *Psychology & Marketing*, *32*(3), 356-371.

Stephens, K. K., & Malone, P. C. (2009). If the organisations won't give us information…: The use of multiple new media for crisis technical translation and dialogue. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 21*(2), 229-239.

Sung, K. H., & Kim, S. (2014). I want to be your friend: The effects of organisations' interpersonal approaches on social networking sites. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *26*(3), 235-255.

van der Meer, T. G., & Verhoeven, J. W. (2014). Emotional crisis communication. *Public Relations Review*, *40*(3), 526-536.

Waikar, V. G., Desai, P. G. H., & Borde, N. (2016). Hotel's grid group structure and risk management practices. *Tourism Review, 71*(3), 192-204.

Walther, J.B. (2008). Social information processing theory. In L. A. Baxter & D. O Braithwaite (Eds.), *Engaging theories in interpersonal communication: Multiple perspectives*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 391-404.

Wei, H., & Ran, Y. (2019). Male versus female: How the gender of apologizers influences consumer forgiveness. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *154*(2), 371-387.

Wojciszke, B., & Klusek, B. (1996). Moral and competence-related traits in political perception. *Polish Psychological Bulletin*, *27*(4), 319–324.

Wu, F. & Cui, D. (2019). Making Peace or Holding a Grudge? The Role of Publics' Forgiveness in Crisis Communication. *International Journal of Communication*, *13*, 2260-2286.

Yang, S. U., Kang, M., & Johnson, P. (2010). Effects of narratives, openness to dialogic communication, and credibility on engagement in crisis communication through organisational blogs. *Communication Research*, *37*(4), 473-497.

Zhang, N., Paraskevas, A., & Altinay, L. (2019). Factors that shape a hotel company's risk appetite. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, *77*, 217-225.

Zheng, B., Liu, H., & Davison, R. M. (2018). Exploring the relationship between corporate reputation and the public's crisis communication on social media. *Public Relations Review*, *44*(1), 56-64.

Zhu, L., Anagondahalli, D., & Zhang, A. (2017). Social media and culture in crisis communication: McDonald's and KFC crises management in China. *Public Relations Review*, *43*(3), 487-492.

APPENDIX 1

Corporate/Formal response, Male

It was found today that Applewood Hotels & Resorts failed to live up to its high hygiene standards in three Harpin, China Hotels. No doubt, mistakes were made, and the brand takes full responsibility for what happened. Applewood Hotels & Resorts regrets that this incident occurred and would like to extend an apology to all concerned. A thorough investigation of why this occurred will take place to prevent such issues in the future.

Mr. Alistair Brown – CEO

Corporate/Formal response, Female

It was found today that Applewood Hotels & Resorts failed to live up to its high hygiene standards in three Harpin, China Hotels. No doubt, mistakes were made, and the brand takes full responsibility for what happened. Applewood Hotels & Resorts regrets that this incident occurred and would like to extend an apology to all concerned. A thorough investigation of why this occurred will take place to prevent such issues in the future.

Ms. Susan Brown – CEO

Human/Informal response, Male

To all customers, staff, partners, friends and critics,
I learned today that we failed to live up to our high hygiene standards in three Harpin, China Hotels. Like you, I have been disappointed regarding mistakes made and I take full responsibility for what happened. I find it deeply saddening the incident occurred and I would like to extend my personal apology to all of you. We will thoroughly investigate why this happened to prevent such issues in the future.

Mr. Alistair Brown – CEO

Human/Informal response, Female

To all customers, staff, partners, friends and critics,
I learned today that we failed to live up to our high hygiene standards in three Harpin, China Hotels. Like you, I have been disappointed regarding mistakes made and I take full responsibility for what happened. I find it deeply saddening the incident occurred and I would like to extend my personal apology to all of you. We will thoroughly investigate why this happened to prevent such issues in the future.

Ms. Susan Brown – CEO