The Research of Crisis Communication Strategies in Food Safety

----A Comparative Case Study between Sanlu and IKEA

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Abstract
The 2008 Sanlu milk scandal shocked the whole China and the world as well. Sanlu, the main actor of this scandal, was accused of producing and selling tainted milk products and was sentenced to bankruptcy in the end. IKEA, the Swedish furnishing giant, was involved into the horsemeat scandal in 2013. Through a serial of effective crisis communication strategies, IKEA went through the crisis successfully. This paper will conduct a comparative case study via the content analysis method to explore: 1. What kind of crisis communication strategies did these two companies use in different stage of crisis? And also we want to find out 2. What edification can other organizations learn from our study? The results illustrate that Sanlu and IKEA applied different strategies in different stages of crisis which brought them to different endings. Then we offer some propositions for practitioners based on the analysis of the results in order to carry out more effective crisis communication strategies for them to deal with the similar food safety crisis in the future.

Keywords: Crisis Communication Strategies (CCSs), Content analysis, Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), Food safety crisis
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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Food safety crises (or food scandals) are one of the major crises which both developed and developing countries suffered from in the past several decades. In China, food safety issues have continually happened including the gutter oil and clenbuterol hydrochloride in pork in 2011, melamine tainted milk powder in 2008 and the formalin cabbage in 2012 (Marketing China 2013). Among these accidents, the Sanlu milk scandal in 2008 was the main affair which shocked the whole China and the world as well. Sanlu, the center of this scandal, is chosen as one of the study objects in our research.

Similar cases can also be found in developed countries such as cantaloupe with listeria in US as well as sprouts contained E. coli happened in 2011, and horsemeat in beef products which was found in Europe in 2013 (The Huffington Post 2013). Among these events, the horsemeat scandal was the recent case which impacted lots of countries in Europe. IKEA, the company which was involved in the horsemeat scandal, is selected to be discussed as another study object of our research. The background of Sanlu milk scandal and IKEA horsemeat scandal will be presented in Chapter two.

Crisis is an important, unpredictable event which will have potentially negative results. An organization as well as its employees, products, services, financial condition and reputation may be significantly damaged by this kind of events and its aftermath (Yan 2011). Especially food safety crisis will expose consumers to potential harm from the offending products and further affect consumers’ confidence of consuming the affected product when it is widely publicized (Yeung and Yee 2012, Knowles et al. 2007). Moreover, food crises may sometimes even lead to the bankruptcy of a business due to a seriously damaged brand image such as Sanlu went bankrupt in the melamine-tainted milk scandal. Food safety incidents and crises hit not only the involved firms but also the whole industry. As such, a large number of food safety scandals lead to greater research interest in food safety (e.g., Käferstein et al. 1997, Mørkbak et al. 2010).
How companies respond to the crisis is a major factor which influences a company’s crisis-handling success. The appropriate crisis response strategy or called crisis communication strategies/CCSs has been considered as an effective way of image repair for an organization to face a crisis (Benoit 1997) as well as the key to repair the reputation, to reduce negative affect and to prevent negative behavioral intentions (Coombs 2007). Further, Fink (1986) proposed a four-stage pattern of all crises and implied the response from the firm would have different affects if applied in different stages. It is observed that companies’ adopted different crisis communication strategies always brought them to different endings. Just as the result in our study, Sanlu Group bankrupted after the scandal. By contrast, IKEA handled the crisis successfully and won back its reputation among the consumers and finally put back its meat products to the menu again.

1.2 Research purposes and questions
In order to have a better understanding of this difference between Sanlu and IKEA, the purpose of this study is conducting a comparative case study to identify the crisis communication strategies adopted by the two famous companies in different stage of crisis as well as to get some implications of more effective crisis communicating strategies according to the analysis results of our study. Thus, our research question is: 1.) What kind of crisis communications strategies did Sanlu and IKEA use in different stage of crisis? 2.) What edification can other organizations learn from this study?

1.3 Contribution
Crisis communication has been improved greatly in recent years. However, many of the previous researches in this filed are focused on issues such as war, road safety, chemicals and medicines. Only in recent years have researchers began to investigate the crisis communication of food safety (McGloin et al 2008). And the results in most studies of crisis communication show that we know very little about how the crisis communication strategies impact the success of crisis management (Coombs 2007). This study aims to contribute a newer case-based research which seeks to enrich our understanding and knowledge of crisis communication strategies which can be used to protect a company and further provide useful implications to other companies who suffer from food safety issues.
1.4 Overall structure
In order to achieve our research purpose, the remaining parts of this thesis are followed by chapter two which is the background of Sanlu milk scandal and IKEA horsemeat scandal. Chapter three is designed to offer a comprehensive literature review about crisis communication strategies. More specifically, some dominating models are sorted out and referred to formulate our final framework as the foundation in order to identify what strategies were applied by Sanlu and IKEA to deal with the crisis. The research design, a case study research strategy and content analysis method which is used to collect the data, will be illustrated in chapter four. In chapter five, the results of this research are discussed and corresponding analysis are also presented in this chapter to answer our two research questions. Finally, the conclusion will be made as well as research limitation and suggestions for further research in chapter six.
2. Sanlu milk scandal and IKEA horsemeat scandal

2.1 Food scandals in China and Europe

2008 Sanlu milk Scandal
In September 2008, a large-scale melamine-tainted milk scandal broke out in China. It was discovered that Sanlu, a milk supplier, added melamine into raw milk and boost the protein level tested by the reading machines when they were subjected to a test for protein levels which is based on nitrogen content (Jia et al. 2012, Qiao et al. 2010). Melamine is a kind of chemicals which is always used to produce plastics. According to the announcement from the Department of Health, the milk contaminated with melamine caused the kidney stones of infants. And it could also cause renal failure and death if it lacks immediate treatment. According to the data in Xiu and Klein (2010), more than 290,000 people were poisoned and at least six babies died from ingesting the melamine contaminated milk powder. Further investigation revealed that other kinds of dairy products in China such as liquid milk, ice cream and yogurt, contained melamine. These investigations led to the bans on importing products containing Chinese milk all over the world such as bakery products and candies (Xiu and Klein 2010). The scandal finally ended up with the bankruptcy of Sanlu, the death sentences or long jail terms of the key suspects who were related to this scandal, as well as the resignation of the local authority’s officers (BBC News 2010).

2013 Europe horsemeat scandal
It seemed that firms didn’t learn any lessons from Sanlu event since another serious food safety scandal happened in Europe. In 2013, horsemeat was found to be contained in some beef products in Sweden, England, and France. The continuing findings in Germany, Ireland and Romania further exacerbated this crisis. But IKEA’s spokesman said that there was no trace of horsemeat in their products based on the test result they got at that time. Horsemeat does no harm to people’s health; however, it is viewed as a taboo in many countries. After a report declared by Czech Republic's authorities which found the trace of horsemeat inside the meatballs served by IKEA, the big Swedish furnishing giant was involved into the horsemeat scandal on 25 Feb, 2013 (The Guardian 2013b). Later, IKEA recalled their existing meatballs as a precautionary strategy, while IKEA always kept a cautious attitude in the whole crisis period. And then IKEA claimed that further conclusion would be made after the further tests.
The suspense of IKEA horsemeat scandal continued until it declared the IKEA’s final examination result which justified the existence of horsemeat inside the beef. Finally, IKEA relabeled all the mislabeled horsemeat and put them back onto the shelves at a reduced price in the stores (Daily Mail 2013).

2.2 Leading factors of the two scandals
2.2.1 Leading factors of 2008 Sanlu’s scandal

Complicated supply chain

A clear understanding of dairy supply chain will be helpful to achieve the purpose to find out why this scandal happened. According to the study of Xiu (2008), there have three major participants in the supply chain including dairy processing companies, milking collection stations and dairy farmers.

Milk processing companies process and package the raw milk into various milk products for consumption. Most of them are state-owned companies in China and have experienced fast growing during the last decade (Fuller et al. 2006). Economies of scale combined with marketing power allowed these companies to carry out aggressive growing strategies and enabled them to become the main customer of small dairy farmers, milk collection stations and even the local governments from economic perspective.

Milk collection stations are the places where small dairy farmers take their cows for milking, milk storage and shipment. However, the quality inspection was not included in its function and would not be carried out until some problem was found by processors. Actually, they acted like the agents of milk processing firms in the supply chain as they did not have the capacity to bargain with the big milk processing firms (Yan and Xiu 2009).

With regard to the dairy farmers, most of them couldn’t afford to be a dairy farmer since it required upfront investment to purchase cows. As a result, they got the finance support from the processors. And some processors might also offer technical advice, such as the Sanlu (Gale and Hu 2009). However, with no control of price and other conditions of sale, reduction of expenses became the main channel for the small dairy farmers to maintain or increase profits.
Economic inflation
On the other hand, the high inflation happened in the first half of 2008 indirectly increased the cost of key inputs such as feed, electricity and gasoline. Thus, it would cause major financial losses (Xiu 2008). As a result, all direct players including dairy farmers, and the huge processors in the raw milk supply chain tried to find solutions to cut costs.

2.2.2 Leading factors of 2013 horsemeat scandal

Complicated supply chain
Similarly, there also existed some problems inside the supply chain of IKEA’s beef. During the horsemeat scandal, there was a complicated horsemeat supply chain. Figure 2.1 showed the relation among all the suppliers. To the origin of the horsemeat, a Romanian slaughterhouse, Doly Com, provided that horsemeat. While, based on a contract, Doly Com supplied their products to another Dutch company, called Draap Trading Ltd. After the horsemeat was sent to a storage company in Breda (a Dutch city) processed by Draap Trading Ltd., it was transported into a company named Spanghero. And it was Spanghero that always said the horsemeat was labeled as beef when they received that (The Guardian 2013a). While according to the report from French media, Spanghero forged the documents about the horsemeat which means this company forged the certification to claim what they sold was pure meat instead of adulterated one (The local 2013). As we see from the end of this scandal, we can find that there was a complicated supply chain which made it difficult for researchers to investigate the chief criminal of meat adulteration. And also, it showed the chances for forgers and made it easier for them to do their crime.
Figure 2.1 Supply chain of Europe horsemeat during the scandal

Large price difference
The price difference between beef and horsemeat is another latent factor which contributed to this accident. The price of beef had already risen by more than 45 percent in Europe during the five years before the horsemeat scandal happened. According to the data showed by European Commission, in 2013, the price of beef was $5,300 per ton while the price of horsemeat was just $1,200 per ton (BBC News, 2013). It is obviously that horsemeat only cost one fourth of the beef price and such a large price difference was the main motivation of the forgers to do the adulteration.

It is obvious that both of these two accidents were caused by the roots of failing management of food supply chain and were also motivated by the opportunity to get high revenues.
3. Literature Review

3.1 Crisis and Crisis classification

A crisis is described as a sudden and unexpected accident that threatens to interrupt a firm’s operations and evoke a reputational or image threat (Benoit 1997, Coombs 2007). Hermann (1963) identified the nature of a crisis, which characterized by surprise, a serious of threat and a short reaction time. According to Guth and Marsh (2005) study, it is suggested that a crisis may contain partial or all of the following features: stressful, disruptive, dangerous, predictable, widely, easy to exacerbate, and crucial. Whatever the crises are defined with different traits by different researches, all the crises will create negative outcomes. Crises may cause damage to stakeholders physically, emotionally and financially. And a large group of people would be unfortunately affected by a crisis such as employees, customers and suppliers (Coombs 2007).

Moreover, a large number of researchers have made great effort to classify crises on the basis of scope, dimensionality, as well as delineation (Breitsohl 2009). Fink (1986) has classified all crises into a predictable four-stage pattern based on the different phases of a crisis which comprised: 1. **Prodromal crisis stage** – a warning stage; if an organization is aware of the potential crisis in advance, it may have enough time to prepare and avoid upcoming trouble. 2. **Acute crisis stage** – the outbreak of the crisis; some damage will happen during this stage and whether the involved organization can pass the crisis or not is still uncertain. 3. **Chronic crisis stage** – the response period when a troubled firm takes actions to deal with the crisis. 4. **Crisis resolution** – the last stage; during this stage, things return to a “new” normal.

Coombs (2007) has classified the crisis types into 3 clusters according to the degree of crisis responsibility: (1) The victim cluster which means the firms are also seen as victims in the crisis, such as an earthquake damage the organization. Hence, the firm owns weak responsibility in this kind of crises which implies the temperate reputational threat to the firm. (2) The accidental cluster which means the firms’ actions which led to the crisis were unintentional or uncontrollable, such as a technology or equipment failure causes an industrial accident. Thus, the firm owns minimal responsibility in this kind of crises which implies the moderate reputational threat to the firm. (3) The intentional cluster which means the firm
knowingly puts people at a risk, and makes inappropriate decisions or breaks the law or regulation in purpose, such as human-error product harm crisis which causes a product to be recalled. So, the firm owns strong responsibility in this kind of crises which also implies the severe reputational threat to the firm.

Obviously, the two scandals in our paper are human-error product harm crises which belong to the third cluster, such as the Sanlu milk was added with melamine by the dairy farmers and horsemeat was mixed into the beef by the meat supplier in purpose. And such kind of intentional crises with strong crisis responsibility may form a negative effect on sales, market share, brand equity and stock price, or even the extremely situation happen just like Sanlu went bankruptcy (Shi and Chen 2011).

So, by identifying the crisis type, the crisis management team can foresee how much crisis responsibility stakeholders will ascribe to the firm thereby prepare the corresponding reactions to deal with the crisis (Coombs 2007).

3.2 Crisis management and communication strategies.
Crisis management is a rapidly growing field in both practice and academia (Barton 1993, cited by Coombs 1995). One of the main purposes of crisis management is to sustain an firm’s image-the public perception of the firm. Thus, as the crisis management team in a firm, their work is trying to protect the current positive image from being damaged by the negative influences related to a crisis (Coombs 1995). Appropriate crisis management about food safety among the public is of great importance during the whole period of crisis. Crisis management on food safety can prevent or minimize the loss of human life and the influence of the economy from the foreseeable food safety incidents in the future. Foodborne outbreaks and scandals do not occur by chance, but the products of several errors and bad managing practices in food firms and industry. Doeg (2006) has demonstrated in his study that corporate communication and customers’ relationships are of great importance as Doeg’s strategy for crisis management in food industry was based on accountability and trustworthiness. Röhr et al. (2005) has further carried out a research involving German consumers after the Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) and the dioxin scandal to support Doeg’s finding. Many researches
focused on the important role of training aimed at building a firm preparedness and food safety culture, as food safety training helped to reduce the chances of a food crisis’s occurrence (e.g., Lee et al. 2007, Murphy et al. 2011). Additionally, Pearson and Sommer (2011) have illustrated the importance of creativity in the management of crisis by firms. They pointed out that all modern firms should have an effective crisis management team in force. They agreed that creativity is essential to convert crises into opportunities.

During the past decade, an emerging group of crisis management research has focused on the use of crisis communication strategies. The central issue of this research is about how crisis communication can help to protect the organizations’ reputation and image during a crisis (Benoit, 1995; Hearit, 1996, 2001). It is argued that crisis communication strategies have outstanding outcomes for companies’ image reparation (e.g., Benoit, 1995; Coombs, 1999). Companies should use crisis communication strategies to rebuild legitimacy and to maintain their reputation during a crisis. In another word, crises threaten both company’s legitimacy and its reputation. The ideal crisis communication strategies are regarded as the way out of rebuilding legitimacy by means of perceiving the stakeholders’ cognition of the firms’ efforts correctly to reform its image (Coombs and Holladay, 1996). Scholars have developed several models of crisis communication strategies, such as Benoit 1995, 1997; Coombs 1995, 2007; Hearit 1996, 2001 and Siomkos and Kurzbard 1994. Three popular strategies developed by different researchers will be discussed in the following section.

**Company Response Continuum**

Siomkos and Kurzbard (1994) has indicated four crisis communication strategies, from denial to super-effort, comprised the so-called “company response continuum” model, which could be used in product harm crises. They are: 1. Denial which is at the least responsive level: a company could simply deny any responsibility for a faulty product. 2. Involuntary product recall which is a more positive response than denial: recall the product only after ordered from a regulatory agency. 3. Voluntary product recall which implies that the organizations are concerned with consumer interests. The firm starts to recall the product prior to governmental interference. 4. Super effort which means the firm will try its best to prove that it is responsible. It shows the primary concern for consumer welfare rather than saving company resources, such
as an immediate voluntary recall.

**Image Restoration Typology (IRT)**

Benoit’s image restoration typology has been applied in several studies to analyze firm responses to crisis situations and illustrate the potential of this theory (Benoit 1997). And one of the main goals of this theory is to gain a positive reputation of that firm (Lyu 2012). In order to understand the image repair strategies, an attack which contains two components, an offensive act and an accusation of responsibility for the action, should be considered as the root to initiate a crisis for the organizations (Benoit 1997). Benoit (1997) has further proposed five image restoration strategies including (1) Denial: Deny firm’s wrongdoings or find a scapegoat, (2) Evasion of responsibility: The firm states that the accident is out of control or claims that its intention is good but the act is misunderstood, (3) Reducing offensiveness of the act: An alternative strategy to make firm’s lawless actions less problematic, (4) Corrective action: The firm promises to correct the problem, such as recall the products, and (5) Mortification: Confess and beg forgiveness. The primary recommendation from the theory is an emphasis on apology and accepting responsibility for crises (Benoit and Pang 2008).

Though this theory provides one lens for exploring the efforts to rebuild a firm’s damaged reputation, it is too emphasis on the description of its categorization essentially instead of conceptualizing crisis communication strategies which could be more meaningful (Coombs 1998, Coombs and Schmidt 2000).

**Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)**

Coombs (1998) has further developed the situational crisis communication theory based on the previous research. The model considers the crisis situation and provides an evidence-based set of guidelines for using crisis communication strategies which is good for firms to face with scandals (Coombs 2007). A more systematic approach is applied in this theory to identify the crisis communication strategies which could be used to maximize reputational protection (Coombs 2006). According to the definition of the theory, the organization could apply four groups of strategies according to the perceptions of accepting responsibility for a crisis: (1) Deny strategies which attempt to remove any connection between the organization and the
crisis, (2) Diminish strategies which argue that a crisis is not as bad as people think or that the organization lacks control over the crisis, (3) Rebuild strategies attempt to improve the organization’s reputation by offering material and / or symbolic forms of aid to victims., and (4) Bolstering strategies which attempt to gain some goodwill or sympathy from the stakeholders (Coombs, 2007).

Although Coombs’ theory offers a comprehensive guideline of how the firm react in the crisis, the financial resources is always the main constrain of carrying out the strategies. If a firm can’t afford a particular crisis response, they can only select the next best but less-expensive strategy. For instance, a crisis manager may have to apply the justification strategies instead of the suggested apology strategies (Coombs 2007).

In the reality business world, all kinds of crisis communication theories have been widely adopted by different enterprises. For instance, according to Benoit’s image restoration typology/IRT, Northwest Airline (NWA) effectively transferred the responsibility to the specific employees during the pilot’s strike in 1998; P&G successfully saved their new product, SK-II, from a product safety crisis in china. Moreover, Maple Leaf Foods (MLF), a leading packaged food company in the world, restored from a food safety crisis within twelve months with the help of the strategies from Coombs’ situational crisis communication theory (Zhou 2013).

3.3 An adjusted Framework for Crisis Communication Strategies Measurement
According to the above discussion of the previous literature, we can find that different researchers have chosen different indicators to measure crisis communication strategies. We decide to take the theory of Benoit (1997), Coombs (2007), Siomkos and Kurzbard (1994) as reference to formulate our own framework (Table 1). In detail, we follow the study of their definition about crisis communication strategies to divide our framework into five types. They are Deny, Diminish, Rebuild, Bolstering and Recall. For each type, there are two or three sub-strategies. And we will use these sub-strategies, or called multi-indicators as the guideline to design a content analysis to collect and process the data we need in order to measure the strategies adopted by Sanlu and IKEA in next chapter.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CCSs</th>
<th>Strategy definition</th>
<th>Sub-strategy</th>
<th>Sub-strategy definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deny</td>
<td>Statements that deny the occurrence or existence of the crisis</td>
<td>Simple Denial</td>
<td>The firm simply claims that there is no crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Scapegoating</td>
<td>Statements that some other person or group outside of the firm is responsible for the</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>questionable event.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Attack the accuser</td>
<td>The firm confronts the person or group claiming something is wrong with the organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diminish</td>
<td>Statements that seek to minimize the accused person or organization’s responsibility during the crisis or the perceived damage caused by the crisis.</td>
<td>Excuse</td>
<td>The firm claims inability to control the crisis or denies to cause the harm intentionally in order to minimize the responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Justification</td>
<td>The firm claims that the standards used by the accusers to evaluate the impact of the questionable event are inappropriate in order to minimize the perceived damage caused by the crisis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebuild</td>
<td>Statements that confess the crisis did occur, then apologize, compensate and express the willingness for remediation, rectification and proactive works.</td>
<td>Apology/Mortification</td>
<td>The firm admits the crisis did occur and further apologizes to the public which asks for forgiveness.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>Compensation offers to give the victim money, goods, or services to help reduce the negative feelings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bolstering</td>
<td>Statements which aim to offset the negative feelings connected with the issue as well as strengthen the audience’s positive feelings toward itself</td>
<td>Reminder</td>
<td>Praises stakeholders and/or reminds them of past good works by the organization.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Victimage</td>
<td>Tell stakeholders that the organization is a victim of the crisis too</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recall</td>
<td>Statements that the accused person or organization recalls the product preventing the recurrence of the offensive act or to prevent a repeat of crisis.</td>
<td>Involuntary recall</td>
<td>The accused person or organization recalls the product only after being ordered by a regulatory agency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Voluntary recall</td>
<td>The accused person or organization starts to recall the product prior to governmental interference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Super effort</td>
<td>The accused person or organization starts an immediate voluntary recall which is widely advertised and made extremely easy for consumers.</td>
</tr>
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Deny
Coombs (2007) has identified deny as one of the main strategies to deal with the crisis which attempts to remove any connection between the organization and the crisis. If the firm is not involved in a crisis, the negative associated with the crisis will not damage the firm’s image. In Table 1, three sub-strategies are introduced. 1.) Denial or called simple denial means the organization announces that there has nothing happened or no crisis exists (Coombs 1995). Benoit (1997) also states that a firm may simple deny that the act occurred, the firm performed the act, or the act was harmful to anyone. He further offered a business case in this study: Pepsi-Cola accused Coca-Cola of requiring its accountants by paying higher prices in order to subsidize its largest customer McDonald’s. However, Coca-Cola replied by simply and directly deny Pepsi’s charge and said price increases were universally applied instead of an exception for McDonald. 2.) A second form of deny is shifting the blame or called scapegoating which means the firm claims that another person or group outside of the organization should take actually responsibility for the event (Benoit 1997, Coombs 2007). A firm cannot control an event unless a third party is responsible for the crisis. Thus, the firm uses this strategy to eliminate the connection with the crisis. 3.) The last is a more aggressive strategy -attacking the accusers, which means the firm confronts the person or other organizations and claims that something is wrong with the accusation. Hence, it might reduce the damage from the accuser (Benoit 1997, Coombs 2007).

Diminish
Diminish strategy is also widely used by firms according to Benoit (1997) study. Coombs (2007) has argued that a crisis is always not as bad as people thought. So if crisis managers lessen an organization’s connection to crises and make people view crises less negatively, the harmful effects of crises will be reduced. However, he also points out that organization need solid evidence to support these claims and sometime might fail, such as people sometimes would post messages via social media to against firm’s statements. 1.) Excuses, the first sub-strategy of diminish, means the firms deny its intent to do harm and/or state inability to control the events in order to minimize its responsibility. Excuse strategies, which are lack of intent, can be used to present the current crisis as residing in the accidental cluster. The value in reinforcing such a frame is that it would be much easier and less expensive to manage an
accidental crisis instead of an intentional crisis (Coombs 2007). And if the company can convince the consumer, it should be held less accountable, and the damage to that business’s image should be reduced (Benoit 1997). 2.) The second sub-strategy is justification which means the firm aims to minimize the perceived damage caused by the crisis, sometimes by rejecting the seriousness of an accident, claiming the victims deserved what happened or even stating this crisis is not as bad as similar crisis (Coombs 1995). For instance, an oil company can claim that their spill is not as bad as BP oil spill accident happened in Gulf of Mexico (Yan 2011).

**Rebuild**

Rebuild strategies attempt to improve the organization’s reputation by offering materials or symbolic forms of aid to victims, which are normally used for crises that present a severe reputational threat (Coombs 2007). 1.) First is apology, or called mortification in Benoit (1997) study, which indicates the organizations confess the crisis and asks stakeholders for forgiveness (Benoit 1997, Coombs 2007). 2.) The second form is compensation which means the firm offers money or other gifts to victims. The negative feeling may diminish as the firm applies positive actions to help the victims (Coombs 1995). The two sub-strategies, compensation or apology, are both positive reputational actions. If it is acceptable to the victim, the firm’s image could be improved (Benoit 1997).

Coombs (2007) has also pointed out that rebuild strategies are the main avenue for generating new reputational assets. However, rebuild strategies are not always the preferred response since the more accommodative the strategy is, the more expensive it is for the organization (Coombs 2007). Moreover, the adoption of similar strategies may intensify the bad situation since it will make stakeholders feel the crisis deteriorated if the firm reacts so aggressively (Siomkos and Kurzbard 1994).

**Recall**

As the extension of the apology, after the firms confess its full responsibility for the crisis, especially in the situation of the product-harm food safety issue, the remedies are request to
propose. One of the most actively used remedies is product recall, which involves a company’s reactive withdrawal of the harmful products from the market by buying back all existing items of the offending products. 1.) The first form is voluntary recall which means a company may choose to recall the defective product prior to governmental intervention. 2.) The second form is involuntary recall which indicates a firm may recall the product only after an agency orders such action. The third form is called “super-effort” which will make the recall process extremely easy for the consumer by offering discount coupons or free samples of other products and by widely advertising the recall.

Siomkos and Kurzbard (1994) has further conducted a study and found that consumers will perceive the defective products to be the most dangerous when companies involuntarily recalled its product. Consumers’ future purchases of the troubled company’s other products will also be influenced since it will be less negatively influenced by the present crisis if the company responds to it by either a voluntary product recall or a super-effort. The recall action aims to not only prevent further damage to the consumer but also regain the trust from them to sustain its market share after making this information known to the public immediately. In additional, another option for companies engaged in recall is to choose a universal recall or limited recall according to the selected the boundaries or region (Siomkos and Kurzbard 1992).

Bolstering
Bolstering is usually applied to offset the negative feelings connected with the issue as well as strengthen the audience’s positive feelings toward itself (Benoit 2007). 1.) The first sub-strategy to fulfill the purpose is reminder. More specifically, the organization may describe positive characteristics about its existing positive performance in front of its stakeholders to generate some goodwill. For instance, the firm reminds the public of its charitable donations or a history of impartial treatment to its employees (Coombs 1995). 2.) The second is stating that the organization itself is also a victim of the crisis. The idea behind this response is to win some sympathy from the public. Although this strategy aims to connect the firm with something positively valued by the stakeholders, bolstering offers a minimal opportunity to develop reputational assets and then this strategy is best to be used as
supplements to the above primary strategies (Coombs 1995, 2007).
4. Method

4.1 Case Study research method & Content Analysis
In this study, a comparative case study research method is conducted through qualitative content analysis in order to explore media coverage of Sanlu milk scandal and IKEA horsemeat scandal to find out 1.) What kind of crisis communications strategies did Sanlu and IKEA use in different stage of crisis? 2.) What edification can other organizations learn from our study?

Case study research
The case study is defined as an intensive study of a single or relative small amounts of units with an aim to generalize across a great set of units through an empirical exploration of an event or phenomenon within its naturally happening context in the reality (Gerring 2004, Kaarbo and Beasley 1999). There are many uses of case studies which have been suggested by a variety of scholars. Kaarbo and Beasley (1999) summarized five types of case studies according to the different previous studies, which included 1.) Using cases for description to attain the holistic picture of the event or phenomenon, 2.) Using the theory to explore cases, 3.) Using cases to develop theories, 4.) Using cases to explore and advance theories and 5.) Using cases as tests of the theory.

In our paper, we will use the theory to explore case, more specifically, we will use crisis communication theory we discussed in last section as the foundation to explain and examine the Sanlu and IKEA case. After such an effort, the case would be shown to us in a more theoretical outline. Although this type of case studies can offer a mechanism whereby differences can be effected on a particular organization or person that was the subject of the case study, some prescriptive leverage may be evoked by theoretical interpretation of the case. For instance, the decision analysts may evaluate the past performance of an organization based on the specific theory, and then to offer some correct suggestions according to that theory's prescriptive inferences for the case.

The subject of case study can be single or multiple ones. In our study, we will conduct the comparative two cases’ study. The reason of using multiple case studies comes from the limitations of single case. Although single case studies provide interesting insights into the
event, they do not offer clear direction for generalization to other cases by themselves (Achen and Snidal 1989). In general, the comparative case study is the systematic comparison of two or more cases gained through using the case study method (Kaarbo and Beasley 1999). And the main purpose of comparative study is to increase the researcher’s knowledge, to enable himself/herself to be aware of more possibilities and social capacities, and thus to assist him to find the answer of question-prompting, rational models, effect-measuring method and other useful functions (Lijphart 1975).

In our paper, we choose Sanlu and IKEA as the research subject for the case study. The logic of choosing these two companies is according to the comparability between Sanlu and IKEA, more specifically: (1) The two selected cases are homogeneous crises. Both Sanlu and IKEA faced the food safety crisis caused by adulteration. (2) Both Sanlu and IKEA possessed leading positions in the two markets. (3) In the food safety crisis, Sanlu and IKEA were the most affected corporations in Mainland of China and Europe. (4) Both of them had good previous corporate reputation.

Content Analysis
A number of techniques can be applied for the case study in order to collect the information, such as interviews, surveys and content analysis. However, it is not necessary to use multiple sources or types of evidence in order to perform the case study (Kaarbo and Beasley 1999). Here, in our paper, we will use the content analysis to investigate the knowledge we want.

The content analysis was initially used as either a qualitative or quantitative method by the researchers (Berelson 1952, cited by Hsieh and Shannon 2005). Then, it is used primarily as the qualitative research method to analyze text or message. In detail, it is a coding and categorization method which is always applied for investigating a mass of textual information to find out certain tendencies and patterns of words being applied, their frequency, their relationships, as well as the structures of communication (Vaismoradi et al 2013). The content analysis is also viewed as the study of recording human communications, like books, magazines, newspaper, websites, paintings, letters and etc (Babbie 2007, cited by Yan 2011). The aim of content analysis is to objectively convey the information via exploring narrative
materials from life stories by dividing the text into relatively small units of content and submitting them to descriptive treatment (Sparkes 2005). Furthermore, the content analysis method is proper for the simple examining of general issues mentioned in data (Green and Thorogood 2006) as well as for answering questions such as “What reasons do people have for using or not using a service or procedure?” (Ayres 2007). By using it, it is possible to look into data qualitatively and meanwhile to quantify the data (Gbrich 2007, cited by Vaismoradi et al. 2013) through using a descriptive approach in both the coding of data and the interpretation of quantitative counts of the codes (Morgan 1993), and finally gain the knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under the event (Hsieh and Shannon 2005).

Although the qualitative content analysis is one of the flexible research methods used by a variety of researchers to analyze textual data, the lack of a reliable definition and procedures has potentially limited the application of content analysis (Tesch 1990, cited by Hsieh and Shannon 2005). More specifically, content analysis does not carry on in a linear manner and is more complicated and difficult than quantitative analysis because it is less standardized and formulaic, which means there are no simple guidelines for data analysis (Elo and Kyngäs 2008). In a word, there is no simple, “correct” way, of carrying out the content analysis.

As a result, the analysis progress and the results should be described in adequate detail which may assist the reader with getting a clear understanding of how the analysis was processed as well as its strengths and limitations (Gao 1996, cited by Elo and Kyngäs 2008). In another word, the successful content analysis demands that the researcher can analyze and summarize the data and generate categories in order to reveal the subject of the research in a more reliable manner (Elo and Kyngäs 2008) which aims to improve the validity of the analysis results. To increase the reliability of the study, it is always suggested to demonstrate a link between the results and the data, such as appendices and tables, which enables someone else to follow the analysis progress (Polit and Beck 2004, cited by Elo and Kyngäs 2008).

4.2 Sampling
The first step is determining the textual population, which refers to the narrative materials that
can be used as representative samples. The textual population is defined as a series of information that a researcher aims to summarize (Stepchenkova and Eales 2011). There were three main moves: choosing of the sources of the communication (e.g., newspapers), sampling documents (e.g., selecting of a particular newspaper) and the specific sampling within documents (e.g., titles), comprises the basic sampling procedure of content analysis (Holsti 1969, cited by Seo 2012). Selecting the sources of communication is usually in relation to the process of defining the textual population. Considering this study’s purpose of exploring the media coverage of Sanlu and IKEA’s crisis communication strategies to food crises, newspapers are chosen as the source of media communication in our paper. Newspapers have been considered as an appropriate communication source (Lasswell et al 1952, cited by Seo 2012). The authors assert that newspapers are read by the public widely. Further, most recent and past published of newspapers were allowed to access electronically with the help of progressive technologies. For instance, by using the popular search engines, researchers can identify news articles by published time, authors, and titles etc. Thus, the use of newspapers as a source of communication enables researchers to process a series of sampling in a more effective way (Seo 2012).

The preceding researchers on food safety crisis used only a few top newspapers to perform content analysis. For instance, in Lyu (2012) research, four major daily newspapers were chosen to access news coverage of the food safety crisis. Although this method is more convenient for researchers to process the research, it is difficult to ensure if these few major newspapers can totally cover all information you want to collect.

In a word, in order to identity the firm’s crisis communication strategies expressed by the media, this study will select all newspapers coupled with specific time period. The more detail of data processing will be discussed in the following part.

4.3 Data selection and processing
In this study, we use a database, LexisNexis, which enables the researchers to select the type of
newspaper, and “all news” is chosen for this study.

All news articles containing a certain keyword are identified through the search page of LexisNexis database. The combination of keywords is used to search all news articles related with the Sanlu and IKEA events, which is used to precisely identify news articles about these two accidents. In our study, the name of the company (Sanlu/IKEA) and the description of the scandal (horsemeat scandal/melamine tainted milk scandal or Sanlu milk scandal etc) are chosen as the keywords. The time of the scandal happened (2008 or 2013) and the region it took place (China or Europe) is added as the complementary words. If only the name of the firm is used for the identification, some general news items related to the firm may also be identified which are irrelevant to Sanlu’s or IKEA’s responses to the outbreak of crises.

The LexisNexis database also allows researchers to search news articles published within a specific period of time by keywords. For Sanlu, the whole period was 1.Feb 2008~12.Feb 2009. While for IKEA, the whole period would be 15 Jan. 2013~30 Apr. 2013. The reason why we choose this period as our study time is discussed in the following part which explain the operationalization of variables.

Moreover, some other settings, such as Article location; Duplicated content check option which allow to filter out all high similarity articles, can also be configured via the LexisNexis. Figure 4.1 is the snapshot of one configuration from the LexisNexis search page.
Figure 4.1 Configuration in the search page of LexisNexis database

Figure 4.2 One searching results shown in the LexisNexis database

Operationalization of variables
As keywords and the time period have been determined for these two cases, all news articles shown in the results which met the requirements have been filtered from the whole population and read through. Then, we code all the news in an Excel spreadsheet in order to do content analysis by following variables: who, when and what. In detail, all variables and categories are
operationalized as following:

**The actor (Who):** The leading actor of each article will be checked first. Only the information regarding Sanlu or IKEA is coded. Other news which is not so related to Sanlu and IKEA just like the ones about other food product crises is ignored here.

**The stage of the crisis (When):** Since one of our purposes is to examine the different crisis communication strategies adopted by Sanlu and IKEA in different crisis stages, we also judge which stage of the crisis when it was published. In Yan (2011) research, it suggests that the Sanlu milk scandal could be divided into four stages which were in accordance with Fink (1986), a four-stage pattern of crises which we have already introduced in the section of literature review. Here, we also apply this stage classification in our study.

For Sanlu, 1.) The first stage (**Stage 1- Prodromal crisis stage**) is set as the time before the crisis was officially released. Although Sanlu has begun to receive the complaints since late of 2007 that its milk formula had made babies lose the ability to urinate, Feb. 2008 was the first time that Sanlu responded to a young girl’s father’s complaint and ended up with giving him four packages of free milk powder (Stuff 2010). 10 Sep. 2008 was the day before the scandal was revealed to the public, so all the news regarding firms actions happened from 1 Feb. to 10 Sep. 2008 are put in the first stage. 2.) The second stage (**Stage 2- Acute crisis stage**) is set as the first two days after the crisis was revealed. It was not until September 11 that a warning was finally given, as reports started appearing in the media of Sanlu’s problems with baby milk (The Telegraph 2008). So all the identified time happened from 11 Sep.2008 to 12 Sep. 2008 are classified in the second stage. 3.) The third stage (**Stage 3- Chronic crisis stage**) is set as the first month after the crisis was revealed. This stage is considered to be proper to capture the involved firms’ immediate reactions to food crises, since the importance of instant response in managing crisis situations has been considered as a crucial factor of successful crisis management (Ulmer and Sellnow 2000, Coombs 2007). So all the news happened during the period from 13 Sep. 2008 to 10 Oct. 2008 are assorted in the third stage. 4.) The fourth stage (**Stage 4- Crisis resolution**) is set as the remaining time until the end of the crisis. Here we choose 12 Feb. 2009 as the end of this crisis since Sanlu was sentenced to bankrupting by a

Similarly, in IKEA’s case, we decide to divide the whole period into 4 stages in the same way. 1.) The first stage is defined as the period before the IKEA horsemeat scandal broke out. Although the first piece of news about the scandal broke out on 25 Feb. 2013 which said IKEA had begun to recall all meatballs in UK’s market and over 20 European countries after the authorities in the Czech Republic found the trace of horsemeat in their meatball line (The Guardian 2013b), the horse meat had already been found in frozen beef burgers at several Irish and British supermarkets in 15 Jan. 2013 (The Independent 2013). So the first stage is set to be 15 Jan. 2013 ~24 Feb. 2013. 2) The second stage (Acute crisis stage) is defined as the first two days after the scandal broke out. So all the news during 25 Feb.2013~ 26 Feb. 2013 are viewed as the ones in stage two. 3.) The third stage is set as the first month after the scandal broke out and the period is from 27 Feb.2013 to 26 Mar. 2013. 4.) The fourth stage is set as the rest period after the previous three stages. Here we decide to set the last day as 30 Apr. 2013 as IKEA had already made his last decision which was repackaging the horsemeat and putting them back onto the shelves which imply the crisis has been relieved. So we set the fourth stage as 27 Mar. 2013~30 Apr. 2014. That is why we choose 1 Jan. 2013~30 Apr. 2014 as the whole search period for IKEA.

Evidence of crisis management (What): As we discovered in the literature review, Sanlu and IKEA’s responses or actions are categorized into five main groups according to Table 1. They are 1.) Deny which is composed of three factors: Simple Denial, Scapegoating and Attack the accuser; 2.) Diminish which includes Excuse and Justification; 3.) Rebuild which consists of Apology and Compensation; 4.) Bolstering which has two sub-strategies: Reminder and Victimage and 5.) Recall which contains involuntary recall, voluntary recall and super effort. So, at last, judgments are made based on the theme of the news article shown in the statements made by Sanlu or IKEA. In another word, all statements involving the uses of strategies within each news article are coded by calculating the total number of each strategy and sub-strategies adopted and put in corresponding crisis stage.
There are two coders, Ding and Wu, who are the two authors of this paper. Ding provides all coding results for Sanlu while Wu provides the ones for IKEA. The Table 2 and 3 show how each type of variable is coded and recorded in the coding book by the media coverage of Sanlu and IKEA.

For instance, when we run the searching, we use keyword “Sanlu milk scandal” + time period “1 Feb. 2008~12. Feb 2009”. Then we get 16 news articles. See Figure 4.2, it is the corresponding snapshot from the LexisNexis database of the results. 1.) First, we try to find out if this article is mainly describing any response or action of Sanlu or IKEA in the scandal. There have two separate tables in the Excel document of our coding book, named “Sanlu” and “IKEA”. So if it is Sanlu related, all following identified variables will be recorded in Sanlu tab. 2.) The next step is identifying the response time according to the published time or specific time mentioned in the news story, and then we put the time in “Response Time” column. 3.) We further judge which stage it belongs to and mark “One” or “Two” or “Three” or “Four” in “Stage” column. 4.) At last, we pick up the main theme and put the summary of the news story under “Theme” column, and then we identify which strategy and sub-strategy was used by the firm according to all defined factors in Table 1 and finally put them into “CCSs Type” and “Factor” column respectively. This is how we get our coding book.

Table2 Partial examples from the coding book for Sanlu news

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Time</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>CCSs Type</th>
<th>Factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mar. 2008</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>After receiving the complaint from a father said that his young daughter suffered from diarrhea and was difficult to urinate after drinking Sanlu's milk, the Sanlu replied and said the products he suspected were genuine and there were no quality problems (South China Morning Post 2008).</td>
<td>Deny</td>
<td>Simple Deny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Sep. 2008</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>The Sanlu company had persisted that the milk products under suspicion of causing kidney stones in 59 babies were fake products using the Sanlu label (Danwei 2008).</td>
<td>Deny</td>
<td>Scapegoating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Sep. 2008</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Recall</td>
<td>Involuntary recall</td>
<td>Li Jinlu, the Vice Mayor in Shijiazhuang, announced to the public that about 8,218 tons Sanlu milk currently in the market had been recalled (China.Org.Cn 2008).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Sep. 2008</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Diminish</td>
<td>Excuse</td>
<td>Su Changsheng, director of Sanlu's brand management department, rejected that the contamination had occurred in production process and claimed that there has no requirements or standards for testing for melamine in milk (North Korea Times 2008).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Sep. 2008</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Bolstering</td>
<td>Victimage</td>
<td>Tian Huwen, President of Sanlu, told one of the presses that the Sanlu was totally innocent and had been shamed by the immoral milk suppliers (Beijing Review 2008).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Sep. 2008</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Rebuild</td>
<td>Apology</td>
<td>Zhang Zhenling, Sanlu's vice president, read a letter of apology to the public and expressed its regret to the public (People's Daily Online 2008).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Dec. 2008</td>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Rebuild</td>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>The Sanlu group borrowed 902 million YUAN to pay the medical fees of children under suffering caused by drinking its melamine-tainted milk in order to compensate the victims (China.Org.Cn 2009).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Feb. 2009</td>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Deny</td>
<td>Attack the Accuser</td>
<td>A spokesman of Sanlu states that before 1 Aug. 2008, Sanlu had informed the local regulator many times about customers suffering unusual symptoms and required a complete test of its products, however, it was only on August 1 that the Hebei Quarantine Bureau lunched a test for melamine on Sanlu products.” (The Telegraph 2009)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3 Partial examples from the coding book for IKEA news

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Time</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>CCSs Type</th>
<th>Factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25 Feb. 2013</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>IKEA said it had started its own in-house DNA analyses of all meat products two weeks ago and the results shown no traces of horsemeat (The Guardian, 2013b).</td>
<td>Deny</td>
<td>Simple Denial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 Feb. 2013</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>A spokesman from IKEA's headquarters in Helsingborg stated that they had recalled the specific batch of meatballs under suspicious in all markets where they might have been sold (The globe and mail 2013a).</td>
<td>Recall</td>
<td>voluntary recall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 Feb. 2013</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Ylva Magnusson, a spokesman from IKEA claimed that they had also decided to withdraw the wiener sausages from the same supplier which offered adulterated meatballs (CBS News 2013).</td>
<td>Recall</td>
<td>voluntary recall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 Feb. 2013</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>IKEA said in a statement they were corporating with their supplier and experts, discussing how they can optimize routines to avoid similar accident in the future (the globe and mail 2013b).</td>
<td>Bolstering</td>
<td>Reminder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Apr. 2013</td>
<td>Four</td>
<td>An IKEA spokeswoman said the concern of this accident centered mainly on one supplier in Sweden who offered the mixed meatballs (Chiangrai Times 2013).</td>
<td>Deny</td>
<td>Scapegoating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Apr. 2013</td>
<td>Four</td>
<td>A spokesman from IKEA said that they would like to sell the beef contained horsemeat relabeled at a reduced price and donate the sales income to charity (Daily Mail 2013).</td>
<td>Rebuild</td>
<td>Compensation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Results & Analysis

5.1 Results from the content analysis

In the Sanlu case, a total of valid 278 news articles are found in the LexisNexis database. Among them, 72 items are from Stage 1, 115 items are from Stage 2, 40 items are from Stage 3 and 51 are items from Stage 4. In the IKEA case, a total of 136 new articles are identified. Among them, 36 items are from Stage 2, 73 are items from Stage 3 and 27 items are from Stage 4. In additional, there are 17 pieces of news articles are manually discarded which are not so irrelevant of Sanlu and IKEA in these two scandals such as news talking about the general food safety in the world or other company involved in these two scandals. It seemed that Sanlu is more active to communication with the public in Stage 2 while IKEA is more positive in Stage 3.

Although it is found that all five main strategies were used by both Sanlu and IKEA, we can still find two most significant differences between them. First is the frequency of crisis communication strategies/CCSs adopted by them according to the revised crisis communication typology framework shown in Table 1. Second is the different strategy and sub-strategy applied by them in different four stages of crisis. Table 4 and 5 illustrate the details for these two differences. For instance, for Sanlu, we account all “Deny” under CCSs Type of coding book in all stages, and then we get 117 in Deny CCSs Type of Table 4. Because the total amount of identified news for Sanlu in all stages is 278, so we get percentage 42.1% for Deny (117 divided by 278); if we further account simple Denial within the 117 items coupled with stage 1, then we get 38, since the number of all valid items in stage 1 is 72, then we get the percentage 52.8% (38 divided by 72). This is how we get the frequency and percentage according to the original data coding book we discussed in last section and form Table 4 and 5.
### Table 4 Frequencies & percentages of the Crisis Communication Strategies/CCSs used by Sanlu

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CCSs Type/ Time Stage</th>
<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Stage 2</th>
<th>Stage 3</th>
<th>Stage 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deny: <strong>117 (42.1%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple Denial:</td>
<td>38 (52.8%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scapegoating:</td>
<td>34 (47.2%)</td>
<td>3 (29.6%)</td>
<td>8 (20.0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attack the accuser:</td>
<td>3 (5.9%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diminish: <strong>39 (14.0%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excuse:</td>
<td>3 (33.3%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebuild: <strong>77 (27.7%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apology/ Mortification:</td>
<td>29 (72.5%)</td>
<td>26 (51.0%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation:</td>
<td></td>
<td>22 (43.1%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolstering: <strong>3 (1.1%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reminder</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim image:</td>
<td>3 (2.2%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recall: <strong>42 (15.1%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involuntary recall:</td>
<td>42 (36.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary recall:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Super effort</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total: <strong>278 (100%)</strong></td>
<td>72</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5 Frequencies & Percentages of the Crisis Communication Strategies/CCSs used by IKEA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CCSs Type/ Time Period</th>
<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Stage 2</th>
<th>Stage 3</th>
<th>Stage 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deny: <strong>55 (40.4%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple Denial:</td>
<td>15 (41.7%)</td>
<td>12 (16.4%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scapegoating:</td>
<td>4 (11.1%)</td>
<td>16 (21.9%)</td>
<td>8 (29.6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attack the accuser:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diminish: <strong>26 (19.1%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excuse:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11 (15.1%)</td>
<td>15 (55.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebuild: <strong>4 (2.9%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apology/ Mortification:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 (14.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolstering: <strong>3 (2.2%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reminder</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 (4.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim image:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recall: <strong>48 (35.3%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involuntary recall:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary recall:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17 (47.2%)</td>
<td>31 (42.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Super effort</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total: <strong>136 (100%)</strong></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2 Analysis and Discussion

It is found that deny is the most frequently covered strategy used by both Sanlu (42.1%) and IKEA (40.4%). Recall and diminish are the second and third frequently applied by IKEA which accounts for 35.3% and 19.1% respectively. By contrast, rebuild and recall lie in the second and third for Sanlu which account for 27.7% and 15.1% respectively. The following are diminishing strategy (14.0%), and bolstering strategy (1.1%) for Sanlu while the rebuild and bolstering account for 2.9% and 2.2% for IKEA.

After looking into to the results, we can find the sub-strategies: Attack the accuser, Excuse, Involuntary recall and Apology were only used by Sanlu while Justification and Voluntary recall and Reminder were the unique ways used by IKEA. Further, we can identify the different strategy and sub-strategy applied by Sanlu and IKEA in different four stages of crisis. The following part is the detail analysis of our founding which is also the answer for our first research question.

Stage 1: Prodromal stage-- the time before the crisis revealed

During this stage, a total of 72 items are identified for Sanlu. The mainly used strategy was deny which aimed to conceal the fact even if they had already know the testing results discovered melamine was being added to milk few weeks before the scandal was revealed in public. In detail, Sanlu Simply denied (52.8%) the problems of its products after receiving complaints from the consumer and took active responses to Scapegoat (47.2%) other stakeholders.

Ten months before a journalist posted Sanlu's name online at a Chinese social portal on 11 Sep. 2008 which revealed the scandal to the public, Sanlu began to receive complaints about its formula from their consumers and further complaints received in March and July 2008 (The Washington Post 2008, The New York Times 2008a, Stuff 2010). For instance, a young girl's father posted details on a website to complain that his daughter suffered from diarrhea and was difficult to urinate after drinking Sanlu's milk which was bought in Feb. 2008 (South China Morning Post 2008). Although the father gave up his complaints after receiving four packages of free milk powder, the process of compensation carried by Sanlu
was more likely a way to keep victim silence and cover up the scandal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 5.1 Sanlu’s Simply Denial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Panic spreads as more fall ill in milk powder scandal</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sunday, 14 Sep. 2008</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After receiving the complaint from a father that his young daughter suffered from diarrhea and was difficult to urinate after drinking Sanlu's milk formula, the Sanlu replied and said the products he suspected were genuine and there were no quality problems (South China Morning Post 2008).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 5.2 Sanlu’s Scapegoating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sanlu recalls 700 tons of melamine-tainted milk powder</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Friday, 12 Sep. 2008</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sanlu Company had persisted that the milk products under suspicion of causing kidney stones in 59 babies were fake products using the Sanlu label (Danwei 2008).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IKEA was the latest group to become caught up in the Europe-wide scandal over the presence of horsemeat in ready-made dishes that erupted in January when horse DNA was detected in beef burgers sold in some Britain and Ireland supermarkets (News.Com.Au 2013).

There have no evidence if IKEA has known their meat products’ problem in Stage 1 and no obviously strategy was identified for IKEA during our study. However, they had already lunched their precaution action, such as conducting the in-house test, to prepare for the potential accident since similar problems had already emerged in other Europe countries during that period.

**Stage 2: Acute crisis stage-- the first two days**

During this stage, a total of 115 items are identified for Sanlu. The mainly used strategy in this stage by Sanlu were Involuntary recall (36.5%) and Excuse (33.9%) followed by Scapegoating (29.6%). On the evening of 11 Sep. 2008, Sanlu confessed that its products were melamine contaminated and started to recall the products. However, Sanlu always tried to find excuse to conceal the truth when they were asked if Sanlu had already known about the problems earlier.
Tainted Milk Scandal Hits China-made Dairy

*Thursday, 11 Sep. 2008*

The Sanlu Group publicly admitted that its products were melamine contaminated after conducting its own analysis and said it would recall 700 tons of milk powder produced before August 6, 2008 (China Today 2008).

**Figure 5.3** Sanlu’s Involuntary Recall

Chinese Dairy Knew of Chemical Contamination in Milk Weeks Before Recall

*Saturday, 13 Sep. 2008*

A Sanlu manager quoted by the newspaper Beijing News said the company failed to track down the problem until it imported sophisticated foreign-made testing equipment in August (Fox News 2008).

**Figure 5.4** Sanlu’s Excuse

For IKEA, a total of 36 items are identified in this stage, the mainly applied response were Voluntary recall (47.2%) and Simply denial (41.7%) followed by Scapegoating (11.1%). IKEA began to recall all its meatballs right after the revealed news from the Czech. However, they denied that their products contained horsemeat since their internal examinations showed no trace of horsemeat.

IKEA halts European meatball sales after horsemeat found

*Monday, 25 Feb. 2013*

A spokesman from IKEA’s headquarters in Helsingborg stated that they have recalled the specific batch of meatballs under suspicious in all markets where they may have been sold (The globe and mail 2013a).

**Figure 5.5** IKEA’s Voluntary Recall

Horsemeat scandal: IKEA withdraws all meatballs from UK stores.

*Monday, 25 Feb. 2013*

IKEA said it had started its own in-house DNA analyses of all meat products two weeks ago and the results shown no traces of horsemeat (The Guardian 2013b).

**Figure 5.6** IKEA’s Simple Denial

*Stage 3: Chronic crisis stage: the first month*

During this stage, a total of 40 items are identified for Sanlu. The most widely used strategies by Sanlu in this stage were Apology (72.5%) to the public to ask for forgiveness since with
the increasing number of sick babies, Sanlu finally admitted to having been selling melamine-tainted milk formula for at least half a year and Scapegoating (20.0%) other organization who added melamine to raw milk and sometimes Victimage(7.5%), claimed itself was also the victim, in order to gain some sympathy from the public. At the end of this stage, Sanlu’s CEO was fired and arrested, the mayor of the Shijiazhuang city, where Sanlu is based, has also been dismissed, along with four other city officials. Li Changjiang, head of the government food inspection service, was forced to resign (Stuff 2010, Economist 2008). After the first week following the public exposure to the melamine-tainted milk scandal, Sanlu was placed under supervision by the Chinese government and control over the crisis had largely been taken out of its hands (Yan 2011).

### China's Sanlu apologizes for milk powder contamination

*Tuesday, 16 Sep. 2008*

Zhang Zhenling, Sanlu's vice president, read a letter of apology at a news briefing in Shijiazhuang where the corporation is based. “The serious safety accident of the Sanlu formula milk powder for infants has caused severe harm to many sickened babies and their families. We feel really sad about this; Sanlu Group expresses its most sincere apology to you” he said (People's Daily Online 2008).

### Figure 5.7 Sanlu’s Apology

### The Sanlu Scandal

*Monday, 22 Sep. 2008*

Su Changsheng, Manager of Sanlu's Brand Management Department, told Caijing magazine that the company suspected that some unscrupulous dairy farmers and milk dealers had added melamine to raw milk before selling it to the company (Beijing Review 2008).

Tian Huawen, President of Sanlu, told one of the presses that the Sanlu was totally innocent and had been shamed by the immoral milk suppliers (Beijing Review 2008).

### Figure 5.8 Sanlu’s Scapgoating & Victimage

During this stage, a total of 73 items are identified for IKEA. The most widely used strategies were Voluntary recall (42.5%), Scapegoating (21.9%) followed by Simply denial (16.4%), Justification (15.1%) and Reminder (4.1%). At the end of this stage, IKEA totally confessed that their meat contained horsemeat and also started investigation to test other products such as sausage from the same supplier to avoid any other adulterated products in the market and
voluntary recall all products in the same time.

**Figure 5.9 IKEA’s Reminder**

IKEA worries its sausages have horse meat, too
*Wednesday, 27 Feb., 2013*

"Based on some hundred test results that we have received so far, there are a few indications of horse meat," IKEA spokeswoman Ylva Magnusson said Wednesday. "Together with the Swedish supplier in question we have decided to withdraw from sales also the wiener sausages ... from that supplier." (CBS News 2013).

**Figure 5.10 IKEA’s Voluntary Recall**

*Stage 4: Crisis resolution-- the remaining time until the end*

During this stage, a total of 51 items are identified for Sanlu. The mainly used strategy by Sanlu in this stage was Rebuilding which including Apology (51.0%) and Compensation (43.1%). What surprised us was we found some news about the statements of Attacking the accuser (5.9%). In detail, some statements from Sanlu pointed out that the government should also take the blame of this crisis. After investigating some news articles, we finally find the reason behind. A state Council investigation first revealed that Sanlu had processed the in-house testing as early as June 2008 when it discovered melamine was being added to milk to make it appear higher in protein than it actually was (China Daily 2008) and then on 2 Aug. 2008, Sanlu informed the Shijiazhuang municipal government, where Sanlu is headquartered, that some of its milk powder caused kidney stones. However, it was strange that local officials did not alert their superiors immediately and waited until 9 Sept. 2008 (Fox News 2008, Terradaily 2008). It was obviously that the public warning had been delayed by Sanlu and local government which allowed the tainted powdered milk supplies to spread more widely, making tens of thousands of children ill (The New York Times 2008b). Some news also added that the Sanlu and some government officials were trying to cover up the
problem during the Olympics since Chinese media were under enormous pressure from state leaders to carry out only "positive reporting." (The Wall Street Journal 2008, the New York Times 2008b).

As the end of the story, in order to compensate the victims, the Sanlu group borrowed 902 million Yuan ($132 million) to pay the medical fees of children sickened by its melamine-tainted baby formula, which increased its debt to 1.1 billion Yuan, and then Sanlu was sentenced to go bankruptcy because of failing to repay the outstanding debts which surpassed its asset by the local court (China Daily 2009). Sanlu’s Chairwoman Tian is sentenced to life in prison; two men, Geng Jinping and Zhang Yujun were sentenced to death for their involvement in this tainted milk scandal (The Washington Post 2009).

During this stage, a total of 27 items are identified for IKEA, The mainly used strategy by IKEA were Justification (55.6%) and Scapegoating (29.6%) followed by Compensation (14.8%). As the end of the story, after they removed the horsemeat for three months, IKEA
become the first company to return the adulterated items back to the human food chain. More specifically, IKEA would label their traditional pork and beef dishes to warn of the true contents and sell at a reduced price since there was no health risk associated with eating the horse meat and it would be preferable to avoid wasting the products and process it in a more sustainable and ethical solution. Meanwhile, IKEA would donate money to charity as a kind of compensation (The Independent 2013).

**Figure 5.14 IKEA's Scapegoating**

**Withdrawn meatballs back on sale**

*Sunday, 14 Apr. 2013.*

An IKEA spokesman said they would like to sell the adulterated meat relabeled since there was no health risk associated with eating them (The Independent 2013).

**Figure 5.15 IKEA’s Justification**

It is no doubt that the similar food safety scandal will seriously threaten a firm’s reputation and image. However, the most important thing is to learn from this scandal as well as to prevent similar crises from happening again. Based on above discussion, here, we offer some propositions to practitioners which are also the answers for our second research question.

**Proposition 1: Deny is not suggested to be applied in the product harm crisis, such as the food safety scandal in our study.**

Although Deny is the most widely applied strategy in these two cases, it does not mean this is the most effective way to communication with the public. Instead, this is a risky response if stakeholders or consumers feel this firm does hold some crisis responsibility (Coombs 2006). Many experts suggest that companies involved in product harm crises had better not deny their responsibility (Yan 2011). In product harm crises context, no amount of denial will assist the firm with eliminating the blame with the crisis since denial is seen as a narrow, defensive, and selfish responses to the consumers (Simokos and Shrivastava 1993). However, in reality, so many organizations decide to deny their responsibility in order to minimize
negative impacts based on cost-effect purpose which always make the situation worse for the firm.

**Proposition 2: The voluntary recall strategy is more recommended to be adopted than involuntary recall from second stage of the crisis.**

Both Sanlu and IKEA start to recall the products from the second stage of crisis since the public began to know the crisis from this period. The firm is suggested to lunch its recall process even the potential damage is not confirmed. Just as IKEA started to recall all its meatballs even their own test showed no trace of horsemeat, IKEA applied the extra precaution process to avoid any potential negative affects to the consumers. Moreover, the firm should continue to recall all questionable products until the situation become favorable to the involved firm.

The Involuntary recall and Voluntary recall share the same goal which aims to protect not only the public safety but also the corporate reputation as well as consumer trust. However, the effect of these two reactions will be much different (Yan 2011). More specifically, while a Voluntary recall may imply the consumers that the involved firms are willing to take responsibility of questionable products and solve the problem, a government-ordered recall may be viewed as the opposite indication. Many researches show that consumers perceive the firms engaged in voluntary recalls to be more responsible especially if these companies react before regulatory agencies take actions (Siomkos and Kurzbard 1992). Further, consumers always perceive the defective product to be more dangerous and even negatively influence consumers’ future purchases of the troubled company’s other products (Siomkos and Kurzbard 1994). It is obvious that IKEA was smarter to use Voluntary recall to reduce the risk perception from the consumer and create less negative influence to the firm in the future.

**Proposition 3: Rebuild/apology strategy is suggested to be applied on Stage 2 of the crisis.**

Although Rebuild strategy is an expensive way for the firm, it doesn’t mean the organization should apply it as later as possible or reject to use it. Instead, the firm should use it in a correct time to improve the organization’s reputation. Or, you will loss the perfect time to use it. In our study, Sanlu finally admitted to having been selling melamine-tainted milk formula
for at least half a year and apologized to the public formally until Stage 3. Sanlu have expressed feelings of regret and have apologized to victims affected by a crisis in an attempt to reduce the damage of its reputation and image among the consumers. A full apology is supposed to be the positive reputational actions and if it is acceptable to the victim, the firm’s image should be improved (Benoit 1997). However, it was too late for Sanlu since the consumer has lost their patient to trust them. In another word, the consumers chose not to accept firm’s apology. Once the crisis was revealed in Stage 2, it would be better if the firm involved in the crisis could make all information known to the public immediately instead of concealing it.

Proposition 4: The Diminish and Bolstering strategies are more suitable to be used in Stage 3 and Stage 4.

Results also shows that the Diminish strategy was most frequently used by IKEA in Stage 4 by offering justification in order to reduce firms’ responsibility in a crisis and emphasizing the accidental nature of the crisis. Bolstering strategy has been barely utilized by either Sanlu or IKEA because it offers a minimal opportunity to develop reputational assets (Coombs 2007). Sanlu took responses such as stating the organization itself was also a victim of the crisis to evoke sympathy. However, it did not work since its previous bad performance of cheating and trying to cover up the truth had seriously damaged its reputation among the consumers. By contrast, in Stage 3 and 4, IKEA used the Justification a lot and it really worked since IKEA returned the mixed meats back to its stores successfully. It seemed that the customers were more willing to listen and accept the explanation from the IKEA that there was no health harm associated with eating the horse meat and it was a more sustainable and ethical solution to sell the relabeled meats instead of destroying and wasting the food. This creation of trust should thank to IKEA’s consistent honesty and activeness at previous stages to response to the stakeholders.

These four propositions reflect the main difference between Sanlu and IKEA. Sanlu milk scandal and IKEA horsemeat scandal were both terrible affairs which shocked the public. It should be useful for practitioners to understand the main points discussed in our propositions. Although this may not be suitable to all the industries, at least in food industry, it works.
6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary

Food safety is a serious problem for all countries and it deserves to attract the enough attention and awareness of all the stakeholders in the industry. Although this is not the first study of analyzing the food safety crisis, it is a significant step towards examining the case from a different perspective (news coverage). In particular, this study explored the crisis communication strategies by comparing different actions taken by Sanlu and IKEA. The need for effective crisis communication was also emphasized in order to sustain and protect a firm’s image and reputation in the crisis.

From an integrative perspective, crisis communication strategies aim to protect a firm’s image and reputation during a crisis. The most effective method to achieve this is by modifying public perception of the responsibility for the crisis. The five main strategies all attempt to influence the public through the designed messages illustrated via news media. The Deny strategies aims to insist that there has no crisis. Thus, the firm take no responsibility for any questionable events. Diminish strategies emphasize on either the unintentional (excuse) or the external elements (justification) of a crisis. The involved firm’s responsibility would be lessened if a crisis is considered as unintentional or external. Rebuild strategies act to offset some negative crisis attributions with positive impressions of the firm. The organization accepts its reasonability to some level takes actions to compensate for the victims. The Bolstering strategies hunt for connecting the firm to some positive value in the stakeholders’ mind via generating some goodwill or winning some sympathy from the public. Recall strategies is the usual method in product harm crisis which aim to avoid preventing the recurrence of the offensive products or to prevent a repeat of crisis.

Fink (1986) identified a predictable four-phase pattern followed by all crises. Although all five main strategies were used by both Sanlu and IKEA in all four stages; we still can find that they applied different strategies/sub-strategies in different stage. Both the different crisis communication strategies and different firm’s response in different crisis stage give us insight regarding the completely different endings of these two companies. Some propositions are
also be promoted when consider the crisis communication strategies coupled with the different stages of crisis. Here, we suggest 1.) Deny is not suggested to be applied in the product harm crisis, such as the food safety scandal in our study. 2.) The Voluntary recall strategy is more recommended to be adopted than Involuntary recall from stage 2 of the crisis. 3.) Rebuild/Apology strategy is suggested to be applied on stage 2 of the crisis. 4.) The Diminish and Bolstering strategies is more suitable to use in stage three and stage four.

6.2 Limitations and further research
Content analysis of the news coverage was used to answer research questions in our paper. So, the first limitation comes from the limitation of the single source of the data which might result in lack of adequate information to analyze these two scandals from various perspective. Such as customers’ perspective since most news articles from the newspapers’ websites reported these scandal by just describing the related official information of the scandals instead of expressing consumer’s or their own opinion. Social media has played a crucial role in the negotiation and communication of crises and it has become a part of daily life (Utz et al 2013). Nowadays, more and more people use social media as a platform for self-expression, networking in the world, such as Facebook. People can express their own thoughts and opinions, sometimes even challenge the authority. Hence, future research is suggested to collect data from some social media platforms so as to provide stronger support for analysis.

Second, from the prior introduction in section two of the two scandals, it was found that lacking of effective supply chain management in both of these two scandals might be the factor which caused for the crisis. So there is a great value of the examination of effective supply chain management strategies in order to avoid or lessen the occurrence of this kind of food safety crisis in the future.

Third, when we read the new articles to collect our data, we read some news mentioned that Sanlu and some government officials were trying to cover up the problem during the Olympics since Chinese media were under the pressure from state leaders. According to Garcia (2011) study, the selection and effectiveness of crisis communication strategies can vary greatly according to cultural, political and media variables of each country. So it
deserves further investigation about how government and the media create different crisis social contexts for the firm.
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