January 2013

Cause-Related Controversy: An Analysis of Corporate Sponsor Response to the Susan G. Komen/Planned Parenthood Crisis

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Cause-Related Controversy: An Analysis of Corporate Sponsor Response

to the Susan G. Komen/Planned Parenthood Crisis

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Arts
with a concentration in Strategic Communication Management
School of Mass Communications
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

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Date of Approval:
Nov. 5, 2013

Keywords: relationship management, contingency theory, corporate social responsibility,
organizational partnerships, framing, investment

DEDICATION

To my husband, Bruce:

I could not have completed this program without your support, love, and encouragement. Two and a half years ago, in the midst of planning our wedding, I told you that I wanted to work on my master's degree (as you know, it's not like me to just do one thing at a time!). You didn't bat an eye. And during that first semester, when I second-guessed my abilities, you were a constant source of reassurance. Several times since then, when I thought I would surely die of mental or physical exhaustion, you have reminded me of my goals and renewed my resolve.

While I am very excited to be earning my degree this fall, I am probably most excited to be able to focus on our life together again. Thank you for the sacrifices you have made that have allowed me the opportunity to complete my degree. I promise you won't have to eat any microwave meals for at least a few months, and I see many days of fishing ahead to make up for all of the weekends and evenings when you were left to fend for yourself! I love you, and can never thank you enough for all you have done to help me achieve this milestone.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to my thesis chair, Dr. Mitrook, for all of his help in further developing my thesis topic and methodology during the past year. Thank you also to my committee members, Dr. Burns and Dr. Liu, for your thoughtful input and support. I have enjoyed working with all of you, both in class and on this research study.

I would also like to acknowledge my friends and family who provided me with the love and prayers I needed during this process.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study advances crisis communication and relationship management application and theory by examining the crisis response strategies used by corporations during a time of crisis involving a nonprofit partner. A qualitative content analysis was performed on the Facebook pages of 57 companies that were corporate partners of Susan G. Komen in early 2012. Nineteen companies responded using their Facebook accounts during two crisis periods studied. The researcher argues that consideration must be given to additional contingent factors beyond those proposed by situational crisis communication theory. Contingent variables related to the corporations' relationship with the charity, including level of investment, as well as the size and exposure of the businesses were explored for possible influence on the companies' choice of crisis response strategy. Though causation cannot be determined in a qualitative study, support was found for the variables' role in prompting company responses within this particular crisis. The study concludes with a call for more research on the contingent variables that may influence responses in corporate social responsibility partnership crises, as well as for further study on the effectiveness of response strategies employed.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In response to rising consumer awareness of a wide range of issues related to business practice, including the morality of profit, unfair labor standards, environmental concerns, domestic job creation, and more (Bussey, 2011; Rushkoff, 2011), businesses are increasingly emphasizing the importance of implementing corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs into their marketing strategies (Stengel, 2009). Research has shown that publics' perceptions of corporations engaging in CSR activities, such as cause-related marketing campaigns, where a portion of sales are donated to a charity, are generally more favorable than their view of companies that do not engage in such activities (Arendt & Brettel, 2010; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). In fact, a recent Time magazine poll (Stengel, 2009) found that nearly 40 percent of people surveyed had purchased a product because "they liked the social or political values of the company that produced it."

But what happens when a company suddenly finds itself supporting a nonprofit that is in crisis? While the idea of a charity becoming involved with a *corporation* in scandal may seem a more likely scenario (Herman, Head, Jackson, & Fogarty, 2004), corporations also face risks in partnering with charities that are "associated with some value that is inconsistent with those of the consumer" (Kotler & Lee, 2005, p. 101). Though the intent of companies that engage in CSR programs is generally good (Waddock, 2008), this may be lost on consumers if the company supports a controversial cause or charity or one that acts in a way that offends the consumer.

Despite this risk, little academic attention has been given to companies responding to crises involving their corporate social responsibility partners. Given the increasing use of social media during times of crisis (Veil, Buehner, & Palenchar, 2011), there is also a need to examine how companies have responded to such crises using new technology, where public relations practitioners are faced with responding to critics in a very public environment.

This study aims to advance crisis communication application and theory by examining the crisis response strategies used by a corporation on its social media page during a time of crisis involving its nonprofit partner. This is accomplished by looking at a case that occurred in 2012 and involved Susan G. Komen and Planned Parenthood. Using situational crisis communication theory as a theoretical foundation, a qualitative content analysis was performed on the Facebook pages of 57 of Komen's corporate partners to identify the specific response strategies used by the companies during two distinct phases of the crisis. Relationship management theory and the contingency theory of strategic conflict management were also utilized in exploring the possible contingent factors of investment and business exposure on the companies' selected strategies.

The Susan G. Komen and Planned Parenthood Crisis

When the news broke in early 2012 that Susan G. Komen for the Cure would stop providing nearly $700,000 a year in funding to Planned Parenthood, the breast cancer charity, lauded in the past for its contributions to women's health, found itself in the crosshairs of a politically-charged controversy that quickly escalated to a full-blown crisis for the organization (Belluck, 2012). Founded in 1982, Susan G. Komen for the Cure (Komen) has grown from a small, home-based charity founded to find a cure for breast cancer into one of the largest nonprofits in the United States, commanding more than $350 million in revenue in the 2010-

2011 fiscal year ("Guidestar quick view," 2012). Over the course of its 31-year history, Komen has expended close to $2 billion on "ground-breaking research, community health outreach, advocacy and programs in more than 50 countries" ("Our work," 2012).

While the cuts were officially made in December 2011, news of the decision did not break until January 31, 2012 (Belluck, 2012). Komen said the cuts were made because Planned Parenthood was under investigation by a member of the U.S. Congress, citing its policy against supporting organizations under formal investigation by a government body (Goldberg, 2012). Critics cried foul, claiming that Komen had, instead, caved to conservative and religious groups and had created the investigations rule as "an excuse to cut off Planned Parenthood" because the organization provides abortions (Goldberg, 2012). While Planned Parenthood does perform abortions, it is viewed by many as an important source of preventative health services for women. According to Planned Parenthood, it has performed more than four million breast exams over the past five years (Crary, 2012).

Though the organization denied any political motivation for its decision, in the hours and days after news of the cuts broke, public opposition toward Komen swelled. Activists called for boycotts of the nonprofit, major news outlets printed editorials criticizing Komen, and dozens of politicians called for a reversal of the funding decision (Crary, 2012; Sargent, 2012). Previous Komen supporters took to social media and slammed the charity, stating they would no longer make donations if the decision were not overturned (Bassett, 2012). Conversely, Planned Parenthood experienced an outpouring of financial support, raising more than $400,000 in the 24-hour period after news of the decision was reported (Barrett & Boyett, 2012). During the week following the news of the decision, more than 1.3 million posts mentioning Planned Parenthood and Susan G. Komen had been shared on Twitter (Belluck, Preston, & Harris, 2012).

Public outcry and hostility was not directed exclusively at Komen, however. As one of the most-recognizable nonprofit brands in the world, Komen is currently assisted by nearly 140 corporations that provide cash gifts, event sponsorships, and "mutually-beneficial" cause-related marketing partnerships ("Partners and sponsors," 2012). Corporations supporting Komen include well-known brands such as Yoplait, Ford Motor Company, American Airlines, and General Mills ("Partners and sponsors," 2012). In recent years, businesses have increasingly emphasized the importance of implementing corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs like these into their marketing strategies (Stengel, 2009). Most CSR partnerships are viewed positively by the public, and have even been shown to increase consumers' likelihood to purchase a company's products (Stengel, 2009). However, associating a business with a cause does not come without risk. Amid the fallout of Komen's decision, angry consumers took to the social media pages of Komen's corporate sponsors to call for boycotts of sponsor products (Newell, 2012). The companies faced a public that likened the firms' philanthropic support of the charity to an endorsement of Komen's policies. The Energizer battery company, for instance, had been recognized for its support on Komen's Facebook page just one day before the news of the Planned Parenthood cuts broke, and was subsequently the target of numerous angry social media users (Miller, 2012).

Amid mounting pressure to change course, Komen eventually backtracked and reversed its decision just four days after the furor began (Belluck, Preston, & Harris, 2012). While Komen did not lose any of its corporate supporters as an immediate result of the controversy, it has experienced a downturn in public support since the controversy began and several partners have allowed their partnership agreements to expire. It is clear that the situation not only impacted the organization, but also the companies that support it.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Corporate Social Responsibility Defined

Corporate social responsibility (CSR), also referred to as corporate citizenship, corporate philanthropy, corporate social responsiveness, or corporate social performance (Carroll & Buchholtz, 2009; Kotler & Lee, 2005), has been broadly defined as "how businesses act to implement the broad societal responsibility of going beyond economic criteria, such as creating products, employment, and profits, to meet broader social and environmental expectations" (Pomering & Johnson, 2009). Researchers and practitioners have long disagreed about what exactly those "broader social and environmental expectations" encompass and the requirements for achieving them.

Historically, an economic viewpoint of business proliferated, with most people in society expecting businesses to only be concerned with their own self-interest (Carroll & Buchholtz, 2009). Bowen (1953) is frequently cited as one of the first researchers to make solid recommendations about a business's role in society, proposing the use of "industry councils" to aid in the promotion of ethics through fair pay, use of sustainable materials, and labor standards. Scholars have since offered numerous models and theories for CSR, presenting a confusing landscape of often conflicting ideas (Garriga & Mele, 2004). In an effort to slice through the confusion, Garriga and Mele (2004) performed a content analysis on the various theories that have been presented and found that CSR theories can be categorized into four groups:

"instrumental theories," in which profit is a business' only concern and socially responsible

activities are seen as a means to an end; "political theories," which are concerned with the power

of corporations in society and the "responsible use of this power in the political arena;"

"integrative theories," where a company considers social demands and integrates society's values

into its actions; and "ethical theories," which are based on various ethical approaches and

concern themselves with the responsibilities of corporations to society (p. 63-64).

Carroll (1991) argued that each of the above elements have a place in business. In his

seminal work on the topic, he offers what is now widely considered a "leading paradigm of CSR

in the social issues in management field" (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003). Building on prior work

where he suggested a corporation has four obligations – economic, legal, ethical, and

philanthropic – Carroll (1991) argued that these obligations should be thought of as a pyramid,

with each element building on the one before it. In today's complicated and increasingly anti-

corporate world, the model provides a prescriptive approach to assist corporations in their efforts

to "balance their commitments to the corporation's owners with their obligations to an ever-

broadening group of stakeholders who claim both legal and ethical rights" (Carroll, 1991, p. 39).

Despite once being prized as the ultimate demonstration of socially responsible behavior,

the importance of philanthropic activities has been de-emphasized in more recent literature and

replaced with a call to evaluate the totality of the corporation's business practices, including

"corporate governance, diversity, environmental and legal concerns, social perspectives and

global impact" (Werhane, 2008, p. 271). Companies hoping to use philanthropy to overcome

deficiencies in their business practices are characterized as focused only on enhancing their

reputations, and would do better to emphasize "respect" of the environment, employees, and

stakeholders within their overall business practices (Waddock, 2008, p. 262). Schwartz and

Carroll's (2003) updated CSR model concedes that corporate social responsibility need only emphasize the three dimensions of economics, law and ethics; thus, philanthropy is no longer an obligation, but an additional benefit that is unnecessary to be considered socially responsible if the other dimensions are being addressed. Within this perspective, a company's ethical responsibility to society goes beyond simple "good works" programs. As Waddock (2008) notes:

> While laudable in its own right, the activities of any foundation or charitable
> giving program alone cannot and do not constitute good corporate citizenship …
> Something more is needed to balance the interests of society against those of
> economy, something that is unlikely to happen based on companies' good will
> alone (p. 263).

The philanthropic qualities of CSR activities are still seen by many scholars as the priority, however (Kotler & Lee, 2005). In this perspective, the law and ethics are seen as the obligatory requirements of business, while "discretionary" activities are a "voluntary commitment" that set a company apart as socially responsible (Kotler & Lee, 2005). Kotler and Lee (2005) emphasize the advocacy of causes through corporate social responsibility programs. Six types of CSR initiatives may be used not only to advance the company's selected cause(s) but also benefit the company's goals (Kotler & Lee, 2005). These initiatives are detailed in the following section. Though programs like this have been criticized for their "exclusive focus on business/society relationships" and for their emphasis on advantages to the company's reputation (Werhane, 2008, p. 270), they are some of the most visible examples of corporate social responsibility behavior by companies and are the types of programs utilized by the companies in the case examined in this study.

Types of CSR programs

While corporate giving and community involvement are two types of CSR activities that have been extensively studied in the literature (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001), Kotler and Lee (2005) identified a total of six mutually beneficial CSR initiatives that companies can use to support causes, along with key benefits and drawbacks to each approach:

Cause promotions: Focus on persuading *consumers* to "contribute to the cause or participate in activities to support the cause" (p. 50) through promotional efforts not tied to sales of a product.

Cause-related marketing: Involves the company making a contribution to a cause based on sales of products. Donation may be in the form of a specific dollar amount or percentage of revenues. Benefits to the company include identifying new customers and increasing sales.

Corporate social marketing: Support of a "behavior change campaign intended to change public health, safety, the environment, or community well-being" (p. 114). Examples include smoking cessation or gun safety campaigns. Enhanced brand positioning is an intended benefit of such programs.

Corporate philanthropy: A direct contribution is made to a charity in the form of cash donations, grants, scholarships, or in-kind services or products. Creates goodwill for the company through affiliation with charitable brand.

Community volunteering: The corporation encourages and supports employees volunteering their time in the community. Efforts can vary from simple encouragement to volunteer to paid time off for employees to providing cash grants for employee charitable projects.

Finally, Kotler and Lee (2005) point to *socially responsible business practices* as the

sixth CSR initiative a company may undertake. Socially responsible business practices involve

changing "internal processes and procedures" to make an impact on issues of importance to

employees, suppliers and other company partners, and the general public (pp. 208). However,

Kotler and Lee (2005) propose socially responsible business practices as one of *many* options for

businesses, unlike the perspectives advanced by other researchers (Waddock, 2008; Werhane,

2008), who argue that socially responsible business practices should be more than short-sighted,

narrow programs focused on meeting company goals.

Criticisms and Drawbacks to CSR Partnerships

While promoting CSR activities cannot overcome a poor product offering or inadequacy

of customer service, a growing body of research shows links between CSR and consumers'

product evaluations and purchase intent (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). These potential advantages

– the premise of doing well by doing good – are an oft-cited explanation for why businesses

engage in socially responsible activities (Fitzpatrick & Gauthier, 2001). Though a true causal

link between "doing good" to doing well financially has been questioned (Vogel, 2005), scholars

have argued that socially responsible companies enjoy benefits including greater sales, enhanced

corporate image, and increased appeal to employees and investors (Kotler & Lee, 2005).

Critics of this common form of CSR abound, arguing that true social responsibility

activities should be "morally right for that reason alone, without an ulterior self-interested

motive" (Fitzpatrick & Gauthier, 2001, p. 198). Critics also point out that companies' often mask

their true intent of improving their bottom line or their image, thus actually engaging in the

morally-questionable behavior of deception (Fitzpatrick & Gauthier, 2001; Gulyás, 2011;

Werhane, 2008). Companies are also accused of using philanthropic activities to detract from

other negative impacts they have upon society (Waddock, 2008). Consequently, it is not surprising that consumers often view companies that tout their CSR accomplishments with skepticism, assuming the claims are either disingenuous or, in some cases, deeming them hypocritical when compared to personal experiences with a company (Pomering & Dolnicar, 2009; Pomering & Johnson, 2009).

Aside from these moral issues, CSR activities (particularly those that involve an ongoing partnership with another organization) also come with potential drawbacks. As was the case with Komen's unpopular funding decision, one partner's behavior could bring negative attention to the other partner, resulting in a diminished brand reputation and decreased sales or market share (Wymer & Samu, 2003). Beyond scandals, there is also the possibility of turning off consumers who are concerned that the charity "has a mission or is associated with some value that is inconsistent with those of the consumer" (Kotler & Lee, 2005). Therefore, selecting an appropriate partner is of critical importance.

Fit between a brand and a cause has been identified as a necessary element to creating a successful partnership (Lafferty, 2009; Wymer & Samu, 2003). Fit in a CSR relationship has been defined as the logical connection between a brand/company and a product or cause (Lafferty, 2009). It has been assumed that fit is important to the success of a CSR campaign since the public's skepticism of the motives behind the partnership would reasonably be diminished if the two entities are aligned (Lafferty, 2009). The selection of a charitable partner with the correct fit can be accomplished by choosing causes that are of concern in communities where a company does business, that key publics (customers, investors, etc.) care about, and that have "synergy" with the already established mission and values of the company (Kotler & Lee, 2005, pp. 238-239). Wymer and Samu (2009) suggest that beyond these surface-level types of

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fit, there must also be managerial fit between the two organizations in order for the partnership to have the best chance of long-term success. Should fit between the two organizations not prevent the relationship from turning sour, contractual agreements are also proposed as a way to manage disagreement (Kotler & Lee, 2005).

Framing Theory

Framing theory has been described as how news frames function "to suggest how audiences can interpret an issue or event" (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009, p. 19). Frames help to define problems, identify the sources of the problems, evaluate the causes and their effects from a moral standpoint, and offer suggestions on how the problems may be solved (Entman, 1993). Communicators make conscious decisions to make certain aspects of an issue more salient; then, through the deliberate use of images, words or phrases, they guide a receiver's thinking (Entman, 1993). Framing theory has been applied to a wide range of issues in the literature, including politics (Scheufele, 1999; Scheufele, 2000), social, and environmental issues (Lancaster, Hughes, Spicer, Matthew-Simmons, & Dillon, 2011; Newman, Howlett, Burton, Kozup, & Heintz Tangari, 2012), and even corporate social responsibility programs (Gert-Jan Steltenpool & Verhoeven, 2012; Tengblad & Ohlsson, 2010).

Framing research has its roots in two distinct disciplines: sociology and psychology. In his book *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* published in 1974, Goffman was one of the first researchers to examine the sociological underpinnings of framing. His work highlights society's use of "schemas" to help interpret situations in life. Schemas constitute common frameworks of reality that are shared among citizens and can be drawn on by the media (Goffman, 1974). Framing can also be examined from a psychological standpoint, as a

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number psychologists have demonstrated that perception is applied on a more personal or individual level (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009).

Due to its historical ties to both psychology and sociology, research on framing has been scattered. Pinpointing a standard definition of framing has proven elusive (Entman, 1993). The effects of framing are also very similar to other communication effects, such as information effects, persuasion effects, and agenda-setting effects, leading to even more confusion on the topic (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). For instance, framing's relation to agenda-setting theory has led to debate over whether framing effects are a consequence of accessibility, rather than applicability (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). Entman (1993) argued that framing is distinct from agenda-setting and other theories due to the communicator's role in making certain information more salient for the receiver.

To better clarify framing's position in the larger context of communication research, Scheufele (1999) conceptualized framing not as a static phenomenon, but as "a continuous process where outcomes of certain processes serve as inputs for subsequent processes" (p. 114). The model comprises four processes: frame building, frame setting, individual-level effects of framing, and journalists as audiences. Frame building will be discussed in further detail in the next section due to its relevance to the present study.

Framing in Crisis Communication

A majority of research related to framing has focused on its practice by the news media, yet framing's role in how people make judgments about the world also makes it an important tool for public relations practitioners (Hallahan, 1999).

One such way practitioners use framing is through frame building. Frame building describes "the processes that influence the creation or changes of frames" (Scheufele, 1999). It

considers the various influences of the negotiation of frames, including news production

practices, corporate and political "actors," and culture in an attempt to understand how frames

are constructed (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). External sources to media, which would include

corporate public relations representatives, are adept at using frame building to construct their

messages and utilize frames frequently to influence how issues are later framed in the media

(Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). Public relations practitioners are charged with communicating

with distinct audiences, or publics (Kirk, 2000), and frames offer a way to target messages to

accomplish an organization's goals.

Framing has been applied to public relations research primarily in looking at crisis

response and in circumstances where public perception of an issue is negative (Davis, 2010;

Oyer, Saliba, & Yartey, 2010; Steltenpool & Verhoeven, 2012). Oyer et al. (2010) examined the

Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) use of framing in its responses during major

hurricanes. They found that two dominant frames were used by the organization through an

empirical content analysis of FEMA's news releases. In another study reviewing an

organization's response during crisis, Barnett (2008) identified specific frames used by Duke

University when it was alleged that several members of its lacrosse team had raped a student

from another university. Unlike most other studies that analyze the frames used by an

organization, this particular study employed a qualitative text analysis methodology. The study

reviewed mainly print communication, but also looked at the use of the Internet as it was one of

the university's main methods of communication about the issue.

In another framing study, Davis (2010) explored the communication surrounding a

corporate merger, which was framed negatively by the news media but positively by the

company. Letters, press releases, and the company's "About Us" section on its website were

analyzed through content analysis, and common themes in language were identified. The themes were then compared to those identified in news articles about the merger.

Common to each of these studies was a focus on identifying *specific* themes or frames used by the communicator, rather than examining the overall strategy employed. In contrast, Hallahan (1999) proposed seven models (or strategies) for framing's use in public relations. The models provide practitioners with a more-definitive structure to assist in the selection of appropriate and effective frames in corporate communication and are based on three overarching techniques that can be used to frame an issue – valence framing (portraying an issue as good or bad), semantic framing (use of alternative phrasing or language to describe an issue), and storytelling (selecting key themes and using narratives to support that frame). Thus, the proposed models are concerned with the strategies or methods employed in creating frames, rather than specific frame themes.

The models include framing of situations, attributes, risky choices, actions, issues, responsibility, and news (Hallahan, 1999). Framing of *attributes*, *risky choices*, *issues*, and *responsibilities* are discussed below, as they are most directly applicable to issues involving crisis, such as the Susan G. Komen and Planned Parenthood controversy at hand.

Framing of attributes is used to persuade by bringing negative or positive attention to certain attributes of people, products or events. Though most commonly used in advertising and marketing products, companies can use this technique to emphasize their own good work, ie. their corporate social responsibility programming (Hallahan, 1999).

Framing of risky choices is based on prospect theory, which argues that people are more likely to engage in behavior that minimizes losses, rather than that which may render equal gains (Hallahan, 1999). Public relations practitioners could use this technique to present the downside

of one decision to encourage support for competing decisions. As a practical example of this strategy, one of Susan G. Komen's corporate supporters could respond to critics of its decision to support the charity by saying that the alternative would have greater negative consequences on women's health.

The *issues framing model* acknowledges that controversial issues "frequently result in extensive public discussion" among parties that are in dispute with one another. A public relations practitioner may create frames to define the issue and assist in resolving such disputes or to control the "prominence of the issue" in the media (Hallahan, 1999, p. 227).

Finally, the *framing of responsibilities* technique involves attribution of the cause or responsibility of some event. Corporations can build frames to take credit for their positive behaviors (ie. CSR initiatives) or to avoid or shift blame for negative ones, like those involved during times of crisis (Hallahan, 1999).

Framing Corporate Social Responsibility Programs

Scholars have examined the use of frames in corporate social responsibility communication. However, most of the research centers on using corporate social responsibility programs as a frame and examining its effects (Steltenpool & Verhoeven, 2012), rather than looking at the frames used to communicate about a CSR program. Steltenpool and Verhoeven (2012) used experimentation to measure how CSR messaging used as a frame influenced consumer purchase decisions about beverages. Similarly, Wang (2007) examined the use of CSR programs as a way to prime audiences before showing them a news report on a company framed in either a negative or positive manner, measuring the effect of CSR on the perception of the company. Research that has looked at the content of frames related to CSR programming has focused on the analysis of those frames in the news media, rather than in corporate

communication vehicles (Lee & Kim, 2010). More directly related to the current study, Waller

and Conaway (2011) discussed how Nike successfully used framing in its messages to counteract

media frames that presented the company as socially irresponsible. In particular, the authors

looked at the specific frames used by the company, and categorized them based on whether they

were episodic or thematic in nature. An episodic frame is developed from the perspective of

individuals or covering only specific events, whereas a thematic frame is developed from a broad

perspective that is more about society and the bigger picture (Hallahan, 1999). The researchers

also examined the resulting frames presented by the media and categorized them in a similar

fashion (Waller and Conaway, 2011).

Crisis Communication Strategies

A corporation faces a crisis when it is accused of being responsible for an action that is

deemed "offensive" (Benoit, 1997), which in turn poses a threat to the reputation of the

organization under attack (Coombs, 2007). During times of crisis, even a well-regarded

organization, like Komen, may find that prior favor with the public is not enough to prevent

stakeholders from demanding answers, spreading negative information, and changing behaviors

toward the organization (sales, donations, etc.). And while having a plan in place for handling

potential situations before crisis strikes may be helpful, organizations with crisis plans may not

always handle crises better than those without (Marra, 1998). Other factors, such as company

culture and autonomy of the public relations department, have been found to be better predictors

of crisis management success than crisis planning (Marra, 1998).

When a crisis occurs, plan in place or not, managers are tasked with acting quickly to

assess the situation and identify the audiences that must be addressed (Benoit, 1997).

Organizations need to communicate with those audiences first to provide information on "what

to do to protect themselves from the crisis (instructing information)" and secondly, "to help them cope psychologically with the crisis (adjusting information)" (Coombs & Holladay, 2008, p. 252). Adjusting information provides information about what happened, what is being done to prevent similar crises in the future ("corrective actions," and shows concern for the victims (Coombs, 2007, p. 165).

Because of the high stakes involved, how to strategically respond to crisis has been the topic of numerous studies over the years. A quantitative analysis of literature published over an 18-year period found that most crisis literature focuses on two theories, both of which focus on reputational restoration following crisis: Benoit's image repair theory and Coombs' situational crisis communication theory (Avery, Lariscy, Kim, & Hocke, 2010). Benoit's (1997) image repair theory centers on five strategies: When using *denial,* the accused party claims that an attack is false or places the blame on someone or something else. *Evasion of responsibility* involves claiming ignorance of a situation leading to the crisis, claiming the incident was an accident, or asserting that the crisis resulted as a result of actions made with good intent. With the strategy of *reducing offensiveness*, a company may use one of several tactics: bolstering to emphasize its good qualities while taking the attention off the crisis, minimization to show that the act was not as serious as it has been depicted, differentiation to show that the act was not as serious as other offensive acts, transcendence to show there are more important considerations than the act at hand, attacking the accuser to reduce credibility of the attacking party, or finally, providing compensation to the victim(s). A company may also take corrective actions to resolve the problem or to prevent future issues. Finally, *mortification* is a strategy that involves apologizing for the company's actions and asking stakeholders for forgiveness.

Coombs' (2007) situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) offers some of the same strategies, but emphasizes a more contingent nature of crisis response. Similar to the framing of responsibilities technique described by Hallahan (1999), Coombs suggests public relations practitioners use framing to shape how responsibility for the crisis is perceived since how publics perceive a crisis and attribute blame for negative outcomes impacts the "reputational threat" to the organization (Coombs, 2007). Even if the company is not actually responsible, or the act is not particularly appalling, it is the perception of responsibility and offensiveness that matters (Benoit, 1997). As Coombs (2007) explains:

> A crisis manager tries to establish or shape the crisis frame by emphasizing certain cues. The cues include whether or not some external agent or force caused the crisis, whether the crisis was a result of accidental or intentional actions by members of the organization and whether the cause of the crisis was technical or human error. It does matter if stakeholders view the event as an accident, sabotage or criminal negligence. The crisis types or frame determines how much stakeholders attribute responsibility for the crisis to the organization (p. 166).

To determine the appropriate strategy, causation must be assessed. Crises can be segmented into three categories: organization as victim, accidental situations, and preventable situations (Coombs, 2007). Crises caused by natural disaster or other unpreventable acts fall within the organization as victim category, with publics perceiving the lowest amount of organizational responsibility for such situations. Accidental situations include crises caused by the unintentional actions of the organization, such as product recalls. Preventable situations present the strongest threat to an organization's reputation and include crises caused by the organization, which "knowingly placed people at risk, took inappropriate actions, or violated a law/regulation" (Coombs, 2007, p. 166).

Perception of a crisis also hinges on "crisis stability" – ie., is there a pattern of similar behavior or crisis situations with the organization (Coombs, 2000). Viewing crisis response

through the lens of stakeholder relational history – either favorable, neutral, or negative – is also effective in predicting which crisis response strategies will be most successful (Coombs, 2000, pp. 87-89). Relationships impact how a stakeholder views the organization pre-crisis, during the crisis, and following the crisis. Reputational stability is built through the sum of relationship building interactions with stakeholders over time (Coombs, 2000). Situational crisis communication theory holds that "an organization that treated stakeholders badly in the past is attributed greater crisis responsibility and suffers more direct and indirect reputational damage than an organization with a neutral or positive relationship reputation" (Coombs, 2007, p. 169). A stable history of crises, compounded by a negative relational history, can cause a public to place greater blame on a corporation than if the company has fewer past transgressions and a better reputation (Coombs, 2000).

With these contingent factors in mind, crisis response strategies are used to "establish a frame or to reinforce an existing frame once the crisis type has been identified by the organization" (Coombs, 2007, p. 171). Possible strategies fall into three main categories – deny, diminish, and rebuild (Coombs & Holladay, 2008) (see Table 1). The strategy selected is primarily based upon the type of crisis and the relational history and history of crisis for the organization (Coombs, 2007). *Deny* strategies are most effective when there truly is no crisis (rumor) or there has been some incident outside of the company's control, such as an earthquake or other natural disaster (Coombs, 2007). These are the most adversarial of the strategies, which stress advocating the organization's position (Coombs & Holladay, 2008). *Diminish* strategies attempt to minimize damage to the organization's reputation through excuses or rationalization of actions (Coombs, 2007). *Rebuild* strategies acknowledge the company's role in the crisis and seek to regain the public's trust. Rebuild strategies are the most accommodating of the strategies,

giving greater attention to the public's needs than the organization's (Coombs & Holladay, 2008). A secondary strategy of bolstering may be used to reinforce any of the other strategies, and includes emphasizing the organization's status as a victim, emphasizing past good works, and praising publics (Coombs, 2007).

The success of the selected strategies lies in the acceptance of the crisis strategy by the target public (Coombs, 2007, p. 171). Though it seems like it would most readily appease the public, apology is not always the most desirable strategy as it can be construed as admitting responsibility, which may have legal ramifications for the company. Showing sympathy and offering compensation to victims of the crisis has been shown to have similar reputational outcomes as offering an apology (Coombs & Holladay, 2008). Another factor to consider when selecting a strategy is whether a frame has already been established in the mainstream media or online (Coombs, 2007). Some of the more aggressive strategies, such as denial, may be more difficult to implement if a competing frame is already being presented. In extreme cases where culpability has been determined in the court of public opinion, taking responsibility for the crisis, despite the legal consequences, may be a good choice to prevent further damage to the reputation (Choi, 2012).

Crisis Response Online

Crisis communication has been the focus of myriad studies through the years, with most studies focusing on high-profile crises involving corporations (Avery et al., 2010). Relatively few studies have examined crisis response within the realm of the online environment, though this topic is gaining increasing attention. Several studies have looked at the use of social media as a communication tool during an offline crisis, which is similar to what is proposed in this study. Coombs and Holladay (2012) examined reactions to a corporate apology submitted on the

Table 1. Situational Crisis Communication Theory: Relationship of Crisis Type, Relationship History, Crisis History and Response Strategy

Crisis type	Relational history and crisis history	Possible Primary Response Strategies
Organization as victim - Natural disasters - Rumor - Workplace violence - Product Tampering/Malevolence	Positive or Neutral Relationship - and - No history of similar crisis	**Deny** *Attack the accuser* - Crisis manager confronts the person or group claiming something is wrong with the organization. *Denial* - Crisis manager asserts that there is no crisis. *Scapegoat* - Crisis manager blames some person or group outside of the organization for the crisis.
	Negative relationship - and/or - History of similar crisis	**Diminish** *Excuse* - Crisis manager minimizes organizational responsibility by denying intent to do harm and/or claiming inability to control the events that triggered the crisis. *Justification* - Crisis manager minimizes the perceived damage caused by the crisis.
Accident Challenges (stakeholders claim an organization is operating in an inappropriate manner. Technical-error accidents (industrial accident) Technical-error product harm (product recall)	Positive or Neutral Relationship - and - No history of similar crisis	**Diminish** *Excuse* *Justification*
	Negative relationship - and/or - History of similar crisis	**Rebuild** *Compensation* - Crisis manager offers money or other gifts to victims. *Apology* - Crisis manager indicates the organization takes full responsibility for the crisis and asks stakeholders for forgiveness.
Preventable Human-error accidents Human-error product harm: Organizational misdeed with no injuries Organizational misdeed management misconduct Organizational misdeed with injuries	Use same strategy regardless of relationship history or crisis history	**Rebuild** *Compensation* *Apology*

Adapted from Coombs, 2007

company's own online forum, looking at acceptance of the apology, purchase intention, effect on reputation, and suggestions for further corrective action. In another study about offline crisis, Muralidharan, Rasmussen, Patterson, & Shin (2011) discovered differences in the frames used on Twitter and Facebook by media and news organizations when communicating about the 2010 Haiti earthquake.

Handling crises stemming exclusively from online activity has also been addressed. Burns (2008) explored the ethical considerations related to a crisis caused by a company's disingenuous use of social media (blogs) through the use of case study. Jin and Liu (2010) and Liu, Jin, Briones, and Kuch (2012) advanced the blog-mediated crisis model, which proposes that crises stemming from blogs should be addressed using the SCCT's recommendations for rumors.

Finally, researchers have compared how crises are framed on social media versus traditional media outlets: Valentini and Romenti (2011) explored bloggers' and blog readers' reactions to a company's financial crisis; Moody (2011) examined how celebrities influence the perception of their personalities during reputational crises.

Contingency Theory of Strategic Conflict Management

Public relations excellence theory delineates four distinct models of practicing public relations, based on the direction of communication and power of the communicators – the press agentry/publicity model (one-way asymmetric), the public information model (one-way symmetric), the two-way asymmetrical, and the two-way symmetric model (Grunig, 1992; Grunig and Hunt, 1984). Researchers emphasizing a normative perspective of public relations have argued that the ideal public relations practice is the two-way symmetrical or "mutually beneficial communication" model (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

Scholars calling for a less rigid explanation of how public relations is best practiced introduced the contingency theory of strategic conflict management, arguing that "any attempt to identify a single model of practice for public relations in an organization, much less a single ideal model of practice, is difficult at best" and that such models are "unrealistic" in every day practice (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, & Mitrook, 1997, p.37).

Contingency theory asserts that public relations decision making actually takes place along a continuum rather than within models, and involves adopting stances ranging from pure advocacy to pure accommodation (Cameron, Cropp, & Reber, 2001; Cancel et al., 1997). A practitioner using *advocacy* does so with the "purpose of defending self-interests and persuading other parties to look favorably upon the organization," while using the strategy of *accommodation*, on the other hand, indicates that the practitioner is willing to use "cooperation with the aim of satisfying the other's concerns" (Ye & Pang, 2011, p. 252). Contingency theory proponents hold that accommodation, the "key element of a two-way symmetrical communication," may not always be the best – or even most ethical – method for handling a public relations situation (Cancel, Mitrook, & Cameron, 1999). And though an advocating stance is fodder for those who would criticize those in the field as merely proponents of spin, promoting the organization's well-being above that of its publics' is inherently important to the role of a public relations practitioner "as it is often done in the face of organizational expectations that public relations should advocate on the organization's behalf" (Cancel et al., 1997). The organization is, after all, signing the practitioner's paycheck.

In practice, the reality is that taking a pure accommodating or a pure advocating stance is rare; instead, a number of stances somewhere along the spectrum may be taken over the course of a crisis, even with the same public (Chang, Hong, & Cameron, 2012; Shin, Cheng, Jin, &

Cameron, 2005). Multiple variables could potentially influence the amount of accommodation taken by a practitioner (Cancel et al., 1997), and throughout the course of the theory's development, 87 contingent variables influencing the relative stance of the organization have been identified (Cancel et al., 1999). The variables have been further quantified into 12 categories, designated as either internal or external variables. External categories were identified as industry environment, public relationships, political/social/cultural environment, external threats, and public power (Shin, Cameron, & Cropp, 2006). Those considered internal are the organization's development, organization's structure, PR department independence, PR department governance, management characteristics, individual capabilities, and individual characteristics (Shin, Cameron, & Cropp, 2006). The variables also fall into categories of predisposing variables and situational variables (Cancel et al., 1999). Predisposing variables include items like organization size, corporate culture, public relations access to the dominant coalition, and so on (see full list, Table 2). These factors "influence location along the continuum before the corporation enters into a particular situation involving an external public," at which point situational factors further determine the amount of accommodation that is made by the practitioner (Cancel et al., 1999). Situational variables identified include such items as urgency of the situation, threats (negative publicity, etc.), general perception of the public on an issue, characteristics of threatening public (ie. size, ability to get media coverage), feasibility of accommodating, among others (see Table 2) (Cancel et al., 1999).

Practitioners also take several variables into consideration related to community relations activities (Cancel et al., 1999). Situational variables related to community relations include a mixture of what could be considered internal and external variables, including the external

public's power to positively impact the corporation (how beneficial is relationship to company);

support of the dominant coalition and corporation employees of the community relations request;

the availability of corporation resources for accommodation; politics; tradition; and the external

public's characteristics (Cancel et al., 1999).

Table 2: Predisposing and Situational Variables Impacting Level of Accommodation Used by Practitioners

Predisposing variables	Situational variables
1. Organization size	1. Urgency of the situation
2. Corporate culture	2. Threats (negative publicity, etc.)
3. Business exposure	3. Cost-benefits analysis
4. Public relations access to the dominant coalition	4. Balancing of interests (internal publics, external publics, etc.)
5. Dominant coalition enlightenment	
6. Line managers	5. General perception of the public on an issue
7. Line manager enlightenment	6. Corporation's public reputation
8. Individual characteristics of individual dominant coalition members.	7. Characteristics of threatening public (ie. size, ability to get media coverage)
	8. Coorientation of public and corporation
	9. Characteristics of public's requests
	10. Feasibility of accommodating
	11. Actions of the public

Cancel et al., 1999

Measuring stance

One of the major advancements in the evolution of contingency theory is the

development of a scale to measure stance in a situation – either as action-based accommodation

or qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodation (Jin & Cameron, 2006). Jin and Cameron (2006)

explain that stance is "operationalized as the degree of accommodation or the willingness of

taking accommodations toward publics in varied situations" (p. 423). Action-based accommodations refer to stances of agreement with the other party, while "qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodations weight more toward expressing regrets and qualifying the organization's tendency of collaboration and so forth without explicitly taking concrete actions" (Jin & Cameron, 2006, p. 425) Using two surveys and a judge panel, the researchers determined that stance could be measured as the willingness of the practitioner to accommodate a public. Hwang and Cameron (2008) tested the scale through an experiment that examined "the relationship among perceived leadership, perceived severity of threats, and public expectation about an organization's stance" (p. 70). The scale has also been used to examine issues related to social media use, as demonstrated by Kelleher (2008) who conducted an experiment to examine public relations practitioners' use of blogs on the likelihood of using an accommodative response with key publics.

Contingency Theory and Crisis Response

One of the key characteristics of contingency theory is its assertion that stances utilized by public relations practitioners change over time. The assumption that practitioners adapt strategies as situations evolve makes it a natural fit for examining the dynamic nature of crises and conflict.

According to Shin, Cheng, Jin, and Cameron (2005), "conflict occurs both when a public moves in a different direction from the organization or when an organization refuses to change its direction after having received input from its public" (p. 400). Contingency theory has been used along with crisis response theories like SCCT in multiple studies examining companies experiencing crisis (Chang et al., 2012; Hwang & Cameron, 2008; Pang, Jin, & Cameron, 2010; Park, 2008; Ye & Pang, 2011).

Relevant to the study proposed in this paper, Ham, Hong, and Cameron (2012) used case studies to explore the evolution of companies' stances and crisis response strategies as they experienced the same crisis situation, finding that each company responded somewhat differently to the crisis and that their responses changed as phases of the crisis unfolded. The researchers found support for the idea that competition amongst companies experiencing the same crisis can influence how each company responds.

Shin et al. (2005) used a content analysis to test contingency theory's application within four high profile conflicts covered in the media. The study focused on determining how different variables impact an organization's or a public's use of accommodation or advocacy, and investigated potential contingent factors that influence the crisis/conflict management strategies of an organization (Shin et al., 2005). The researchers examined 337 news stories written about the cases coding them for 12 variables including source, strategy employed, and contingent factors impacting the strategy used, among others. They found that stances of the companies that were challenged used more accommodating stances over time and that the public generally advocated more than the organization. Shin et al. (2005) called for more research to be conducted to explain how power differences between an organization and its publics influence the choice of stances and strategies during crisis situations. They also noted a specific limitation to the study, in that the content analysis was performed only on "journalistic pieces that may not fully represent the stances taken by the organization/public as it is reported by a third party" (Shin et al., 2005). Examining corporate responses within an unmediated environment like social media outlets would eliminate this bias.

Theory of Relationship Management

Organization-public relationship has been shown to be an important factor within the public relations decision making process. In the literature reviewed earlier, contingency theory scholars have shown that the quality of public relationships impacts the level of accommodation used in a public relations strategy (Shin et al., 2006). This principle is applied in the situational crisis communication theory literature, which holds that the history of public-organization relationships is a contingent factor impacting how crises are perceived by a public (Coombs, 2007). Likewise, relationships are essential to successful corporate social responsibility partnerships. Such partnerships involve at least two parties – a corporation that is supporting a charitable organization and the charitable organization itself. One party can affect the reputation and success of the other, and as has already been described, fit between the two organizations can assist in building a successful partner relationship (Lafferty, 2009; Samu & Wymer, 2009; Wymer & Samu, 2003).

Despite the apparent importance of relationships to an organization and its publics, Ferguson (1984) was the first to appeal for greater public relations research in this area. Since that time, many scholars have attempted to conceptualize public-organization relationships. Research efforts initially focused on the components making up a relationship rather than finding an agreed upon definition of relationship (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997). In response to such calls for further definition, Ledingham and Bruning (1998) defined organization-public relationship as the "state which exists between an organization and its key publics in which the actions of either entity impact the economic, social, political, and/or cultural well-being of either entity" (p. 62). Huang (1998) later defined relationship as the "the degree that the organization and its publics trust one another, agree on one has rightful power to influence, experience

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satisfaction with each other, and commit oneself to one another" (p. 12). Organization-public relationships have also been described as "patterns of interaction, transaction, exchange, and linkage between an organization and its publics" (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 2000, p. 18).

Relationships form when there is recognition of an interdependence that exists among various parties (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999). This realization could be related to the fact that the parties need something from the other, face mutual threats, or have some legal reason to associate with one another (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997). In the case of corporate social responsibility partnerships for instance, the reason for a relationship forming could be that the charitable organization needs additional funding that can be provided by an organization that is looking to enhance its brand reputation.

In times of crisis, situational crisis communication theory holds that prior relational history with a public can help predict which crisis response strategies will be most effective (Coombs, 2007). This knowledge is helpful only to the degree that it is possible to manage relationships prior to the crisis. With this challenge in mind, Hon and Grunig (1999) offer several strategies to maintain relationships. Among them are providing *access* to public relations staff; adding *positivity* to the relationship by making the relationship enjoyable; maintaining *openness* of thoughts and feelings; offering *assurances* that the concerns of parties involved in the relationship are legitimate; *networking* with groups that are likeminded with the organizations' publics; and *sharing tasks* related to problem solving (Hon & Grunig, 1999, pp. 14-15).

Strategies like those proposed within the situational crisis communication theory focus mainly on managing perception of the crisis or enhancing the image of the organization. Scholars have been critical of such approaches, asserting that the focus in public relations programs should be less about the "manipulation of public opinion" and more about building relationships

(Bruning and Ledingham, 1998, p. 15). To address this gap, scholars have drawn from interpersonal communication literature to identify several strategies that are effective in managing relationships during conflict (Hon & Grunig, 1999). *Integrative strategies* emphasize symmetrical decision outcomes built on two-way communication methods, whereas *distributive strategies* are those where the organization is adversarial and "benefits at the expense of the other" (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 16). *Distributive tactics* include arguing and the use of threats. *Dual concern strategies*, also known as "collaborative advocacy" strategies, take into consideration the need to balance the practitioner's responsibilities to the public and to the organization (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 16). Strategies are asymmetrical or symmetrical, and include contending, avoiding, accommodating, compromising, cooperating, being unconditionally constructive, and win-win or no deal (Hon & Grunig, 1999).

Relationship Outcomes

Hon and Grunig (1999) have linked success in building relationships with effectiveness of public relations activities, asserting that the "value of public relations can be determined by measuring the quality of relationships with strategic publics." Though they are ever-changing in nature, relationships can be measured through both cross-sectional and longitudinal means (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 2000), and several scales have been developed to measure the quality of organization-public relationships.

Huang's (2001) multi-dimensional scale incorporates "cross-cultural comparability so that the instrument can be used in both Western and Eastern cultures" (p. 62). The scale, known as the Organization–Public Relationship Assessment (OPRA), built off of Huang's (1997) work on the public's perceptions of a quality relationship with an organization and found support for the dimensions of trust, commitment, satisfaction, and control mutuality, a new dimension

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related to strategies of managing social relationships in Chinese culture (Huang, 2001, p. 69). *Trust* refers to a feeling that those in the relationship can rely on each other (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998) or one party's level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party (Hon & Grunig, 1999). *Commitment* refers to the parties' belief that it is worth the effort to continue a relationship, or the idea that the benefits outweigh the cost (Hon & Grunig, 1999). *Satisfaction* is the "extent to which one party feels favorably toward the other because positive expectations about the relationship are reinforced" (Hon & Grunig, 1999). *Control mutuality* refers to the extent that each party agrees they have the power to influence one another (Hon & Grunig, 1999).

In a quantitative study looking at how relationships affect the consumer decision making process, Ledingham and Bruning (1998) likewise found support for the relational dimensions of trust and commitment in predicting consumer behavior, as well as three other factors: openness, involvement, and investment. *Openness* involves open, frank communication with publics. *Involvement* refers to the organization's support of the community in which it operates. *Investment* refers to the time, energy, feelings, efforts, and other resources given to build the relationship. These items, along with three others, reciprocity, mutual legitimacy, and mutual understanding, were included as dimensions during development of a scale to measure quality of relationships (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999). The resulting analysis indicated that the public has expectations of an organization on three dimensions: professional relationship, personal relationship, and community relationship (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999).

Relationships in CSR

Even though organizations can be considered a public, it should be noted that the literature described to this point describes relationships that an organization has with a public

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that is made up of individuals, rather than another organization. Grunig and Huang (2000) note

this disparity by pointing out that prior research based on resource dependency theory and

exchange theory was commonly used earlier for describing organization to organization

relationships, but more current research on the subject has evolved to address environmental

pressures from groups made of individuals like "publics and activist groups" (p. 35).

      Within the context of organization to organization partnerships, determining whether the

relationship is exchange or communal may be key to defining the quality of the relationship. Hon

& Grunig (1999) define an exchange relationship as one where "a party is willing to give

benefits to the other because it expects to receive benefits of comparable value to the other. In

essence, a party that receives benefits incurs an obligation or debt to return the favor" (p. 20). In

a communal relationship, "both parties provide benefits to the other because they are concerned

for the welfare of the other—even when they get nothing in return" (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 20).

Hon and Grunig (1999) note that "communal relationships are important if organizations are to

be socially responsible and to add value to society" (p. 21). Corporate social responsibility

partnerships stress mutually beneficial outcomes, going beyond simple transactional or exchange

relationships. However, by engaging in communal relationships there is *some* expectation of

benefit in the long-run, as organizations expect that by "being concerned about communal

relationships" they will "encounter less opposition and more support over the long term from

their publics" (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 21).

      As has already been described, techniques to enhance the success of CSR partnerships

include ensuring target market, value/mission, and managerial fit. The importance of relationship

building is likewise noted in Kotler and Lee's (2005) recommendation for companies to select

strategic CSR initiatives based upon their "ability to create relationships with partners in the

nonprofit..sector" and build credibility for the company (p. 245). A long-term commitment

forged between the cause and the company is also recommended to ensure the best outcome for a

partnership and greater likelihood for a strong relationship to develop (Kotler & Lee, 2005).

Additionally, just because there is not a "debt" owed to the other party does not mean communal

relationships do not require a great deal of collaboration during plan development and execution

in order to be successful (Kotler & Lee, 2005). Constant interaction between the partners is

necessary to make sure that the goals of the program are achieved.

Increasingly, modern practitioners must think about their work less in terms of how many

programs they have produced and aimed at publics, but more so in terms of how those short-term

projects assist in building long-term relationships with strategic publics (Hon & Grunig, 1999).

In corporate responsibility partnerships, one of those publics includes the receiving charitable

organization. When those relationships are challenged, as was the case with the Komen and its

corporate sponsors during the Planned Parenthood controversy, practitioners must consider the

contingent factors at play, including the depth of relationship the company maintains with its

charitable partner, in choosing how to respond.

The following section will detail how this study extends the literature reviewed thus far.

This will be followed by a description of the methodology employed, a review and discussion of

the study's findings, and conclusions that can be drawn given the results.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to advance crisis communication and relationship

management application and theory by examining the crisis response strategies used by

corporations during a time of crisis involving a nonprofit partner. Specifically, this task is

approached from a contingency theory viewpoint, with the researcher striving to explore how

Komen's corporate sponsors' level of investment in its charity partner, as well as its size and level of exposure, impacted its use of crisis communication strategies, such as those suggested by Coombs' (2007) situational crisis communication theory.

While other studies have examined the effects of crisis response strategies on relationship outcomes (Huang, 2008; Haigh & Brubaker, 2010), this study is different in that it explores how attributes of a CSR relationship potentially impact the crisis response strategy. Additionally, little attention has been given to corporations involved in a philanthropic partnership with a charity in crisis. This study addresses the gap in the literature, a gap which is surprising given the popularity of corporate social responsibility programs today and the fact that nonprofits are not immune to crisis (Sisco, Collins, & Zoch, 2010). Researchers have also noted that few studies have analyzed multiple organizations' reactions to the same crisis (Chang et al., 2012), and this study addresses a call for further research in that area.

Research Questions

Based on the literature review, a central question for study emerged: *what was the response of Susan G. Komen's corporate partners to the crisis involving their common charitable partner?* The importance of timeliness in crisis communication is well documented in the literature (Sturges, 1994; Coombs, 2007). Scholars have suggested that as the crisis moves through various stages, different strategies are more effective (Sturges, 1994), thus the first two-part question is proposed to learn if differences in the responses existed during different stages of the crisis:

RQ 1a.: *How did Komen's corporate partners respond when news of the cuts to Planned Parenthood broke?*

RQ1b.: *How did Komen's corporate partners respond after funding was restored?*

Prior relationship with a public has been shown to impact the strategies employed by an organization during time of conflict and crisis (Cancel et al., 1999; Coombs, 2007); it seems natural that the relationship an organization has with its charitable partner that is in crisis should impact its decisions on how to respond. Those that have had long-standing relationships or who have made greater financial contributions may be more likely to want to preserve the relationship and may use different crisis response strategies than those companies who are less invested in the relationship, as investment has been shown to be a key variable in predicting satisfaction in relationships (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). Without a body of prior work in this area, further exploration is required to see if any conclusions could be reached about the influence of investment on the manner in which Komen's corporate partners responded to the crisis:

RQ2: *How did the responses of Komen's corporate sponsors with more time or money invested in the partnership compare with those with less money or time invested?*

Finally, researchers have found that organization size and business exposure are contingent variables impacting the level of accommodation a practitioner will use when addressing a public, and the two variables are intertwined (Cancel et al., 1999). Again, within this study the goal is to explore these variables to see how they may have attributed to the specific response strategies employed by the various corporate partners:

RQ3: *How did sponsors of different organization sizes and levels of business exposure/visibility respond to the crisis?*

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Academics have called for more work on crisis communication with varying methodologies (Avery et al., 2010). Given the research questions, a qualitative approach is preferred as it allows for the deeper exploration of issues or problems (Creswell, 2013). Content analysis is an appropriate method of research for this study as it can demonstrate how sources construct messages to influence receivers (Wrench, Thomas-Maddox, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2008), with a focus on messages "actually produced in practice" (Stacks, 2002, p. 108). As technology has improved accessibility to electronic documents, a qualitative approach to content analysis has been used increasingly by researchers to examine news media and documents such as web pages, blogs, Facebook posts, photos, and more (Altheide, 2013). Qualitative content analysis differs from traditional content analysis in that it considers the "situations, settings, styles, images, meanings, and nuances" of the data, and incorporates reflective elements of analysis (Altheide, 2013, p. 25). While still systematic and complex in nature, qualitative content analysis emphasizes the researcher's instrumentality within the study, providing a narrative description of observed phenomenon and putting the findings in context (Altheide, 2013).

In this study, qualitative content analysis is used to look at actual frames, or crisis response strategies, used by corporations during crisis. According to Waller and Conaway (2011), "frame analysis affords the communication researcher with a potent, precise approach with which to analyze the inner dynamics of the often complex and wide-ranging debate on issues in the corporate and public realm" (p. 89). The study is concerned with analyzing the

frames within social media posts by the company. This decision was made for a few reasons. First, social media's role in the crisis was mentioned in several news articles published about the situation. Secondly, as a matter of practicality, the public is leaning more and more on social media for information in times of crisis (Veil et al., 2011), and practitioners must be familiar with challenges this environment poses. Finally, the social media environment provides elements of realism. Online communities are notable as a "naturally occurring forum for exploring stakeholder reactions to crisis communication" (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). Observing conversations online, without intervention by researchers, provides unfiltered data for analysis (Coombs & Holladay, 2012).

Facebook was selected as the social media outlet because of its immense popularity (reaching 1 billion users in 2012; see Vance, 2012) and the ability to easily revisit posts made in past years through the "Facebook timeline"; Twitter only allows for review of posts made one year prior to a point in time. Since data was not collected until 2013, this proved important to gaining accessibility to posts made in 2012. To provide context, and to assist in answering research questions two and three, the researcher studied the situation within which corporations framed their message – examining consumer viewpoints during the crisis period, information about the company's history with the charity, and financial and business information related to the company, along with numerous news articles and blog posts published about the crisis in 2012.

Qualitative techniques were used to create categories for coding the data. A constant comparative method was used to examine individual posts as the unit of analysis for their use of Coombs' (2007) crisis response strategies and common themes.

Sample selection

 A multi-step sampling strategy was employed. The sampling process first began by looking at Komen's current partner list and a list that circulated on social media during the crisis period (see www.facebook.com/pages/Boycott-Susan-G-Komen-Corporate-Partners; http://www.democraticunderground.com/1002258543; http://pjfusco.com/?p=1332). Significant differences were noted between the two lists. Though news reports following the crisis noted that none of the corporate partners had immediately severed their affiliation with Komen (Terkel, 2012), the lists circulating during the crisis listed a total of 200 companies, while today the charity's website lists only 137 partners ("Partners and Sponsors," 2013). In the year and a half since the crisis broke it is clear that companies have allowed their agreements to expire, and further study of news articles on the topic confirmed this (Hughlett, 2012).

 To ensure that the companies examined were in fact partners during the time of the crisis, while also ensuring that detailed information about the companies' involvement with the charity, such as giving totals, was still readily available, it was decided to use only companies that appeared on both lists. Family or personal foundations, charitable event series, or other non-corporate organizations (Zeta Tau Alpha sorority, for example) were eliminated from the resulting list. As data was collected, companies that did not maintain a Facebook account in January and February 2012, do not allow user comments on their pages, or that had accounts where user comments during the time period were not available (ie. because of the volume of responses being truncated on the page) were also eliminated. Following this narrowing process, 52 partners remained. In an attempt to garner more data for analysis, particularly for companies with a longer relationship with Komen, five additional companies that are not current partners

were randomly selected from the list of former partners and added to the sample (denoted with a star in the list below).

A complete list of the final 57 companies analyzed is found in Table 3.

Table 3. List of Corporate Partners Analyzed

Balance Walking by Foot Solutions	Interfresh, Inc.	Palmer's
BIC USA Inc.	IOGEAR	Payless ShoeSource
Boar's Head Provisions Co., Inc.	Jason Aldean	Pepperidge Farms*
Canari Cyclewear	Jersey Mike's*	PNY
Candy Coburn	Kitchen Aid	Premium Outlets
Caribou Coffee*	Koi Design	Princess Cruises
Caterpillar	Kyocera Advanced Ceramics	RE/MAX
Chesapeake Bay Candle*	La Madeleine	Republic of Tea*
Dell	LPGA	Sally Beauty Holdings, Inc.
Deluxe Checks	Meredith Corporation	Shoutback Concepts
Eggland's Best	Mohawk Group	SodaStream
Energizer	Nature's Flowers	Stein Mart
Evian	New Kids on the Block	Titlest (Acushnet)
Evite and Postmark	Nuun	Trident Seafoods
Ford Motor Company	On The Border	U.S. Bobsled and Skeleton Federation
Georgia Pacific	Opal Orthodontics	WaCoal
Graphique de France	OPI	Walgreens
Hallmark	Oriental Trading Company	Yoplait (General Mills)
Holland America Line	Otis Spunkmeyer	Zumba Fitness

Data Collection

To assist in collecting data related to predisposing attributes of the organizations, investment in the CSR relationship, and Coombs' (2007) situational crisis communication

strategies, a qualitative content analysis protocol was created (see Appendix). A protocol is "a way to ask questions of the document" that guides data collection (Altheide, 2013, p. 44). The protocol consisted of a number of categories, including the name of the company, date of company Facebook posts (if any), location of company posts, frame used, themes observed, and items related to context (nature of other activity on the page). This protocol was also used to capture auxiliary information on the corporations' demographics, partnership history, and Facebook page activity for use in observing any trends that might have been present within the data.

As frames have been shown to be dynamic in nature, changing as organizations perceive the need for alternative strategies (Hallahan, 1999), the study analyzed corporate sponsor responses within two distinct time periods related to the crisis: January 31, 2012 through February 2, 2012 (the day news of the decision to de-fund Planned Parenthood broke and two days after) and February 3, 2012 through February 10, 2012 (the day that Komen announced its decision to restore the funding and one week after). The second time period was determined after looking for the responses on the Facebook pages of Komen's corporate partners; the researcher started by looking at just a few days after the decision was reversed but expanded the time period as responses were found on later dates.

Following the selection of the companies, the corporate Facebook pages were located. If more than one corporate page existed for a multinational company, the U.S. page was used. It should be noted that there was not a Facebook page for the companies of Acushnet and General Mills, so the brands of Titleist and Yoplait, respectively, were used as those brands were listed along with their parent companies on Susan G. Komen's partner list. BIC USA, Inc. had multiple Facebook pages for its brands, so the first entry when "BIC" was searched on Facebook was

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used (BIC Soleil). The number of Facebook "likes" for each company's page was recorded. A search was then performed for company posts made on the dates in question. It was recorded as to whether user comments using the keywords of "Susan G. Komen", "Komen", "SGK", or "Planned Parenthood" and "breast cancer" were present on the Facebook page during the specific dates. Screenshots were made of company posts that mentioned the key terms or that responded to posts using the key terms, including those that were made directly on the wall by the company and those that were made in response to a Facebook user's comments. These were later reviewed for use of frames and themes.

The possible influence of the level of investment on corporation response during the crisis was explored. Investment has been found to be an important element of organization-public relationships, and refers to the time, energy, feelings, efforts, and other resources given to build the relationship (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). Therefore, question two was addressed by recording both the length of time each company has been in partnership with Komen and the amount of money donated by each company to the cause, as stated on the Susan G. Komen or corporate sponsors' websites. In addition to noting the total amount of funds donated to the cause, the corporation's membership in a specific partnership "circle," a way that Komen recognizes the annual giving level of its partner organizations, was noted.

Researchers have found that organization size and business exposure are contingent variables impacting the level of accommodation a practitioner will use when addressing a public, and the two variables are intertwined (Cancel et al., 1999). Thus, information related to the organization's size and visibility/exposure was recorded to explore any possible impacts these factors may have had on choice of crisis response. The type of organization can impact the amount of interaction a consumer may have with a brand, impacting its level of exposure and its

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feeling that it must respond to its customers (Cancel et al., 1999). Organization type was recorded using the following categories: Retail, Food and Drink, Electronics/Technology, Household and Personal Products, Transportation/Travel, Music, Sports, Media, and Other. The number of employees and annual sales/revenue (if available) of each company was also documented. The Facebook "likes" recorded earlier as I examined the corporate pages were also used to inform research question three regarding corporation size and visibility.

Coding Procedure

Interacting with the document being studied is a key element in conducting qualitative content analysis (Altheide, 2013). A constant comparison method was used in identifying frames and themes as the data was analyzed. Constant comparison involves a "back and forth process" of reading, making notes, re-reading, comparing items, making summaries of findings, and using inductive reasoning to build themes up from the data (Altheide, 2013; Creswell, 2014). Individual company posts were used as the unit of analysis.

Categories related to company and partnership information (such as size, revenue, and giving history) were coded using corporation financial statements, Komen's and its corporate sponsors' websites, news articles about the controversy, and the Facebook pages of the companies, as well as Dun & Bradstreet's Million Dollar Company database, which reported 2012 revenues and employee information.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Number and Location of Posts

A review of the Facebook pages of the 57 companies chosen for analysis revealed that silence was the most frequently used communication technique employed by Komen's partners during and after news of the controversy broke. Thirty-eight companies chose not to respond to the crisis on Facebook, even though many posted on other topics during the time period observed.

Nineteen companies did post information on their Facebook pages relevant to the controversy, however. In total, 344 posts were made by those companies during the time period studied – and 282 of these were made by Energizer. Many companies posted only in response to negative consumer comments made publicly on the company's Facebook page. Of the 19 companies that provided some response, 11 posted a response directly to their "timeline" (Facebook page). This is notable because comments posted directly to the timeline are more visible to the end-user than those posted on a user comment due to the nature of Facebook's default view settings (ie. a consumer must change a setting in order to view comments other than the company's when first visiting the company's Facebook page). If a company does not post to its timeline, the comment eventually becomes buried in comments section of the page. This may have been a strategic decision, allowing companies to provide some response on the topic, but minimizing the exposure of the response (and consequently additional consumer reaction). Companies that posted directly to their timeline elevated the discussion to a more prominent

position – lending credence to the idea that the crisis was important and that consumers' claims were legitimate and important.

Consumer Reaction

As has already been noted, more than half of the companies analyzed received feedback from consumers about the issue on their page, and a third of the companies studied provided some response to the situation. Though consumer perception was not the focus of this study, the context it provides is relevant to understanding the situation within which Komen's corporate sponsors found themselves. News articles and blogs discussed the role of social media in providing consumers an outlet to express their opinion of the controversy (Newell, 2012; Terkel, 2012), but understanding exactly what was said was important to understanding the environment within which the companies had to respond. Therefore, the comments on each page were reviewed, notable posts were recorded, and patterns observed across multiple pages were summarized.

Comments posted on all of the companies' pages during the time period observed were overwhelmingly negative in sentiment toward the companies' support of Komen. These posts were made directly to the companies' timelines as well as on unrelated posts the companies had posted. Many posts urged the companies to reconsider their partnership. A typical post of this type is seen in this comment to Energizer:

> *Alexandra (Feb. 2, 2012 to Energizer): I was very distressed to see that Energizer is listed on Komen for the Cure's webpage as a corporate sponsor. I have been your customer for a very long time and I urge you to withdraw your support for SGK.*

In addition to voicing displeasure with the corporate partnership, many consumers stated their intent to "boycott" the company if the partnership remained intact, and naming alternative brands they would purchase instead:

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Andy (Feb. 1, 2012 to Boar's Head): LOVE your products. Won't be buying them anymore because of your partnership with Susan G. Komen though. Bummer.

Jamie (Jan. 31, 2012 to Yoplait): I'm switching to Dannon as long as you support Susan G. Komen. They are a tool of the right wing.

Others suggested alternate charitable partners that might make more suitable partners for

the companies:

Walt (Feb. 4, 2012 to Ford Motor Company): You need to dump SGK when

they play politics with women's lives. Support the American Cancer Society instead.

Politics, as noted in the posts above to Yoplait and Ford, was a frequent theme of

conversation and this seemed to mirror offline debate found in news coverage about the issue.

Consumers noted possible political motivation in Komen's decision, as well as their perception

that Komen's partners are guilty of playing partisan politics by association:

Kathryn (Feb. 1, 2012): don't (sic) buy Evian if you support the great work of Planned Parenthood. Evian gives money to the Komen Foundation which just pulled its support for breast cancer screenings for poor women. This (sic) did this under pressure from right-wing extremists who want to limt (sic) women's access to quality healthcare. Go Poland Springs!

Diane (Feb. 4, 2012 to Nuun): Nuun – I appreciate that you want to support those coping with breast cancer, but I think you are very naïve to think that the two are total (sic) separate. In supporting an organization which has politicized womens' healthcare you are hitching your brand to theirs…

While negative posts comprised most of the activity on the companies' pages, a minority

of consumers did voice their support of the companies for their partnership with Komen. Some

also made clear their intent to *purchase* the company's products because of its partnership with

the charity. These consumers were in favor of Komen cutting off support from Planned

Parenthood. On several pages, consumers argued with each other about the underlying issues

influencing Komen's decision – topics included the legality and morality of abortion, political

partisanship, and the charity's "worthiness." Consumers who made positive comments about the companies' support of Komen were overpowered by the negativity that was prevalent on most pages, but their dissent shows that it was in fact a dividing issue among consumers.

Amongst all of the passion about the issue, some consumers demonstrated feelings of apathy. On the Titlest page for instance, a female consumer who posted a complaint about the company's support of Komen was quickly shut down by a male consumer who was annoyed by the introduction of "politics" in a place he felt should solely be devoted to discussion about the sport: "Get off your soapbox…this is a golf forum about stuff from Titlest…not a place about your political feelings toward a company or whatever they support."

A review of the comments shows the complexity and sensitivity of the issues the companies faced in the days following the crisis. While the overall response was negative, companies were in fact tasked with responding to consumers holding multiple viewpoints and expectations. The dynamic interplay of thoughts in real-time and in a very public forum provides an example of the changing and challenging landscape of communication that crisis managers find themselves in today.

A point worth mentioning is that many companies received no feedback on their Facebook pages about the issue (or at least none that still resides on the page). This was surprising because the lists of Komen's corporate partners circulating on the Web included all of the companies analyzed. It was found that several consumers had posted the same message on multiple pages, but they did not post on all pages. This indicates that some criteria was developed and used by consumers in determining which companies should hear their opinions. This point will be discussed later in more detail within the section on contingent factors.

Strategies Used During Phases of the Crisis

According to SCCT, Komen's corporate partners faced an "accident" crisis type (the exception being Pepperidge Farm, which faced an organization as victim crisis due to the rumor circulating when the crisis broke that it was still one of Komen's charitable partners). The companies did not initiate the crisis, but rather faced challenges from stakeholders for their affiliation with the charity that did initiate the crisis. According to SCCT, with an accident crisis type one of the diminish strategies should have been used by the companies assuming their relationship history was positive or neutral prior to the crisis and they had not faced similar crises (Coombs, 2007). This study found that most companies did in fact use an excuse or justification strategy but there were some exceptions that will be discussed in more detail below. Differences were also observed in the different phases of the crisis that were studied.

No Response as a Strategy

As has already been mentioned, 38 companies did not respond to the crisis on their Facebook timelines. Many of them did post about other topics, however. Product promotions were common – Dell pushed a virus protection software and OPI a line of nail polishes.

Of all things a company could talk about during a time of crisis, Groundhog Day and the Super Bowl were two frequent topics of posts. The events were timely, but neither topic has anything to do with the companies' core missions. Both were used simply as a conversation starter, not as a tie in to an event or product related to the companies. If this was an attempt to change the subject consumers took note, with several finding clever ways to tie their own comments to the company's post. In response to Caribou Coffee's Grounghog day post, for instance, one consumer said this: "The shadow I see is the shadow of Susan G. Komen defunding Planned Parenthood."

Also surprising was that some companies promoted their support of other charities in the days following the crisis. Walgreen's talked about a program to support the Make-a-Wish Foundation, while Mrs Baird's Bakeries posted a comment about the American Heart Association's "Go Red for Women" day. It is interesting that companies would bring up the topic of philanthropy (a women's cause even in the case of Mrs Baird's) during a time of crisis with another charitable partner. Perhaps their decision was fueled by a desire to show their goodwill toward more than just the charity in crisis, but it seemed to provide an opening for critics who may have been reminded of the controversy with Komen. If it was the intention of the companies to create a diversion by starting conversations about other topics, consumers found a way to bring the discussion back to what they felt was important. Company posts on the timeline, even those unrelated to the crisis, provided a prominent place for consumers to post their feedback. These posts were more visible than those posted by consumers directly on the timeline (again because of default settings on the page that prioritize company-origin content).

Of the companies that did not post about the controversy, 17 were companies that received comments from consumers about the situation on their Facebook pages. While we cannot know if the company sent a private message to those consumers, the available information gives the impression that no response was made. Though these companies did not deny involvement outright, silence about the situation has been characterized as an advocative stance (Chang et al., 2012). Silence means companies may face criticism from those that perceive the company has something to hide; but with such a sensitive topic and with so many parties involved (pro-Komen consumers, pro-Planned Parenthood, and Komen itself), these companies may have felt that the greater risk lied in alienating any one public through a response

that was not well-received. It is also possible they did not feel the probability of loss as a result of the crisis was great enough to warrant response (Seeger et al., 2003).

Among those that did not receive feedback about the issue on their Facebook pages, no response may certainly have been the best response. Perhaps their consumers provided feedback through other means (mail, email, phone calls, etc.), and Facebook was not the expected or preferred communication tool for their audiences. Or perhaps they did not receive negative feedback at all, meaning the perceived threat was low. Threat has been identified as a contingent variable impacting the amount of accommodation used in responding to a particular situation (Cancel et al., 1999). Without the perception of a high threat to the company, the company may have decided an advocative stance of silence was appropriate. Sturges (1994) also argued that the objective of crisis management strategy is to ensure that post-crisis opinions are in line with pre-crisis opinions. If this outcome is possible without providing a public response to the crisis, then the company may have decided responding was unnecessary.

Finally, ethics may have also played a role in not responding. Cancel et al. (1999) discussed the notion that the accommodation of publics is not always the ethical choice, particularly if the public that is being accommodated is "morally repugnant" (p. 38) or not in line with a company's values. Accommodating a public can mean "violating a practioner's moral convictions" as well countering business interests (Cameron, Cropp, & Reber, 2000, p. 250). While some researchers have asserted that the safest and most ethical course of action is to respond in an honest manner, acknowledging the crisis and updating the public on what its position or course of action would be (Seeger et al., 2003), in some cases, limiting discussion may be the only choice to avoid being "combative" (Cameron, Cropp, & Reber, 2000, p. 250).

However, it could be argued, particularly in the case of those companies that did receive questions and comments from consumers on their Facebook pages, that ignoring the issue gives the impression that consumers' concerns are not important to the company. Companies that truly believed their position is the "right" one may have felt discussion would do little to improve the situation – but providing at least some basic information about the status of the situation would have helped publics learn about and process the situation (Sturges, 1994), as well as having shown a commitment to the company's relationship with its consumers.

Crisis Breaking/Pre-Reversal

As news of Komen's decision broke, consumer comments lit up many of the corporate partners' Facebook pages. The most advocative stances were observed through the strategy of denial of crisis used by Georgia Pacific and Pepperidge Farm. The statements took different forms, but nonetheless conveyed the sense that there wasn't a crisis afoot for the companies. Georgia Pacific reemphasized its commitment to the charity through its sponsorship. This statement does not indicate recognition that there is a crisis and demonstrates advocacy for the company's choice to be a sponsor:

> *Georgia Pacific (Jan. 31, 6:07 p.m.): GP, Quilted Northern & Vanity Fair are proud to be participating as the National Volunteer Recognition Sponsor of the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure series. You can learn more about our partnership at http://www.quiltednorthern.com/komen.html.*

Pepperidge Farm on the other hand asserted that it was no longer involved with the charity, having "concluded its corporate sponsorship of Susan G. Komen for the Cure at the end of 2011 for business purposes," despite consumer claims to the contrary on its Facebook page (the company was erroneously listed as a partner on Komen's website at the time of the crisis).

The two examples show that the denial strategy was used by companies with opposite positions on the topic. Denial does little to address the concerns of victims (Coombs & Holladay,

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2008), yet it is effective in situations where perceived responsibility is minimal, relationships with the public are positive prior to the crisis, and there is no history of similar crisis (Coombs, 2007). In Pepperidge Farm's case, claims that the company was still a Komen partner could be considered rumors, and according to the SCCT a denial strategy would be the best strategy to employ for that crisis type (Coombs, 2007). Georgia Pacific on the other hand is still involved with the charity, making its denial strategy questionable according to SCCT, as consumers indicated an association between Komen's charitable partners and Komen's decision.

Among those that acknowledged the crisis situation, Komen's role in the situation was a common theme. Yoplait and Republic of Tea used a scapegoating strategy as they sought to separate themselves from the crisis. Republic of Tea stated it "had no involvement in the recent announcement from Susan G. Komen regarding their grant process." After reminding consumers of Yoplait's "long history of supporting women in the fight against breast cancer" it similarly stated that it did not have involvement in Komen's decision, and went even one step further than Republic of Tea, suggesting consumers contact Komen directly to express their opinions. Given that some responsibility was attributed by consumers to the companies for their involvement in Komen's decision to de-fund Planned Parenthood, companies choosing a deny strategy of denial or scapegoating did not apply the principles of the SCCT to their response (except again for Pepperidge Farm, which used denial for dealing with a rumor). It is possible that they did not recognize a threat posed by the situation or that the companies. Threats have been found to be a contingent factor impacting the amount of accommodation used in responding to a crisis (Cancel et al., 1999). Another situational variable that has been noted as impacting the likelihood of using more accommodative techniques is balancing of interests (Cancel et al., 1999). In this case, the

companies may have been weighing their responsibility to their consumers, the charity itself, and internal publics making decisions about the partnership.

Once Yoplait had used the same statement for two days, consumers began to increase their calls for further information and the company used adjusting information to show empathy to their consumers, expressing an understanding that the "silence is frustrating." Adjusting information provides information about what happened, what is being done to prevent similar crises in the future ("corrective actions"), and/or shows concern for the victims (Coombs, 2007, pg. 165). It assists with consumers' psychological processing of events, and helps pave the way for further communication. Posts providing information, such as figures on the amounts the company had donated to Komen, were also used by Yoplait as the crisis broke.

Energizer, Boar's Head, and Otis Spunkmeyer used excuses to explain their involvement in the crisis. Each used the same excuse with the same terminology: that they were "unaware" that Komen was changing its grant policy. They each also clarified their intent for the partnership as being positive in nature. Energizer changed its response slightly in the days after the crisis broke. Both responses used excuse as the primary strategy, but its preliminary response also included elements of adjusting information as it noted corrective action being taken to "evaluate" its partnerships.

> *Energizer (Jan. 31, 2012): Hi <u>FIRST NAME</u>: Like many of you, yesterday we learned about the decision of Susan G. Komen for the Cure to discontinue its funding to Planned Parenthood. Energizer has made donations to Susan G. Komen for the Cure for several years designed to help further the research needed to find a cure for breast cancer. We are constantly evaluating the charitable organizations with whom we partner to ensure they are a good fit for our brand and consumers. We appreciate you taking the time to share your feelings about yesterday's news.*

> *Energizer (Feb. 2, 2012): Hi <u>FIRST NAME</u>: As we shared with many of you yesterday, Energizer was unaware that the Komen organization was making a change to their grant policy. Our sole intent has always been to support women*

in the fight against breast cancer. While we cannot respond uniquely to every comment posted, please know we are reading them all and appreciate you taking the time to share your thoughts with us.

Finally, the use of justification was observed in the days immediately following Komen's decision to de-fund Planned Parenthood. Holland America, Princess Cruises, and Nuun each used the strategy in a similar way. The companies stressed that donations had gone to "women living with breast cancer" or "lifesaving breast cancer research," and not to grants to Planned Parenthood, underscoring the good the donations had done in an effort to minimize the controversy.

Post-Reversal

The second part of research question one centers around whether differences were observed in how the companies responded following Komen's reversal of its decision to de-fund Planned Parenthood, which was announced on Feb. 3, 2012. Researchers have noted the dynamic nature of crises and the need to "customize" crisis management strategies at each stage of a crisis to maximize the likelihood of positive public opinion following the crisis (Sturges, 1994). However, following Komen's apology and reversal of its decision, several companies that had previously responded to the controversy chose to let those responses be their last word on the topic (Georgia Pacific, Holland America, Princess Cruises, Nuun, Republic of Tea, Otis Spunkmeyer). Some who had previously replied responded again but did not change their strategy (Boar's Head, Pepperidge Farm). Consumers expect immediate feedback about crisis situations (perhaps even more so on social media outlets) but some researchers have cautioned against providing inflexible responses when so little is known at the outset of a crisis (Seeger et al., 2003). The companies that did not change their responses may have felt they already responded with "certainty" on the topic, and with their decision "made and disseminated, the

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organization often feels compelled to vigorously support and defend" their position (Seeger et al., 2003, p. 132) – which must be accomplished either by not providing a change in response or providing extreme justification. Certainly in the case of those who used a denial strategy, it would difficult to change course without providing some serious explanation of why the change in tune is necessary.

Only two companies – Yoplait and Energizer – changed their response strategy following the reversal of Komen's decision. Both used more accommodating strategies. Early on Feb. 3, Yoplait continued to use adjusting information to express its understanding of consumers' frustrations, but after Komen had made its announcement, its posts used elements of excuse and adjusting information:

> *Yoplait (Feb. 3, 2012): We hope this morning's announcement from Komen gives us the opportunity to refocus on what's important: Fighting breast cancer and supporting ALL women. We're continuing to listen to your comments, and are taking them into account as we discuss the best way for Yoplait to champion women's lives. Because this situation was a surprise to us as much as it was to you, we thank you for being patient. We take our commitment to women very seriously.*

Energizer's response shifted even more dramatically following the reversal of Komen's decision. While it had responded with an excuse strategy *280 times* over the three days following the crisis breaking, on Feb. 3 it suddenly utilized a compensation strategy by announcing it would be making a donation to another charity:

> *Energizer (Feb. 3, 2012): We heard many comments from our consumers and what is clear is that promoting women's health, and finding a cure for breast cancer, is a goal we share. To show you our appreciation for your passion and to further our commitment to this cause, Energizer is making a donation of $50,000 to the Siteman Cancer Center, based in our hometown of St. Louis, MO, to fund even more mammograms specifically for those in need.*

This strategy was the most accommodative strategy used by one of the companies analyzed for this study. It is possible that both Yoplait and Energizer may have initially

misgauged the seriousness of the situation, moving to a more accommodative approach after they had time to assess the situation. One of the challenges a crisis presents is that the situation can change rapidly as new information becomes available. Practitioners are often faced with providing a response that is flexible enough to allow the company the ability to change its stance as more information is revealed (Seeger et al., 2003). Wording that makes it clear that the response is based only on the most current information would have likely made it easier for the companies to shift their strategies (Seeger et al., 2003).

Others who had *not* responded previously spoke up after Komen's decision had been reversed. Deluxe Checks, La Madaleine, and LPGA simply used adjusting information in their responses to consumer comments posted on their Facebook pages, each telling the consumer they were listening to their responses and noting the recent developments in the situation. Chesapeake Bay Candle, a small candle and gift merchandiser, did not post about the crisis on its own timeline, but it did take time to respond to two consumers who expressed concern over the issue. By using phrases like "we are deeply concerned about Komen's decision" and "we welcome the reversal of the decision" and noting that it was considering parting ways with the charity, the company indicated that it disagreed with Komen's position and believed the charity was to blame for the situation – a scapegoating strategy. The company also provided adjusting information, noting that it had contacted the charity about the situation and was deliberating its partnership.

Ford Motor Company mentioned the charity's role, saying it couldn't "speculate or comment on the motives behind Susan G. Komen for the Cure's decision." Though it did not expressly blame them, one can ascertain that it deemed the charity responsible for the controversy. In addition to this scapegoating strategy, adjusting information was also used to

Table 4. Company Responses During and After Komen's Crisis Breaking

Crisis breaking, Jan. 31, 2012 - Feb. 2, 2012

Company	Primary Strategies	Bolstering Strategies
Georgia Pacific	Denial	None observed
Pepperidge Farms	Denial	None observed
Yoplait (General Mills)	Scapegoat Adjusting Information Providing Information	Reminder
Republic of Tea	Scapegoat Adjusting Information	None observed
Energizer	Excuse Adjusting Information	Victimage, Reminder, Ingratiation
Otis Spunkmeyer	Excuse Adjusting Information	Victimage, Reminder, Ingratiation
Boar's Head Provisions Co., Inc.	Excuse Providing Information	Reminder
Nuun	Justification	None observed
Holland America Line	Justification	Reminder
Princess Cruises	Justification	Reminder

Post-Decision Reversal, Feb. 3, 2012 – Feb. 10, 2012

Company	Primary Strategies	Bolstering Strategies
LPGA	Adjusting Information	None observed
Deluxe Checks	Adjusting Information	None observed
La Madeleine	Adjusting Information	Ingratiation Reminder
Pepperidge Farms	Denial	None observed
Chesapeake Bay Candle	Scapegoat Adjusting Information	Reminder
Ford Motor Company	Scapegoat Adjusting Information	None observed
Boar's Head Provisions Co., Inc.	Excuse	Victimage, Reminder, Ingratiation
Evian	Excuse Justification	Reminder Ingratiation
Yoplait (General Mills)	Excuse Adjusting Information	Victimage Ingratiation
Jersey Mike's	Justification	Reminder Ingratiation
REMAX	Justification	Reminder
Candy Coburn	Justification	Reminder
Energizer	Compensation	Ingratiation

show empathy – Ford expressed concern about those that were upset about the incident and those that might be affected by breast cancer.

The remaining companies used diminish strategies of excuse or justification. In posts on Feb. 3, Evian pointed out that it was not aware of the charity's change in policy and clarified its intent was to support women's health. Later, in a response to a consumer asking for confirmation that the company would continue supporting Komen, Evian provided an affirmative response justified by the fact that partnership with the charity would "support their (Komen's) ongoing mission of saving women's lives in the fight against breast cancer!"

Jersey Mike's and RE/MAX also employed justification techniques. By sharing the positive outcomes of the partnership and providing some perspective in pointing out the totality of the company's charitable giving programs, Jersey Mike's attempted to minimize the situation. RE/MAX provided the only evidence of a coordinated crisis management strategy by linking from its Facebook page to a statement on its website. In that statement, the company shared its reasoning for partnering with Komen, stating that "because of the personal impact breast cancer has had on the RE/MAX family and the tremendous success Komen has experienced for 30 years, RE/MAX has been an energetic supporter of the breast cancer battle for many years." It also noted Komen's change of direction on the Planned Parenthood issue as reason to continue with its partnership.

Themes Observed Within Crisis Responses

Nineteen companies provided some response to the situation, and while various strategies were employed, several themes came to light across multiple posts.

The Cause vs. the Charity

Across the board, there was a tendency to note a commitment to "breast cancer research," "the fight against breast cancer," or "women's health initiatives," rather than a commitment specifically to Susan G. Komen. In fact, of the 19 companies that responded, just two (Georgia Pacific and Evian) iterated their continuing partnership with Komen specifically.

The others simply beat around the bush, using vague, sometimes borderline-cryptic wording. For example, at three paragraphs Holland America's response was one of the longest of those that were analyzed. However, it didn't mention Susan G. Komen or provide any information about the situation that had transpired. Consumers were left puzzled. One posted, "is this program in any way linked to the Susan G. Komen programs?" While it was clear that it was continuing its programs to support breast cancer research, the consumer who was not "in the know" about the issue would be left to do her own research about what transpired.

Seeger et al. (2003) noted the challenge during crises "to respond in ways that are specific enough to empower subsequent interpretation and action, yet flexible enough to accommodate what is obviously a dynamic and uncertain condition" (p. 132). It was clear when reading several of the company posts that they were attempting to show some response, while not overstating their position. The result: many responses that didn't really say anything. In the hours and days after the news broke of Komen's decision, dozens (or hundreds of consumers in Energizer's case) were left clamoring for answers, wondering what the "real" resolution would be to the situation. In Energizer's case, the eventual response that it would be donating $50,000 to another charity came with no explanation or context. It also didn't answer the question that was on everyone's minds at the time: *Will you continue to partner with Komen?*

When dealing with a highly contentious topic like that broached in this case, it is obvious that companies are resistant to positioning themselves solidly in one group's line of fire. However, a better job could have been done by the companies in providing clarity about the situation and how they planned to respond. Again, an honest response may have gone a long way toward helping consumers process the situation.

Timing of responses

A key characteristic of a crisis is the necessity for the organization to respond "very quickly, with little information about the nature of the event" (Seeger et al., 2003). At the outset of a crisis, the emphasis is on providing information about what happened and helping any victims, then providing information that can assist in the psychological processing of the situation (Coombs, 2007; Sturges, 1994). Following that, reputational repair can commence (Coombs, 2007).

Without the human victims or environmental consequences that violent crises involve, the companies had to deal with tempering a situation that consumers found "offensive" (Benoit, 1997). Some companies set about doing this almost immediately. Georgia, Pacific, Yoplait, and Energizer responded on the same day the crisis broke, while Boar's Head and Otis Spunkmeyer posted the day after. Every other company waited to respond until Feb. 2 or after. This often meant that the responses came several days after consumers posted their comments. In the case of the LPGA, no response was made on its golf clinics page until Feb. 10 – a full 10 days after the crisis broke. It is interesting that a host of companies provided no response whatsoever until Komen had reversed its decision on its funding of Planned Parenthood. Many referred to the reversal in their posts, subtly indicating Komen's culpability in the situation. Yoplait and Energizer, having made posts on the topic immediately after the crisis broke, swung their

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subsequent posts to the opposite end of the accommodative continuum following Komen's

reversal – perhaps having had time to meet with Komen executives, listen to consumers, and

observe the reversal of the decision. With so many companies waiting to respond until after

Komen made a move, one has to wonder about the behind the scenes discussions that took place

and whether it was a coordinated effort on the part of Komen's loyal partners. At least among

those that posted immediately following Komen's announcement on Feb. 3, it gave the

appearance that it was synchronized with the charity's announcement.

Detachment from "Decision Makers"

Victimage was a common strategy used to show that the companies could "relate" to their

consumers feelings about the issue. However, it was observed that a few social media managers

took relationship building with consumers a step further by disassociating themselves from the

decision makers at the company and giving a more personal, less "PR" response.

In responding to a consumer, Deluxe Checks' social media manager made this explicit by

saying she/he was "listening to your comments and sharing them with decision makers at

Deluxe." Boar's Head likewise used this strategy in response to a consumer concern posted on its

Facebook page: "Thank you for your comment, Catherine. Will certainly pass this along to the

appropriate people."

This could be interpreted as a subtle use of victimage on the part of the social media

manager. Separating themselves from the decision makers puts them at the level of the consumer

who is making the complaint – essentially saying, *I'm just like you – I don't make the decisions*

around   here.

While Yoplait didn't refer to "higher ups," the social media manager did use personal

language and engaged in two-way conversation in responding to questions. Even though it used

the same scapegoating post several times over two days, Yoplait provided the greatest number of unique responses to consumers during the time period observed. The exchange below typifies the "conversation" technique Yoplait used:

> *Yoplait (Feb. 2, 4:42 p.m.): No insult intended – the Super Bowl dip recipe was posted on Tuesday morning. We will have an updated statement shortly.*
>
> *Rochelle (Feb. 2, 4:47 p.m.): Thank you for the response it is appreciated.*
>
> *Yoplait (Feb. 2, 4:52 p.m.): No problem, we understand the silence is frustrating.*

The "official" company statements were necessary to relate important information about the situation, but consumers may expect more personal, less formal communication on social media than elsewhere as social media provides ways to communicate in an almost instantaneous manner directly with companies and individuals. Yoplait's exchange shows the speed with which it conversed with consumers.

Of course, some companies exhibited the opposite technique. Energizer, Evian, Otis Spunkmeyer, Pepperidge Farm, La Madeleine continuously posted the same responses or slightly modified versions of the same responses as comments to consumers in the days following the crisis breaking. Yoplait did as well, though it interrupted the monotony from time to time with some personalized responses just as consumer frustration seemed to be simmering over. Given the fact that the companies were receiving input from consumers, it was appropriate that the companies responded in some manner, but one wonders whether these "copy and paste" responses were more harmful than they were helpful.

Contingent Factors Involved in the Crisis Response

Relationship with the Charity – The Impact of Investment

Within a qualitative study, it not possible to determine causation for the response choices made by the companies during the situation they encountered with the Komen controversy.

However, qualitative analysis does provide an opportunity to discuss the possible underlying issues that may have been at play in greater detail, and some findings about the role of a company's investment in a charity can be made as they relate specifically to this case.

Investment did seem to factor into whether the companies responded during and after the crisis. First and foremost, consumers recognized that the companies' partnership with the charity indicates significant financial support. With that understanding, a certain level of responsibility for the charity's actions is attributed to the corporation because of the funding they provide. This is evident in the multitude of comments calling for a boycott of the companies' products, as customers understood that sales of company products are passed on to the charity and thus, support the charity's activities that consumers have deemed inappropriate. This connection was expressed explicitly by some consumers. For instance, companies received comments such as this one, which makes a link between the Yoplait's sponsorship of Komen and Komen's decisions: "I'm deeply disappointed in YOPLAIT to be affiliated with Susan G. Komen, therefore SGK's decision to cut PP off from SGK benefits." A perception of joint decision making was common to both sides of the issue, as this statement from a Komen supporter demonstrates (emphasis added): "I'm a woman and I am GLAD that *you guys* are withdrawing funds from Planned Parenthood grants … *You and the Susan Foundation* did the right thing."

Though most consumers referred to the companies as "corporate partners" in the general sense, several consumers demonstrated specific knowledge of the company's giving history through their comments. These consumers seemed to attribute high levels of giving to greater expectations of responsibility and even a perception of control over the situation:

> *Kimberly T. (Feb. 2, 2012 to Energizer): Energizer, as a member of the Million Dollar Council please use your power to stand firm for women and advocate to SGK to restore their relationship with Planned Parenthood immediately …*

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The Million Dollar Council was one of two partner recognition societies used by Komen at the time of the crisis. The Million Dollar Council recognized partners that had given $1 million or more over the course of the partnership, while the other recognition society, the Million Dollar Council Elite, recognized companies that provided $1 million or more to the charity annually. Today, Komen has renamed these societies the Promise Circle and Pink Ribbon Circle, respectively, and has also added new "circles" of recognition for giving at lower levels.

Coombs (2007) has indicated that the perception of responsibility for a crisis is one of three variables that should be considered by the corporation when determining its crisis communication strategy. With a level of understanding about the financial commitment that corporate partners had made to Komen, consumers perceived the companies as having some responsibility for the crisis. It is this perception of financial investment as related to culpability then that may have affected the companies' decision making process.

For the best example of this principle among the companies examined, we have to look no further than Energizer. By far, Energizer received the most comments on its Facebook page in the days following eruption of the controversy, the vast majority of which were negative in nature. The heightened amount of criticism was due to the announcement of Energizer's inclusion in Komen's Million Dollar Council on the charity's own Facebook page just hours before the crisis broke. While many other companies were giving at this level at the time, Energizer was highlighted as a major supporter and this motivated consumers to speak out against the company. In Energizer's case, it seems likely that the choice to use compensation as its ultimate crisis response was driven by the overwhelming amount of attention the company received in the aftermath of Komen's decision, brought on by awareness of its magnitude of giving. Perception of the public on an issue has been identified as situational variable impacting

the amount of accommodation a public relations practitioner will use in responding to a crisis situation (Cancel et al., 1999). It seems public perception of the level of responsibility of the company was impacted by awareness of the investment the company had made in the charity. This perception, along with the fact that this criticism was occurring online, in a public forum, may have contributed to Energizer's strategy.

As noted earlier, it stands to reason then that companies no longer providing funding to Komen would not be held responsible for the situation by consumers, and can easily employ a denial strategy, as shown by Pepperidge Farm.

Within the companies' posts, information about the history of philanthropic investments was a commonly used bolstering technique. Detailing the good that had been done by the companies – like the reminder from Jersey Mike's that "last year (it) supported hundreds of charities by raising more than $2 million for great causes" – served to reinforce the companies' reputations as a good corporate citizens. Ingratiation largely centered around consumers' role in raising funds, ie. the idea that success had been achieved together. Interestingly, these comments generally referred to the cause (breast cancer or women's health) rather than to the charity specifically: "The Republic of Tea has a long history of supporting women in the fight against breast cancer," for example. This may be a result of companies hoping to reap the reputational benefits of their generosity while still maintaining some separation from Komen.

Looking at longevity of the relationship, there did seem to be some patterns. It was observed that companies that had not been partners for more than a year or two did not have the same influx of consumer comments on their pages as those that had longer relationships. This was true for even larger, well-known brands, such as Walgreens. Perhaps there has simply not been enough time for awareness of the CSR partnership to develop. Studies have found that in

general, consumer recall of specific company CSR programs is low (Pomering & Dolnicar, 2009). Consumers have been shown through experimental research to have favorable attitudes toward companies that engage in CSR activities – but this stance centers on actually knowing that the company is CSR-oriented (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). It would seem logical in this case then that low awareness of the CSR partnership would result in a lack of perception of responsibility for the crisis and less feedback on those companies' pages. More than a third of the companies examined began their partnership in 2010 or later; of these, just four commented on the situation and only one (Jersey Mike's) made a response directly on its timeline.

The Role of Company Exposure

Along the same lines of what was observed with companies who had been in partnership with Komen for shorter amounts of time, size and exposure of the company seems to have played some role in whether a company was impacted by the crisis on its Facebook page. Ten out of the eleven companies who had less than 5,000 "likes" received no comments from consumers and did not provide any response to the situation through their Facebook pages. Companies like Nature's Flowers, a small floral company (two employees and revenues of less than $100,000 per year), and IOGEAR, a manufacturer of computer cables and accessories (four employees and less than $500,000 per year in revenues), are not household names. Nor is their association with Komen advertised through national marketing campaigns like some of the other brands that are associated with the charity. These factors make it unlikely that a consumer would think of these companies as corporate partners ahead of the larger, more well-known brands that are generally associated with Komen. A company's "large size may cause them to be a target of interest or issue groups" (Cancel et al., 1999, p. 178). With so few participants engaging with the brand on this social media vehicle, and with no opposition to the situation expressed on the

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page, smaller companies may not feel it necessary to address the situation through this venue. In fact, the one company with fewer than 5,000 likes that did provide comment on the situation did so in response to criticism it received on the page.

As might be expected, well-known brand names and those that affiliated with retail goods or food and drink products received the bulk of the feedback from consumers. Brands versus stores/individual outlets seemed to get more attention, perhaps because of the wide-availability and use of brands like Yoplait and Energizer, as opposed to a store like Sally Beauty that enjoys more of a niche market. All but two companies with Facebook followings larger than 200,000 received comments from consumers on the issue. Larger companies were less responsive to comments on their pages, with some obvious exceptions, and this was probably because of the volume of posts large companies receive from consumers about a myriad of issues each day (product complaints and questions). Smaller companies may be able to give more personal service to their customers since their customer base is smaller; however, in studies on the topic, practitioners have stated their belief that the general public expects larger corporations to be more responsive to public demands than smaller businesses (Cancel et al., 199, p. 177). From a practical perspective, this is especially important since during crisis the public's desire for a response is amplified, and stakeholders are not only seeking answers but expecting them in a timely fashion (Seeger et al., 2003).

Among those that responded, the use of certain frames did not seem to be associated with any specific industry or size of business. Some differences were observed in level of sophistication of the responses, however, even within the same typology. Note the difference in these justification responses for instance:

> ***Nuun*** *(Feb. 2, 2012): Hi Diane and Annmarie – Nuun's sponsorship of the 3-day walk has nothing to do with their grant money and whether or not they*

support Planned Parenthood. The walk is for women living with breast cancer. Period. Those women are who we support in their battle. If you would like more information on our response to the news coverage and boycott please stay tuned. As we gather more information directly from SGK we will be issuing a statement on our website.

__Holland America__ (Feb. 2, 2012): Since 2006, Holland America Line guests have contributed over $3 million to help fight breast cancer through our On Deck for the Cure program. Funds raised through our program go directly to fund lifesaving breast cancer research and do not go to any local community grants. We acknowledge and respect the fact that our guest and employees have their own individual views on charitable organizations and causes. The On Deck for the Cure 5-K walk is one of hundreds of optional activities available to our guests during their cruise. We appreciate those who elect to participate in our walks and fully respect those who choose not to.

This program is just one aspect of our Social Responsibility Program to give back to communities around the world and help make a difference. Other programs include donating re-usable shipboard items, disaster relief, supporting hundreds of non-profit organizations through cash sponsorships and cruise donations and employee volunteerism and giving. For more information, visit the Social Responsibility section of our website at www.hollandamerica.com.

Both are clearly justification strategies, but Nuun's word choice is a bit unrefined; the defensive elements are very evident. In contrast, Holland America also used justification, but it was much more subtle as it used several reminders and examples of ingratiation. This shows that even within a certain typology, word choice and tone can impact the level of perceived accommodation. Nuun, with a staff of 25, may not have as many experienced communications staff as a larger company like Holland America (who along with its parent company Carnival employs 13,700 employees). Factors related to the PR department and individual capabilities have been shown to impact response to conflict (Shin, Cameron, & Cropp, 2006). Practitioners working for companies like Holland America, a company in an industry faced with customer service issues, natural disasters, accidents, and emergency situations on a fairly regular basis,

may also have elevated expertise about how to handle crisis situations making them better equipped to carry out crisis management strategies.

Advancement of Contingency Theory

A rigorous review of actual responses used by corporations during the Komen/Planned Parenthood controversy shows that a range of strategies were used in responding to a common crisis. While many companies used a strategy recommended by the SCCT for the crisis type, many others either did not respond or used a response strategy other than what Coombs' (2007) model would prescribe.

Coombs (2007) suggested that crisis type, prior relationship with a public, and crisis history could be used to determine the level of crisis responsibility attributed to a company, and in turn, the crisis response strategy that should be used. As shown in this study, some factors – including investment (money and time) and company size – do seem to influence the perception of the company's responsibility for the crisis, and likely played a role in how some (but not all) companies responded to the crisis. The assertion advanced by the SCCT, however, is that an increased level of responsibility should *always* trigger an increase in accommodation (Coombs, 2007). In the case of Energizer and Yoplait, a shift to more accommodative stances was observed as the crisis progressed, but this was not universally observed. For instance, Georgia Pacific, a member of Komen's Million Dollar Council, was blamed for Komen's decision by consumers who posted on its Facebook page, but it used one of the most advocative strategies of the companies analyzed.

This highlights the idea that additional factors, like moral conviction or the beliefs of the dominant coalition, may have acted independently to influence a practitioner's strategy. Throughout this discussion a number of possible reasons for a company's response have been

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proposed. In addition to the role of investment and company size/exposure that were at the center of this study, the role of several factors that have been shown in the literature to impact the level of accommodation a practitioner will use was discussed. These included situational factors such as balancing of interests and those related to the companies' publics (threats, perception of the public on an issue, characteristics of the public), as well as internal factors, such as experience of the PR practitioner (Cancel et al., 1999). With the exception of one organization (Candy Coburn), all of the companies that responded to the crisis did so after receiving feedback from consumers, making actions of the public another possible factor pushing companies to respond in the way they did.

This study looked only at the public-facing content of responses that were made following the crisis, and the researcher did not have access to internal documents or discussions among the companies' decision makers. Therefore, it is impossible to identify all of the factors that may have played a role in how each company responded to this situation. Despite that limitation, the findings provide support for contingency theorists' claims that a model like the SCCT, which uses a narrow set of contingent factors to predict a crisis response, is not sufficient to explain why companies responded as they did to the crisis. Additionally, the case examined here challenges the use of SCCT as a tool in determining *how* best to respond a particular situation, as the SCCT does not provide for the complexity of the environment corporations are operating within.

In agreement with what Cancel et al. (1997) asserted, this content analysis shows that the response of Komen's corporate partners depends on a wide range of items, including internal, external, situational, and predisposing factors. Examining real life cases like this one helps connect theory with practice. Of course, the findings of this qualitative study should not be

confused with recommendations for ideal responses for given situations (Cameron, Cropp, &

Reber, 2000). Rather, they highlight the notion that depending on the situation, an effective crisis

response may be found at a number of points along a continuum, and not within a fixed model.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study looked at how multiple companies responded to a shared crisis involving a

nonprofit partner on their Facebook pages. As shown in this study, two-thirds of the companies

analyzed received comments on their Facebook pages from consumers who turned to social

media platforms not only for information but also to communicate with the parties they deemed

responsible for the crisis. Not so long ago, if consumers wished to voice their displeasure with a

company they would have to write a letter to the company or the newspaper, or perhaps picket

outside the corporate offices. In both cases, the exposure was limited to whatever information the

company released about the feedback and what the media covered. This is no longer the case.

Social media has changed the environment in which a company must react to crisis, and

dramatically so.

The research presented helps to advance our understandings of crisis response and

relationship management theories. By examining multiple companies responding to the same

crisis, the contingent nature of crisis management has also been further developed. Prior to this

study, investment had been examined as an outcome of an organization's relationship with its

publics, rather than as a possible contingent variable impacting response strategies during a

crisis. Within the framework of corporate social responsibility partnerships, examples of the

influence of investment in a charity on a company's response strategy have been identified as

being related to the amount of responsibility attributed to the corporation, though further study is

needed in this area. Additionally, as a result of this study, the role of other contingent variables

(organization size and business exposure) have been explored within the realm of corporate

social responsibility partnerships. This research has shown support for the assertion that

size/exposure may impact how a company responds to a crisis, though perhaps not in the way

other researchers have proposed (Cancel et al., 2009). In this case, larger companies were not as

responsive as smaller companies, despite practitioner claims that there is an expectation that

larger companies be more responsive to publics (Cancel et al., 2009).

The implications for this study go beyond the theoretical, however. Practitioners can

learn from other companies that have experienced crisis scenarios such as the one examined in

this case. One of the most evident learnings that can be gleaned from this study is the immense

opportunity practitioners have for communication with publics through social media networks.

During times of crisis, publics demand information in a timely manner, and it is critical for

practitioners to be responsive to consumers (Seeger et al., 2003). Within this study, practitioners

were faced with a very sensitive situation that elicited a great deal of conversation on the

companies' Facebook pages. As was seen in this case, the public nature of posts to a company's

page means that those not in the "collective opinion" have a voice (Sturges, 1994, p. 300). But it

also provides greater opportunities for public/collective opinion to form and to swell – providing

a mouthpiece for the vocal minority that may not have been able to leverage the power necessary

to incite change in the past.

In this "new" world where feedback from consumers is immediate, direct, and public,

companies face the difficult prospect of appeasing constituents who may have very opposing

viewpoints. The risk is that someone is never pleased – which has always been the case – but

social media allows for the fallout to be observed by anyone with a smart phone and a Facebook

account. Practitioners must be aware of these issues and opportunities in order to respond

quickly and appropriately when crisis inevitably occurs. They must also consider what their

social media strategies will be prior to crisis (Jones, Temperley, & Lima, 2009). If crisis occurs,

does the company plan to use social media to respond? Is Facebook (or some other social media

platform) even an appropriate place to respond to controversy?

Online communication has been praised for its effectiveness in fostering dialogic

communication, enhancing transparency, and building relationships (Kent & Taylor, 1998).

However, if during crisis, the conversation is led only by consumers, or the organization uses

less accommodative techniques, the very essence of an open social media environment may be

disrupted. Managing dissonance between wanting to use social media platforms to build

relationships, while realizing that two-way symmetrical communication may not always be

desired or possible, is a challenge practitioners face in using social networking platforms like

Facebook. This challenge may be compounded if a disconnect exists between who is managing

social media and who manages the overall communication strategy of the organization. Crisis

situations highlight the need for strategic management of all organizational communication,

including social media content (Jones, Temperley, & Lima, 2009). Looking at this case

specifically, one wonders if company decision makers knew that the social media coordinator

was posting about Groundhog Day or the Super Bowl while their company faced intense

criticism. Companies must realize that social media is a vital component of building and

maintaining corporate reputation, and management must be actively involved in developing

social media strategies that address the various priorities and challenges of the business (Jones,

Temperley, & Lima, 2009).

Finally, this case presents questions for practitioners contemplating potential corporate

social responsibility partnerships. As Kotler and Lee (2005) point out, there is inherent risk in

partnering with a charity for a social responsibility project. The appropriateness of the charity should be determined in terms of how the charity or cause fits with the company's mission and the target audience's values (Kotler & Lee, 2005). This could prove important to heading off situations like the case in question where the crisis was not a violent one but instead appeared to be one of values or politics.

Limitations

Within this study, there are a few limitations. First, the sample included mainly companies that continued with their partnership with Susan G. Komen following the controversy. A small sample of data was used from corporate partners that have separated from Komen since the crisis, but it is possible that looking at more companies that have ended their partnership since the crisis situation transpired would have garnered different insights.

Second, as a result of utilizing qualitative inquiry, there is the lack of generalizability of the findings to other crisis types or organizations. Since the study is based on a specific case study, the results should be considered within the framework of this particular crisis.

Third, the study was conducted more than a year after the crisis had taken place. Altheide (2013) cautions researchers that content on social media outlets and websites can be altered or removed without warning. Since the crisis period analyzed in this study was in early 2012, and data analysis did not take place until 2013, it is possible that some Facebook posts were removed and information on websites was altered before data collection took place.

Fourth, a second coder was not utilized. Checks on intercoder reliability may have highlighted potential discrepancies in the way the data was interpreted by the researcher, and may have led to different conclusions.

Finally, as Coombs and Holladay (2012) noted, a limitation to looking at online communication is that you are only seeing communication amongst people who go online. It could be that consumers reacted in a different manner offline than they did online, impacting the overall threat perceived by the companies.

Future Research

This study focused primarily on the response strategies selected by companies facing the same crisis involving their nonprofit partner. While the context of the responses was considered in exploring the research questions, a natural extension of this study would be to examine the effectiveness of each company's response strategy by more deeply analyzing the resulting comments made by consumers. This study also only looked at a very small number of the variables identified through research on the contingency theory of strategic conflict management, and the applicability of contingency theory to nonprofit crisis applications is an area that remains largely unexplored. Finally, this case provides a wealth of opportunities for future research in a number of areas including nonprofit autonomy, political communication, organization-public relationships, and ethics of corporate social responsibility programs.

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APPENDIX A:

PROTOCOL

Part I: Corporate Size and Visibility Information

1. Company Name:

2. What is the industry of the organization?

3. How many people does the company employ?

4. What is the company's annual sales/revenue (in USD)?

5. How many likes does the company's Facebook page have?

Part II: Corporate CSR Investment

6. What year did the company start its partnership with Susan G. Komen?

7. How much money has the company donated in total since the partnership began (in USD)?

8. What partnership recognition "circle" is the company a part of?

   Promise circle   Inspiration circle
   Pink ribbon circle   Impact circle
   Innovators circle   Imagine circle

9. Second partnership circle that the company is a part of (if applies).

   Pink Ribbon Circle
   None

Part 3a: Facebook Posts Present on Page

10. Looking at the corporate Facebook page posts between the dates of Jan. 31 and Feb.10, 2012, are comments from USERS including the key words of *Susan G. Komen, Komen, SGK, or Planned Parenthood* present?

11. Looking at the corporate Facebook page posts between the dates of Jan. 31 and Feb. 10, 2012, are COMPANY posts including the key words of *Susan G. Komen, Komen, SGK, or Planned Parenthood* (or in response to consumer posts using those keywords) present?

If no, discontinue coding for this company. If yes, proceed to question 3 and complete the next section for each post.

Part 3b: Frame/Crisis Response Strategies Employed by Company

12. Was the company's response posted directly to the company page's "Facebook wall rather than in response to a specific consumer's comment?

13. On what date was the post made?

14. Does the Facebook post employ one or more of the following primary crisis response strategies?

Attack the accuser	Excuse	Compensation
Denial	Justification	No crisis response observed
Scapegoat	Rebuild	

The primary crisis response categories can be classified as follows (adapted from Coombs, 2007):

Attack the accuser - Crisis manager confronts the person or group claiming something is wrong with the organization.
Denial - Crisis manager asserts that there is no crisis.
Scapegoat - Crisis manager blames some person or group outside of the organization for the crisis.
Excuse - Crisis manager minimizes organizational responsibility by denying intent to do harm and/or claiming inability to control the events that triggered the crisis.
Justification - Crisis manager minimizes the perceived damage caused by the crisis by convincing the publics the crisis was not that serious, the victim deserved what happened, or claiming the crisis was misrepresented (Stephens, Malone, & Bailey, 2005).
Compensation - Crisis manager offers money or other gifts to victims.
Apology - Crisis manager indicates the organization takes full responsibility for the crisis and asks stakeholders for forgiveness.

The following example from the Energizer Battery corporation's Facebook page shows how to differentiate the different responses:

Example of an Excuse strategy (excuse verbiage underlined):
Energizer (Feb. 2, 2012): Hi <u>FIRST NAME</u>: As we shared with many of you yesterday, <u>Energizer was unaware that the Komen organization was making a change to their grant policy. Our sole intent has always been to support women in the fight against breast cancer.</u> While we cannot respond uniquely to every comment posted, please know we are reading them all and appreciate you

taking the time to share your thoughts with us.

15. Does the Facebook post employ one of the following secondary crisis response strategies?

    Victimage
    Reminder
    Ingratiation
    No bolstering observed

The secondary crisis responses can be classified as follows:

Victimage - Crisis managers remind stakeholders that the organization is a victim of the crisis too.

Reminder - Tell stakeholders about the past good works of the organization.

Ingratiation - Crisis manager praises stakeholders and/or reminds them of past good works by the organization.

The following example from the Holland America Facebook page shows how to differentiate the different responses:

Example of reminder:
Holland America (Feb. 2, 2012): Since 2006, Holland America Line guests have contributed over $3 million to help fight breast cancer through our On Deck for the Cure program.

16. Is any theme observed that is common across the various posts? Note keywords or phrases.

17. Context: What other posts are typical on the page? What was the nature of comments from consumers?

APPENDIX B:

CORPORATE PARTNER RESPONSES ANALYZED

Boar's Head (Feb. 3, 2012): Thank you to those of you who have posted on our wall sharing concerns about Susan G. Komen for the Cure's recent change to their grant process. Like many of you we were just made aware this week and are looking into the matter. We remain firmly committed to the fight to end breast cancer.

Boar's Head (Feb. 2, 2012): Thank you for the information, Nicole!

Boar's Head (Feb. 1, 2012): Thank you for your comment, Catherine. Will certainly pass this along to the appropriate people.

Boar's Head (Feb. 1, 2012): Thank you Jennifer T. and Andy M. for your comments. Yes, Andy, we were informed last night that SGK did make this decision about Planned Parenthood. Our donation in 2012 is given to them specifically for Breast Cancer research and we want to be actively involved in finding a cure.

Candy Coburn (Feb. 3, 2012): Regarding "Pink Warrior": We are interested in doing what we can to help people fighting BREAST CANCER. "Pink Warrior" is about bravery, and love, and support and hope. Its purpose is – and always has been – to bless people who need it. We hope that it will be used in a positive way by anyone who is in the fight against cancer. We hope people will let the song be exactly what it is – a song. Let it be a song for hope, a song that speaks to and strengthens people who are in the fight of their lives…a song of support and love.

This exact response used twice:
Chesapeake Bay Candle (Feb. 6, 2012): Thank you for your note, FIRST NAME. Chesapeake Bay Candle is committed to the fight against breast cancer and we believe all women should have access to breast cancer screenings. It is for those reasons that we joined forces with Susan G. Komen for the Cure in 2010. We are deeply concerned about Komen's decision to stop most of its financing g of Planned Parenthood, and welcome the reversal of this decision on February 3. We have reached out to Komen executives to confirm their future commitment to provide access to breast cancer screenings to all women and currently deliberate if and how to continue our partnership with the organization.

Deluxe Corporation (Feb. 3, 2012): Thanks for sharing with us. It is clearly an important issue for many people. Please be assured that we are listening to your comments and sharing them

with decision makers at Deluxe. In the meantime you may be interested to know about recent developments in this situation. Please check msnbc.com for the latest report.

Energizer (Feb. 3, 2012): We heard many comments from our consumers and what is clear is that promoting women's health, and finding a cure for breast cancer, is a goal we share. To show you our appreciation for your passion and to further our commitment to this cause, Energizer is making a donation of $50,000 to the Siteman Cancer Center, based in our hometown of St. Louis, MO, to fund even more mammograms specifically for those in need.

Energizer (Feb. 3, 2012) Hi Rachael – Please know that all posts are being read and none have been deleted. To view all wall posts, please be sure that you click on "Everyone (Most Recent)" at the top right of the page. To view our house rules (which include the only circumstances in which we would delete a post), please visit: http://www.facebook.com/Energizer?sk=info...

This post used 135 times:
Energizer (Feb. 2, 2012): <u>FIRST NAME</u>: As we shared with many of you yesterday, Energizer was unaware that the Komen organization was making a change to their grant policy. Our sole intent has always been to support women in the fight against breast cancer. While we cannot respond uniquely to every comment posted, please know we are reading them all and appreciate you taking the time to share your thoughts with us.

This post used 143 times, with an additional 2 variants:
Energizer (Jan. 31, 2012): <u>FIRST NAME</u>: Like you *(or many of you)*, yesterday we learned about the decision of Susan G. Komen for the Cure to discontinue its funding to Planned Parenthood. Energizer has made donations to Susan G. Komen for the Cure for several years designed to help further the research needed to find a cure for breast cancer. We are constantly evaluating the charitable organizations with whom we partner to ensure they are a good fit for our brand and consumers. We appreciate you taking the time to share your feelings about yesterday's news.

Energizer (Feb. 1, 2012): FIRST NAME - *Thank you for your comment*. Like many of you, yesterday we learned about the decision of Susan G. Komen for the Cure to discontinue its funding to Planned Parenthood. Energizer has made donations to Susan G. Komen for the Cure for several years designed to help further the research needed to find a cure for breast cancer. We are constantly evaluating the charitable organizations with whom we partner to ensure they are a good fit for our brand and consumers. We appreciate you taking the time to share your feelings about yesterday's news.

Energizer (Feb. 1, 2012): FIRST NAME - *Thanks for your post*. Like many of you, yesterday we learned about the decision of Susan G. Komen for the Cure to discontinue its funding to Planned Parenthood. Energizer has made donations to Susan G. Komen for the Cure for several years designed to help further the research needed to find a cure for breast cancer. We are constantly evaluating the charitable organizations with whom

we partner to ensure they are a good fit for our brand and consumers. We appreciate you taking the time to share your feelings about yesterday's news.

evian (Feb. 3, 2013): Thank you for your comments Lizza P., Laura Y. and Susan B . It seems that Susan G. Komen has heard your concern! It means a lot to us that our fans are as passionate as we are about supporting women's lives. We were unaware that the Komen organization was making a change to their grant policy. Our sole intent has always been to support women in the fight against breast cancer!

evian (Feb. 3, 2012): Hi Amy, as of now we will continue to support their ongoing mission of saving women's lives in the fight against breast cancer! Thank you for being as passionate about women's lives as we are.

evian (Feb. 3, 2012): HI Karen, it looks like Susan G. Komen heard your concern. We were unaware of the change to their grant policy and so glad that our fans are as passionate about saving women's lives as we are. Our sole intent has always been to support women in the fight against breast cancer!

evian (Feb. 3, 2012): Hi Liz, We were unaware that the Komen organization was making a change to their grant policy. Our sole intent has always been to support woment in the fight against breast cancer.

evian (Feb. 3, 2012): It means a lot to us that our fans (even little bears) are as passionate as we are about supporting women's lives. We were unaware that the Komen organization was making a change to their grant policy. Our sole intent has always been to support women in the fight against breast cancer!

evian (Feb. 3, 2013): Your voice has been heard Lea. We appreciate your comment and it means so much to us that you are as passionate about saving women's lives as we are. Our sole intent has always been to support women in the fight against breast cancer!

evian (Feb. 3, 2012): We were unaware that the Komen organization was making a change to their grant policy. Our sole intent has always been to support women in the fight against breast cancer! Thank you Graham for being just as passionate about saving women's lives as we are.

evian (Feb. 3, 2012): It seems that you voice has been heard Lauren. It means a lot to us that our fans are as passionate as we are about supporting women's lives. We were unaware that the Komen organization was making a change to their grant policy. Our sole intent has always been to support women in the fight against breast cancer!

evian (Feb. 3, 2012): Thanks for your comment Kevin. It seems that Susan G. Komen saw your concern. We weren't aware that the Komen organization had changed their policy. It means a lot to us that our fans are as passionate as we are about supporting women's lives.

evian (Feb. 3, 2012): It means a lot to us Judith that our fans are so passionate about women's lives as we are. We were unaware that the Komen organization was making a change to their grant policy. Our sole intent has always been to support women in the fight against breast cancer!

evian (Feb. 3, 2012): Looks like your voice has been heard Paula! We were unaware that the Komen organization was making a change to their grant policy. Our sole intent has always been to support women in the fight against breast cancer!

evian (Feb. 3, 2012): Hi Chelsea, looks like Susan G. Komen heard your concern. It means a lot to us that our fans are as passionate as we are about supporting women's lives. We were unaware that the Komen organization was making a change to their grant policy. Our sole intent has always been to support women in the fight against breast cancer!

evian (Feb. 3, 2012): Hi Kathryn, it seems that Susan G. Komen has heard your voice! It means a lot to us that our fans are as passionate as we are about supporting women's lives. We here at evian were unaware that the Komen organization was making a change to their grant policy. Our sole intent has always been to support women in the fight against breast cancer!

evian (Feb. 3, 2012): Hi Elizabeth, seems that your voice has been heard. It means a lot to us that our fans are as passionate as we are about supporting women's lives. We here at evian were unaware that the Komen organization was making a change to their grant policy. Our sole intent has always been to support women in the fight against breast cancer!

Ford Motor Company (Feb. 3, 2012): Thank you for your sharing your thoughts. While we can't speculate or comment on the motives behind Susan G. Komen for the Cure's decision, we do understand the emotional reaction it has caused. Rather than focus on the politics, we prefer to keep the focus on the need for women to get screened for and educated about breast cancer.

Georgia Pacific (Jan. 31, 2012): GP, Quilted Northern & Vanity Fair are proud to be participating as the National Volunteer Recognition Sponsor of the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure series. You can learn more about our partnership at http://www.quiltednorthern.com/komen.html.

Holland America (Feb. 2, 2012): Since 2006, Holland America Line guests have contributed over $3 million to help fight breast cancer through our On Deck for the Cure program. Funds raised through our program go directly to fund lifesaving breast cancer research and do not go to any local community grants. We acknowledge and respect the fact that our guest and employees have their own individual views on charitable organizations and causes. The On Deck for the Cure 5-K walk is one of hundreds of optional activities available to our guests during their cruise. We appreciate those who elect to participate in our walks and fully respect those who choose not to.

This program is just one aspect of our Social Responsibility Program to give back to communities around the world and help make a difference. Other programs include donating re-usable shipboard items, disaster relief, supporting hundreds of non-profit organizations through cash sponsorships and cruise donations and employee volunteerism and giving. For more information, visit the Social Responsibility section of our website at www.hollandamerica.com.

Jersey Mike's Subs (Feb. 3, 2012): Thank you for sharing your thoughts. Our customers, franchise owners and team members were moved by the stories of breast cancer survivors including those of our own family members and friends. We are proud to have contributed to finding a cure through last year's fundraising program which culminated in October 2011. An important part of our mission is to give back to our local communities and last year we supported hundreds of charities by raising more than $2 million for great causes. We invite you to support an upcoming initiative – our 2nd Annual Month of Giving in March, which raises needed funds for more than 75 local children's charities throughout the country.

LPGA Golf Clinics for Women (Feb. 10, 2012: We appreciate your comment – fortunately, Komen has rescinded their decision to cut funding to Planned Parenthood.

la Madeleine Country French Café (Feb. 6, 2012): Bonjour, Karen. Merci for stopping by and sharing with us. We appreciate our guests taking time to let us know what's on their mind. Looks like things have been reversed but we will keep an eye on the situation. Our goal is to support and promote women's health in a positive way. Have a great week!

This exact response used twice:
la Madeleine Country French Café (Feb. 6, 2012): Bonjour, FIRST NAME. Merci for stopping by and sharing with us. We appreciate our guests taking time to let us know what's on their mind. Looks like things have been reversed but we will keep an eye on the situation. Our goal is to support and promote women's health in a positive way. We hope to see you soon!

Nuun Hydration (Feb. 2, 2012): Hi Diane and Annmarie – Nuun's sponsorship of the 3-day walk has nothing to do with their grant money and whether or not they support Planned Parenthood. The walk is for women living with breast cancer. Period. Those women are who we support in their battle. If you would like more information on our response to the news coverage and boycott please stay tuned. As we gather more information directly from SGK we will be issuing a statement on our website.

This exact response used 3 times:
Otis Spunkmeyer (Feb. 2, 2012): We appreciate your concerns around this issue. Like you, Otis Spunkmeyer is continually learning more about the situation and will assess the information accordingly. For now, we would like to say that Otis Spunkmeyer is passionate about ending breast cancer and have supported numerous organizations who are leading this fight. Every year, we freshly evaluate all of our corporate sponsorships and partnerships. We have not yet made

any decisions on new partnership agreements or renewals of past partnerships. When we do, our giving will be based on those programs and organizations that offer the maximum benefit to the community. Thank you for reaching out to Otis Spunkmeyer. We value direct communication from our fans and an engaged civic minded community.

This exact response used 3 times:
Pepperidge Farm (Feb. 3, 2012): Pepperidge Farm concluded its corporate sponsorship of Susan G. Komen for the Cure at the end of 2011 for business purposes.

Princess Cruises (Feb. 2, 2012): In response to recent news reports, we have been asked if Princess Cruises will continue to support Susan G. Komen for the Cure.

Princess passengers have generously contributed to the fight against breast cancer since 2007, by participating in the Susan G. Komen On Deck for the Cure 5K walks held aboard each Princess cruise. Susan G. Komen for the Cure has confirmed that the funds currently raised by these walks are earmarked for breast cancer research – most recently including two research projects at UCLA and the Stanford University School of Medicine.

We recognize that our passengers and employees may have their own views on individual charitable organizations, but it is our intent to continue offering this unique opportunity to participate in the fight against breast cancer. We appreciate those who choose to participate in the walks, and fully respect those who elect not to.

Those interested in learning more about the wide range of non-profit organizations supported by the Princess Cruises Community Foundation can visit www.princess.com/communityfoundation.

REMAX (Feb. 3, 2012): We have received an overwhelming number of comments and we are thankful for your input. Please read our statement today regarding the policy reversal: http://bit.ly/y8oDy5

Text on website:

RE/MAX Pleased with Komen Policy Reversal

Posted 2/3/12

RE/MAX is very pleased that Susan G. Komen for the Cure® has reconsidered their community grant policy. We believe this is the best course of action. This removes the impression of political motivations from their previously bi-partisan, charitable reputation, and allows Komen to re-focus their considerable resources on the serious business of battling breast cancer.

Because of the personal impact breast cancer has had on the RE/MAX family and the tremendous success Komen has experienced for 30 years, RE/MAX has been an

energetic supporter of the breast cancer battle for many years. However, RE/MAX never supports specific political candidates or political causes and we are hopeful that politics can remain on the sidelines when such significant health issues are at stake.

We thank everyone who took the time to express their views to point out the many considerations involved in a change of Komen's policy.

It is our hope that we can put this situation behind us and move forward in a united front in the cause that we all feel so strongly about. Working together, we can more easily achieve the goal of conquering breast cancer and ending the pain and suffering that so many families have had to deal with.

Thank you.

Please direct concerns and questions to mediagroup@remax.com.

The Republic of Tea (Feb. 2, 2012): The Republic of Tea recognizes our Citizens' concerns about our support of Susan G. Komen for the Cure. The Republic of Tea has a long history of supporting women in the fight against breast cancer. The Republic of Tea had no involvement in the recent announcement from Susan G. Komen for the Cure regarding their grant process. We are conveying the concerns of our Citizens directly to Susan G. Komen for the Cure, and we are currently reviewing our Sip for the Cure program.

Yoplait (Feb. 3, 2012): We hope this morning's announcement from Komen gives us the opportunity to refocus on what's important: Fighting breast cancer and supporting ALL women. We're continuing to listen to your comments, and are taking them into account as we discuss the best way for Yoplait to champion women's lives. Because this situation was a surprise to us as much as it was to you, we thank you for being patient. We take our commitment to women very seriously.

Yoplait (Feb. 3, 2013): For those who haven't seen Komen's announcement this morning: http://businesswire.com

Yoplait (Feb. 3): Thank you for taking the time to post here. We take our commitment to women very seriously. Thank you for your patience as we take everything into account and discuss the best way for Yoplait to champion women's lives.

Yoplait (Feb. 3): We are glad that people are engaging with the "Your Thoughts…" tab. It is providing a place for people to voice their concerns and we are definitely reading them.

Yoplait (Feb. 2, 5:03 p.m.): Yes, we understand that the silence is frustrating. We will be posting and updated statement soon. Thanks for taking the time to share your thoughts.

Yoplait (Feb. 2, 2012): No insult intended – the Super Bowl dip recipe was posted on Tuesday morning. We will have an updated statement shortly.

Yoplait (Feb. 2, 2012): No problem, we understand the silence is frustrating.

Yoplait (Feb. 2, 2012): Lisa J. – We are not removing any wall posts. Please make sure that at the top of their FB wall you have selected "everyone" and not just "Yoplait", by default it will only show Yoplait posts.

Yoplait (Feb. 2, 2012): For the Save Lids to Save Lives campaign, Yoplait donates .10 cents for each pink lid redeemed (consumers mail or redeem online). The campaign "window" ended on December 31, 2011 and we are still in the process of tallying the results and in turn the official donation to Susan G. Komen. More information to come, thanks for taking the time to post on the wall.

This exact response used 12 times, and slightly modified once:
Yoplait (Feb. 1, 2012): Thank you for your passion on this issue. As you know, Yoplait has a long history of supporting women in the fight against breast cancer. Yoplait was not involved in decisions to change the Susan G. Komen for the Cure grant process. Questions or concerns on that issue should be directed to the Komen organization.

Yoplait (Feb. 1, 2012): We have no plans to remove your post. Thank you for your passion on this issue. As you know, Yoplait has a long history of supporting women in the fight against breast cancer. Yoplait was not involved in decisions to change the Susan G. Komen for the Cure grant process. Questions or concerns on that issue should be directed to the Komen organization.