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Abstract

Purpose – A good corporate image is important to organizations. However, little is elaborated on how organizations can work on their images. This study seeks to explicate the types of image management before, during, and after a crisis through the development of the crisis pre-emptive image management model.

Design/methodology/approach – Integrating insights from communication and marketing literature, this paper uses cases from the USA, Europe and Asia to make the concepts come alive.

Findings – At each stage of Wilcox and Cameron's crisis life cycle, different types of image management can take place. At the proactive stage are image creation and maintenance; at the strategic stage are image strengthening and transformation; at the reactive stage is image repair; and at the recovery stage are image renewal and reinvention.

Research limitations/implications – This paper is a comprehensive examination of the types of image management that organizations can consider as they seek to solidify their images at different stages of the organizations' existence.

Practical implications – This study demonstrates what organizations can do to communicate their desired images through multiple platforms with the aim of heightening their awareness of the profound effects lingering images have on the organization.

Originality/value – While certain concepts like image creation and maintenance and image repair have been explored before, this paper introduces new concepts like image strengthening, image transformation, image renewal, image reinvention, and enduring image with the view of demonstrating how image can work for or against the organization.

Keywords Communication management, Corporate image, Public relations, Crisis management, Positioning, Media, Communication, Organizations

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

A crisis can affect an organization's "good name" (Fearn-Banks, 2002, p. 2). As crises, defined as unpredictable events that threaten the expectancies of stakeholders and impact the organizations' performance (Coombs, 2012), are occurring with greater frequency and increasing complexity (Mitroff, 2005), organizations' vulnerability to crises are also increasing (Stocker, 1997). Pinsdorf (1987, p. 37) argued for the inevitability of crises. They are "no longer a matter of if, but when; no longer an exception, but the expected, even the inevitable".

One of the objectives of crisis management is to maintain an organization's image (Coombs, 1995; Pearson and Mitroff, 1993). The other objectives include lessening the negative outcomes on the organization and to protect stakeholders (Coombs, 2010; Stocker, 1997). Dowling (2001) argued that the impact of crises on the image of the organization depends on how favorable or unfavorable the organization's current

image is; the magnitude and type of crisis; and the extent of media publicity. Crisis management should thus seek to restore organizational normalcy and influence public perception. The strategies used should be "designed to minimize damage to the image of the organization" (Dowling, 2001, p. 2), argued Fearn-Banks (2002). Coombs (2012) argued that today's dynamic environment require organizations to manage crises. Five reasons have been posited: First, a broader view of what constitutes crisis. Mitroff (2005) argued there has been a shift from "normal" crises like mechanical/systems failure and faulty design to "abnormal" crises like terrorism, health scares (SARS), and psycho-pathetic acts. Second, negligence to plan for crises shows up on the complacency of the organization. Third, advances in technology and the increase in use of technological devices. As a result, news of crises can be transmitted instantaneously. Fourth, increase in stakeholder activism. Fifth, increase in value placed on reputations of organization. Mitroff (2003) argued that an organization's positive public image could be destroyed when crisis occurs.

A good corporate image is thus important to organizations (Benoit and Pang, 2008). However, Wan and Schell (2007) argued that few studies have examined how corporate image can help an organization survive after the crisis is over. Understandably so, since image has been a controversial concept in public relations (Grunig, 2003; Wan and Schell, 2007). Thus, little has been explicated on how organizations can work on their images before, during, and after the crisis. This study aims to:

(1) explicate the types of image management that organizations can consider at each of the four phases before, during and after a crisis;

(2) distinguish the types of images organizations should be vigilant about; and

(3) develop a crisis pre-emptive image management model.

This paper is a comprehensive examination and elaboration on the types of image management that organizations can consider as they seek to solidify their images across the crisis life cycle by integrating insights from crisis management, corporate communication, public relations, and marketing literature. Leading textbooks on corporate communication and crisis management were accessed, and studies from journals like *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*; Public *Relations Review*, Journal *of Public Relations Research*, European *Journal of Communication*, Journal *of Consumer Marketing*, and *European Journal of Marketing* from respective journals' electronic databases were examined. Additionally, to ensure as much insights were accessed, one search service provided by EBSCO discovery that accesses literature from multiple databases was also used. The search terms included image, reputation, brand, identity. The period of search was from 1979 to 2012.

This paper is structured thus. The next section examines the concept of image and how it differs from reputation, how organizations can shape their images, and the different strategies organizations have used to revamp their images. The following section describes the different image work that organizations can embark on across the crisis life cycle, leading to the development of the Crisis Pre-emptive Image Management Model. The fourth section explores how organizations can communicate their desired images. The fifth section ends with a new concept called enduring image.

This paper is significant on three fronts. First, it consolidates disparate studies on image. Current research is segmented, with studies differentiating image based on national image (Cai *et al.*, 2009; Choi, 2010; Chua and Pang, in press; Zhang and Benoit,

2004) or images of public figures (Han and Ki, 2010; Wakshlag and Edison, 1979). Second, beyond exploring established concepts like image creation and maintenance (Massey, 2004) and image repair (Benoit and Pang, 2008), this study introduces new concepts such as image transformation, image reinvention, and enduring image with the view of demonstrating how image can work for or against the organization. Third, beyond exploring dominant strategies analyses to help organizations improve image after a crisis, such as the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Coombs *et al.*, 2010) and Image Repair Theory (Dardis and Haigh, 2009), this study aims to inform what organizations can do to communicate their desired images through multiple platforms. Through these, it is hoped that this study can heighten practitioners' awareness of the profound effects lingering images have on the organization even as they are beginning to recognize image as "critical directly linked to competitive success" (Gray and Balmer, 1998, p. 695).

Image: how can the organization revamp its image?
Corporate image and reputation
A corporate image is an impression that stakeholders form of an organization. The image formed may be a collective or partly shared impression (Christensen *et al.*, 2008; van Riel and Fombrun, 2007). Benoit and Pang (2008) argued that image is an important asset to organizations. Kennedy (2007) consolidated 14 reasons why image is important: For general promotion value, encourage favorable behavior towards the organization; increase sale of products, give products an added advantage, attract shareholders, attract potential employees, facilitate good relations with the community, facilitate good relations with the government, influence attitudes, create favorability, showcase the organization, fulfill corporate objectives, aid management decisions and serve as a competitive advantage for organizations, particularly the smaller ones (Kennedy, 2007, pp. 155-157). There seems to be an innate human nature to want to be liked and valued which is vital to one's existence. A good image can be likened to one's currency. The role of corporate communications is to project a good and "consistent image of the organization across multiple audiences" (Christensen *et al.*, 2008, p. vi).

Image and reputation have been used interchangeably (Benoit and Pang, 2008), and this has caused confusion in public relations (Gilpin, 2010). While corporate image is often regarded as the "mental picture" that stakeholders have of an organization (Gray and Balmer, 1998, p. 697), corporate reputation is what others think of the organization's "track record" (Wilcox and Cameron, 2009, p. 266), based on economic performance, social responsiveness, and ability to deliver on goods and services. It is a "formalized and authoritative description of the organization" (Christensen *et al.*, 2008, p. 91), which is "evolved over time as a result of consistent performance . . . " (Gray and Balmer, 1998, p. 697). This assessment by stakeholders could be based on battery of indicators including credibility, reliability, trustworthiness and responsibility (Fombrun, 1996) and the organization's ability to fulfill stakeholder expectations (van Riel and Fombrun, 2007). Fombrun (1996) argued the organization's performance – its ability to meet economic goals and fulfill social responsibilities – enhance its overall attractiveness, and image, among stakeholders. Elsbach (2006, p. 17) argued that this "enduring status categorizations of the quality of the organization" tend to focus on the status and importance to external stakeholders. Avraham and Ketter (2008) argued there is an evaluative component in assessing corporate reputation.

Dowling (2001) suggested that this is based on value-based constructs, like authenticity, honesty, responsibility and integrity, which are triggered by how the organization conjures and communicate the set of beliefs and feelings stakeholders have of it.

Shaping corporate image

Christensen *et al.* (2008) suggested that reputation comprises the image of the organization. Snapshots of different images of an organization, its social image, financial image, product image and recruitment image, collectively form the reputation of the organization (Fombrun, 1996; van Riel and Fombrun, 2007).

If image can impact the reputation of the organization, as suggested, Martineau (2003) argued that organizations should manage their corporate images. Image can be shaped (Christensen *et al.*, 2008; Fombrun, 1996) to portray an intended image or a construed image (Bronn, 2010). Cornelissen (2011) argued that this symbolic construction should be deliberate and critical as it helps stakeholders perceive the organization through carefully-designed lenses. The strategic advantages included:

- *Distinctiveness:* besides creating awareness of the organization, it triggers recognition and instill confidence among stakeholders, both externally and internally.
- *Impact:* it provides a basis for stakeholders to favor the organization by supporting it through purchase, investment and generates goodwill.
- *Stakeholders:* communicating a consistent image provides a dominant frame for disparate groups of stakeholders, who may have conflicting images, to center their perceptions of the organization.

If corporate image management is a vital component of corporate communication, as Cornelissen (2011) argued, this suggests a critical role corporate communication plays in constructing a good, "official self-image" (Christensen *et al.*, 2008, p. 92). However, the organization's success in generating its desired image is only as successful as how it is received, internalized, and accepted by stakeholders, based on what they hear, see and experience, and this is continually and mutually negotiated with stakeholders. As Wan and Schell (2007, p. 27) argued, image is examined at two levels, first, what and how the organization portrays itself to be through "skillfully designed communication"; and second, the stakeholders' perceptions based on "understandings and interpretations" (Wan and Schell, 2007, p. 27). Two processes at work here, the cognitive (i.e. what one knows about the organization) as well as affective or emotional (how one feels about the organization) components (Avraham and Ketter, 2008; Dowling, 2001). Thus, an image can be constructed (by the organization) or ascribed (by stakeholders).

In this paper, two parameters are established. First, even though an organization's image may vary among stakeholders, and different facets appeal to different stakeholders, the image explored here is the projected image of the organization. Second, even though there can be two facets of an image, i.e. self image, which is related to organization identity and how the organization view itself (Bronn, 2010) and external image (i.e. how the organization projects its image leading to how others view the organization), this study focuses on the latter.

A projected, external image: a media image

While organizations are free to explore their own self-images and organizational identities, and one can surmise that a positive self-image generally leads to a positive external image, it is not the focus of the paper to examine what constitutes a positive self-image. Rather, this paper argues how important it is to have a positive external, or projected image, especially in times of crises when the organization's image is under intense scrutiny. Arguably, the best way to enhance one's image is through the media. Since crises are argued to be "media events" (Garnett and Kouzmin, 2007, p. 175), this public image can be generated through several ways:

(1) constructed by the organization to "build and maintain a particular set of perceptions... to project aspects of their identity" (Gilpin, 2010, p. 267), which means greater control by the organization on what kind of image it wants;

(2) if the organization is not active in constructing its own image, the image vacuum (Abidin and Pang, 2012) will be;

(3) constructed by stakeholders (Benoit, 2004), which means lack of control by the organization on how it is perceived; and

(4) constructed by proxy, endorsement of respected persons like opinion-leaders, which means lack of control by the organization if left unchecked.

In the absence of a direct and more intimate interaction and access to the organization, for instance, attending a meeting chaired by the CEO – a privilege only some would experience, by default or design – most stakeholders would form images of the organization through what it communicates publicly. This public image is often one that is media-driven and an organization's image can be destroyed if the media cover it negatively, particularly during crises (Mitroff, 2003).

The public media image can reflect the real public image of the organization, or it can be a misrepresented public media image. A negative public image can be formed by stakeholders if they are repeatedly misrepresented in the media, even though in reality, the real public image is far from what is portrayed. Studies have shown how organizations and governments have utilized the media to shape perceptions of their respective images. Zhang and Cameron (2003), for instance, found that China tried to present a "brand new image" to the American people by influencing coverage in prestige US newspapers between August and September 2000. Zhang and Benoit (2004, p. 166) found that Saudi Arabia's image repair campaign in 2002 through mainstream news publications, television and raido spots was "partially effective" in repairing its image. Wang (2010, p. 46) argued that China tried to project a new image through the 2008 Beijing Olympics by reframing it as "green Olympics" and "humane Olympics" to "resonate with prevailing international norms and values". Choi (2010) analyzed how two major US newspapers, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, had influenced perceptions when they framed the images of North Korea negatively. Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin tried to project a new image of an action man through the compliant Russian mainstream media by scuba-diving at an ancient Greek site in the Black Sea (*The Straits Times, 2011a*) presumably in preparation for his return to the presidency. The Mormon Church in the US is attempting to change its image by increasing its web presence (Washington Post, 2011). Zhang and Cameron (2003) argued that the media have been used to create and perpetuate the image of organizations and leaders. All these efforts thus serve to enhance an

organization's image in the public eye. Conceivably, a negative public media image often compromises the organization's efforts to reverse it.

Case in point: Goldman Sachs, which was accused of being responsible for the financial meltdown in the US in 2008, still suffers from a negative public media image. Despite its efforts to change its image by volunteering for garbage duty at a charity Thanksgiving dinner for thousands of hungry New Yorkers in 2009, or donating US$500 million over five years to help 10,000 small businesses across the US, it continues to be demonized in the media by critics (Williams, 2009) who were quick to point to the hypocrisy and opulent payouts the organization continued to disburse to its employees while failing to recognize it owed its position and survival to the US$10 billion bailout from the US government. Goldman was reported to have hired a high-powered international PR firm to help change its negative public media image (Williams, 2009).

A negative public media image can be generated by what Vasterman (2005, p. 515) called media hype, which he defined as "media generated, wall-to-wall news wave, triggered by one specific event and enlarged by the self-reinforcing processes within the news production of the media". For media hype to take place, Vasterman (2005, p. 516) argued for four conditions to take place:

(1) a key event that receives much media attention;

(2) a rapid rise and gradual fall of a news wave;

(3) the media keeping the news in the headlines instead of reporting new developments in the news by reporting "comparable incidents or linking them to key event"; and

(4) there is interaction between the media and newsmakers resulting in increased coverage of "social action" and "reactions from social actors".

Further distinctions are made in the kinds of news reported. Incident-related news are factual reports about actual events whereas thematically related news are not factual reports but related to the theme of the news (Vasterman, 2005). For instance, there were many thematically- related news spins after Tiger Woods sex scandal exploded. It is argued that in a crisis, in the absence of developments of incident-related news, thematically-related news keep the public preoccupied. Vasterman (2005) also distinguished two kinds of media hype. A magnified media hype occurs when the media focuses on the crisis in detail and reports on every minute detail, whereas an enlarged media hype is when the media report on all kinds of events which fall under the same theme as the crisis (Vasterman, 2005).

What these mean is that whenever an organization with a negative public media image attracts the attention of the media, the media may hype up the involvement and role of that organization, fairly or unfairly.

Negative public media image: revamping the image
Even if an organization has a negative public media image, Dichter (1985) argued that the organization could change its image. Some of the tactics used have been:

(1) Projecting a new image:
   - *Case in point:* China. China's image has been battered by a series of public relations nightmare since 2003, when it was accused of covering up the Severe

Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) crisis (Pang *et al.*, 2004). From 2007 to 2008, the massive product recalls involving a range of Chinese-made products led to questions asked about whether China had lived up to its reputation as factory of the world (Cai *et al.*, 2009). In 2008, one of its largest dairy producers, Sanlu, was accused of contaminating its milk with melamine, a toxic industrial chemical used to make plastics and fertilizer. The kidneys of hundreds of thousands of infants were damaged after consuming the milk, which was sold widely in China (Ye and Pang, 2011). In 2011, China launched a media campaign to improve its global image. The 17-minute film was launched in New York's Times Square as part of what was known as its "public diplomacy campaign". It was China showing its soft power (Peh, 2011, p. A6). It was observed that the film was "as much about producing positives as nullifying some negatives" (*The Straits Times, 2011b*).

(2) Boosting one's image:

- *Case in point:* Bangkok, which has witnessed a series of political violence between the anti-government and pro-government camps in recent years, received a boost when a well-known developer announced it would build an iconic tower in the heart of Bangkok's prime shopping district. Costing about US$648 million, it is hoped the 38-storey Central Embassy "will boost the image of Bangkok", said the CEO of the Central Group, which was building the tower (Ghosh, 2011, p. C3). Similarly in Dubai, it was hoped that the opening of the 160-storey Burj Dubai, in January 2010 would reverse the negative public media image of debt (*The Sunday Times, 2010*).

(3) Softening one's image:

- *Case in point:* Gordon Brown. This former British Prime Minister had always had a stern public image. He was often portrayed by the media as unsmiling and disconnected from the populace. In 2009, faced with plummeting approval ratings in an election year, he tried to project a softer (read: "humane") image by "granting unusually personal interviews". To "reconnect" with voters, he even agreed to appear in a religious television program (*The Straits Times, 2011c*, p. A14).

(4) Making over one's image:

- *Case in point:* former French first lady Bernadette Chirac. When she was the first lady, the public media image of her was that of a "dull, dowdy and dutiful wife", "strait-laced matriarch", and "dowdy and unsmiling". After her husband completed his presidential term in 2007, Mrs Chirac has made over her image to one of a "glamorous fashionista". At 77, she now has a "new following among the country's uber-hip clubbing set and has even become a fashion muse" (*The Straits Times, 2011c*, p. C11).

Image work and crises: toward a crisis pre-emptive image management model

Much as the above tactics are helpful to change a negative public media image, they remain symptomatic, episodic, and reactive. Making over one's image, for instance, is superficial, focusing on the physical. Organizations need to be exposed to a more holistic and integrated framework on how to manage their images over the course of its

existence. A crisis can cause a previously positive public media image to turn negative rapidly. Take for instance Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou. Before Typhoon Morakot hit Taiwan on August 8, 2009, he was widely regarded as "Mr Clean" who fought corruption in Taiwanese politics. After his failure to manage the crisis, he was vilified by in the media (Ho, 2009). Since crisis is perceptual (Coombs, 2012), Massey (2004) argued that organizations must sustain a good image with their stakeholders in order to successfully recover from crises. Hutton *et al.* (2001) argued that during crisis, a good image can function as a reservoir of goodwill. Studies show that organizations with good images enjoy halo effects during crises (Dowling, 2001; Lyon and Cameron, 2004).

Conceptualization of the model
Elsbach (2006) argued image management, or what she termed organization perception management, takes place when the organization determine that a reassessment of organizational image is needed and takes action to meet the need. This occurs when it needs to manage perception-enhancing triggering events, or perception-threatening triggering events. The latter are events that threaten the image of the organization while the former occur when the organization perceive its image could be more consistent with what it aspires to be. Elsbach (2006) further argued that image management takes place on three occasions, before, during and after organizational events. Strategies used before the organization events are anticipatory; strategies used during organization events are in response to the perception-threatening events; strategies used after organization events are meant to repair or enhance the organization's image.

Elsbach's (2006) insights are consistent with studies in crisis literature. Crisis scholars generally agree crisis communication is a dynamic, ongoing process, across various stages (see Coombs, 2010; Fink, 1986; Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt, 1996; Meyers, 1986; Sturges, 1994; Turner, 1976). Using Wilcox and Cameron's (2009) proactive-strategic-reactive-recovery crisis life cycle framework as a foundational framework, this study integrates Massey's (2004) model of organizational image management and introduces new image concepts to propose a new framework called the Crisis Pre-emptive Image Management Model. Wilcox and Cameron's (2009) life cycle framework does not stipulate time frames on how long each phase lasts. Therefore, it is conceivable that an organization can be in the proactive phase for years before it enters into the strategic phase (see Figure 1).

Before organization event: proactive phase
This is the phase when all appears calm. The organization does not appear to be near any crisis. To prepare for crisis, the organization should embark on environmental scanning for possible issues, how to track and manage emerging issues, and how to come up with a crisis communication plan. Sturges (1994) described it as a time the organization is actively internalizing all these information. Elsbach (2006) termed it as anticipatory organization perception management.

Image work: For organizations without a definitive public image, is unknown or if it is just starting out, this is the time to embark on image creation. Massey (2004, p. 234) argued organizations must "create an image" of itself with stakeholders. For organizations that have established a positive public image, they must continually engage in image maintenance so that this image remains etched in the minds of the
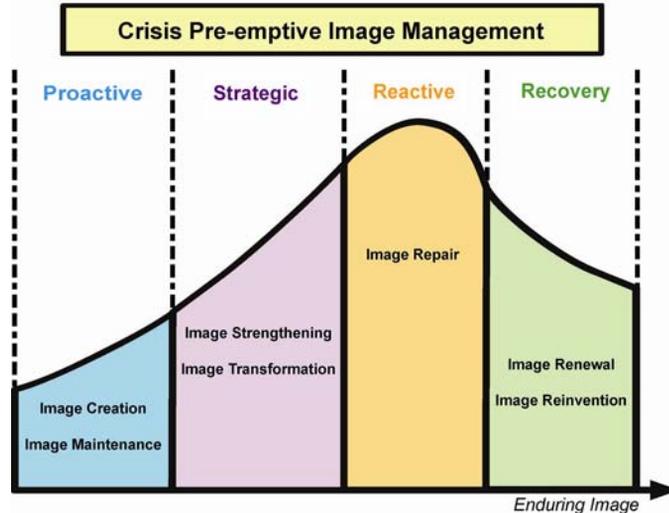
Figure 1.
Crisis pre-emptive image management

stakeholders (Massey, 2004). Organizations can do that by engaging stakeholders, communicating with them, influencing perceptions, soliciting feedback, and aligning expectations. Horsley and Barker (2002, p. 416) argued that such "conscientious image building" helps ensure that communication systems are in place and that relationships are established.

Before organization event: strategic phase
This is the time when issues that are likely to emerge as crisis trigger points are identified. The organization needs to embark on risk communication, conflict positioning (Pang, 2006), and activating the crisis communication plan. Sturges (1994) described it as a time of instructing where the organization is communicating with its stakeholders what it is doing. Elsbach (2006) termed it as anticipatory organization perception management.

Image work: Organizations that have created their images and maintained it thus far need to embark on image strengthening. This is a new concept that essentially means that organizations need to refresh and reinforce its image to stakeholders as image maintenance may lapse into the routine and mundane. If there are issues looming, organizations would take heed to continually remind their stakeholders that despite facing looming issues that may erupt into crisis, they remain committed to the stakeholders, and the stakeholders' (good) image of the organization will prevail. Coombs (2012) described this more generically as reputation management, reinforcing what stakeholders already know of the organization. This is based on positive interactions and a relationship history forged over different experiences.

When faced with issues that may threaten the existence of the organization, organizations can also embark on image transformation. This occurs when the organization feels its image needs to be refreshed to maintain relevance with audience. It is also a way of self-preservation. Image transformation may also be aligned with changes in its mission of existence. Unlike image makeover, image transformation is

more than an outward physical change. It is change in *raison d'etre* and *modus operandi* so that the organization remains relevant in response to changing demands. This move can also be regarded as pre-emptive before crisis strikes.

During organization event: reactive phase

This is when crisis erupts. The crisis communication plan is activated and the organization should be actively responding to the crisis by communicating its actions directly through issuing statements in its website and using social media tools or through the media. Sturges (1994) described this phase as a time of instructing. Elsbach (2006) described it as a time the organization engages in conversation with stakeholders and refines and updates its tactics based on feedback.

Image work: This is the time when the organization needs to embark on image repair. Image repair takes place when an offensive act has occurred and the organization needs to respond immediately (Benoit and Pang, 2008). Image repair is a "dominant paradigm for examining corporate communication in times of crises" (Dardis and Haigh, 2009, p. 101). An extension of apologia (Coombs *et al.*, 2010), the theory asserts that when an organization's image is battered by crisis, face work must be done to reverse the damage. To repair one's image, the theory posits five major rhetorical typologies of denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action and mortification (Benoit and Pang, 2008). The basic premise of this theory is that during crisis, to convince and win back stakeholders, organizations should respond to accusations by offering explanations, defenses, justifications, rationalizations, apologies, and even excuses for one's actions.

After organization event: recovery phase

This is after the crisis is over, when the organization takes active steps to restore its' battered and bruised reputation. It is also a time of learning from the mistakes made so as to prevent them from occurring again. Sturges (1994) described this time as adjusting and internalizing. Elsbach (2006, p. 52) described it as a time when stakeholders assess if the organization has "considered their concerns and needs" after the event has occurred.

Image work: Even though Wilcox and Cameron (2009) and Massey (2004) suggested image restoration (another name for image repair) ought to be done here, it is argued that this would be too late. Through their study of the 2001 terrorist attacks, Ulmer and Sellnow (2002, p. 364) argued that image repair "is not the imperative in the aftermath of an organizational crisis". Besides, image repair is a theory that is applied to analyze communication during crisis and not after (see Benoit and Pang, 2008; Cai *et al.*, 2009; Drumheller and Benoit, 2004; Zhang and Benoit, 2004).

Instead, this study introduces a new concept, drawing on insights from post-crisis discourse, and argues that image renewal ought to take place. In post-crisis discourse, Ulmer *et al.* (2007, p. 177) defined renewal as "a fresh sense of purpose and direction an organization discovers after it emerges from a crisis". Ulmer and Sellnow (2002, p. 362) argued that renewal involves a "rebuilding of confidence". Ulmer *et al.* (2007) argued renewal can take place on three levels:

(1) commitment to stakeholders;

(2) commitment to correcting the problem that caused the crisis; and

(3) commitment to core values.

Coombs (2010, p. 31) described renewal as the "most recent informal line of crisis communication research . . .".

Beyond image renewal, this study next introduces the concept of image reinvention in this phase. Tainted by the crisis, the organization sheds its previous image and rebuilds a new image by reconstituting what it stands for to its stakeholders. There is a difference between image renewal and image reinvention. The former is a recommitment to what the organization stands for while the latter entails overhauling what it stood for. In a marriage analogy, image renewal is synonymous with a husband renewing his vows and recommitting his life to his wife after surviving a crisis that undermines their relationship; image reinvention is synonymous with the husband promising his wife that he will seek to rebuild the marriage by abandoning his checkered past and becoming a new, better husband. In part, image reinvention is inspired by what Ulmer *et al.* (2007, p. 182) described as the "new normal", defined as "a change in an organization's . . . approach and belief system for organizing or living". This "new normal" can take drastic forms, as the cases below illustrate.

Cases in point: While this study has yet to find a compelling and definitive case of image reinvention, examples abound of different ways one has reinvented one's image, and collectively, these montages are instructive of how image reinvention has been executed at different levels. The rags-to-riches story of a certain Bernard Schwartz is legendary, the stuff Hollywood is made of. A poor Jewish boy from the Bronx, he gained fame and wealth acting as knights, cowboys and Romans. Along the way, he changed his name and accent, dissociated with his past, and reinvented a new image as a Hollywood star. By the time he died, Tony Curtis had joined the "pantheon of other great Hollywood reinventions" and "hobnobbing with the likes of Roy Harold Scherer Jr., Norma Jean Baker and Archibald Leach . . . better known as Rock Hudson, Marilyn Monroe and Gary Grant" (Delaney, 2010, p. 3). Or, like how the Duchess of York, who divorced Prince Andrew in 1996, had to reinvent herself as an "author and Weight Watchers spokesman" (de Souza, 2009, p. C4) after she left Britain's Royal Household.

Hollywood fairy tales aside, what the above illustrates is that image reinvention may necessitate a deliberate and complete shedding of the old and changing into a new. It is also not inconceivable that one can also build on one's past and carve out new missions in life – and in the publics' eyes. Former US president Jimmy Carter left office with one of the poorest approval ratings a president ever had. Instead of following the paths of other presidents, making profits from speaking tours or sitting on boards of large corporations, he became a "globe-trotting humanitarian and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002 for his work promoting social and economic justice" (Mooney, 2008). Former vice-president Al Gore is another recent example of one who has reinvented his image, from an almost-president to an environmentalist, and bagging a Nobel Peace Prize in the process.

What these examples have instructed the organization are that image reinvention needs to take place when crises compel it to do so, that maintaining status quo is no longer acceptable; and even if the organization cannot commit to core values (which represents the status quo), it can recommit to correction to stakeholders (Ulmer *et al.*, 2007). Arguably, image renewal and image reinvention must go beyond the rhetorical and physical to assume the narrative, telling the organizational story (Heath, 2004), to reflect the changed image.

Approaches to image management
Based on the above discussion, this model posits three organizational approaches to image management over the crisis life cycle:

(1) *Proactive:* the organization is motivated to establishing its image at the proactive phase of the life cycle and to differentiate itself from the others. The image work undertaken includes image creation and image maintenance.

(2) *Preventive:* the organization seeks self-preservation and wants to ensure it remains relevant to its stakeholders at the strategic phase of the life cycle. The image work undertaken includes image strengthening and image transformation.

(3) *Restorative:* the organization seeks to restore order after the crisis is over at the reactive and recovery phases of the life cycle. The image work undertaken includes image repair, image renewal and image reinvention (see Figure 2).

How organizations can communicate their desired images
Image management is a dialogic process in which organizations and stakeholders communicate with one another (Massey, 2004). Even though this is collaborative, the organization should take the lead in constructing its image. Kennedy (2007) posed several questions the organization needs to address:

(1) Does it have an image to promote?

(2) Is this image consciously managed?

(3) Is this image managed as part of a total communications program?

(4) Are there specialized personnel or dedicated departments to coordinate image and communications activities?

Gray and Balmer (1998) argued that the corporate communication should be at the forefront of such efforts. Hutton *et al.* (2001) found that practitioners argued that managing image, together with managing reputation, should assume heightened roles within the organization. While employing tools like image advertising (Jorgensen and Isaksson, 2008) are useful, organizations ought to be exposed to a more systematic way to understand how stakeholders form images. To do so, this study draws insights from literature on impression formation. Impression formation is defined as "a cognitive process that involves analyzing and bringing together information (i.e. physical and personality characteristics, behaviors, beliefs, personal values, etc.) to form an
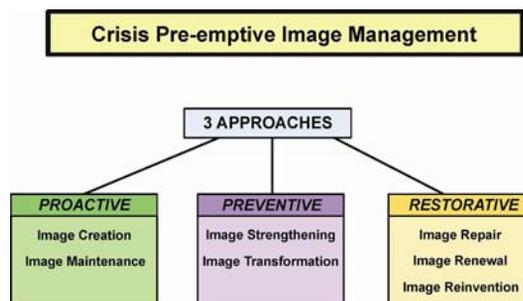
Figure 2.
Crisis pre-emptive image management

'understanding' of an individual" (Sanders, 2010, p. 148). Sanders (2010) developed a Character Impression Formation model, which has four propositions:

(1) the viewer of a TV program begins the impression-formation process by using categorical-based strategies during an initial encounter with the character;

(2) the viewer checks if one's assessment of the character is correct based on new and developing information presented in the program;

(3) if the categorization is incorrect, the viewer engages in inconsistency resolution, such as re-analysis of discrepant information, to reconcile the impression; and

(4) the viewer reconciles discrepancies by either coinciding with one's initial categorization, or basing one's impressions on an attribute-by-attribute analysis.

Traditional and social media: conduits to build positive images

If categories were formed on first impressions, even without direct contact, then the best way to help stakeholders shape first impressions would be through the media. Avraham and Ketter (2008) argued that a positive media image would build a positive image of the organization among stakeholders. Indeed, the media have been described as "image collaborators" and journalists as "image creators" (Avraham and Ketter, 2008, p. 32) who help construct reality. Much of what stakeholders know about entities, like images of a country, is through the media (Choi, 2010; Xu and Parsons, 1997).

One way organizations can build positive images through the media is through framing.

Hallahan (1999, p. 224) suggested that practitioners could operate as "frame strategists, who strive to determine how situations, attributes, choices, actions, issues and responsibility should be posed to achieve favorable objectives. Framing decisions are perhaps the most important strategic choices made . . . ".

Based on Sanders' (2010) model, practitioners can frame, first, the category of the image of the organization, accentuating on the positives. Sturges (1994) argued organizations should protect the positive images and minimize the negative images. Second, frame the attributes of the organization. Framing of attributes have to take into account the cultural context by associating the attribute with "beliefs and values, traditions and rituals, or with other cultural artifacts that people cherish" (Hallahan, 1999, p. 225). Third, frame the organization to ensure it is always in the news in a good way. To be ubiquitous helps consolidate the image in the minds of stakeholders. Fairhurst (2011) argued that the essence of framing is constructing reality. Describing it both as a science and an art, Fairhurst (2011) posited several processes at work as reality is constructed. First, framing allows the organization to control the context. Second, it allows the organization to define the situation. Third, it enables the organization to interpret uncertainty. Four, even as this facilitates the organization to design its response accordingly, organizations are exhorted to morally position themselves. Framing is analogous to telling one's story (Heath, 2004). Narrative as theory argues that as human beings, we tell stories and we live the stories that we tell (Bowen and Heath, 2007). Narratives can also be argued as social constructions of meanings with one's audience (Heath, 2004). Thus, the more positive a story the organization tells of itself, the more it fills the information vacuum (Pang, 2010), or what people get to know, of the organization.

Effective framing can be executed if organizations have strong media relations. Pang (2010) has developed a new model, called Mediating the Media, that is meant to equip practitioners to conduct media relations in a manner that aid the framing process. This model aims to provide a holistic view of how media relations can be conducted by practitioners with the primary objective of winning the journalists over by the knowledge of their work and their profession. The model posits both internal, such as journalist mindsets; journalist routines; and newsroom routines, and external influences, such as extra-media forces and media ideology, on how journalists generate content. Understanding these influences gives practitioners inroads on how they can frame messages favorable to the organization. Fortunato's (2008) study on how Duke university's corporate communication efforts to emphasize positive aspects of a negative story was instructive of how not just stakeholders can be persuaded but also how those messages influenced the larger audience.

Beyond the mainstream media, Gilpin (2010) argued that organizations can tap on blogs and micro-blogging services like twitter and Facebook. The channels used were also examined. Gilpin (2010, p. 275) found that news releases issued through the corporate website were able to project "desired facets" of the organization's image. Twitter can be dialogic, and as a peer-to-peer platform, allows for exchanges to be immediate and mutual. However, Gilpin (2010) argued that it is not a medium to use if organizations are not willing to engage in real-time dialogue. Blogs are asymmetrical and used mainly for promoting and presenting oneself.

In addition to media relations, organizations can conceivably supplement its efforts on all three platforms to help shape their images. So, what are some desirable images organizations can shape for themselves? This author has not come across any study exploring this but if parallels from studies on public figures and celebrities are any indication, the following are universally desired attributes:

- Pleasant personality and good character (Han and Ki, 2010; Washlag and Edison, 1979).

For the organization, it must not be seen as repulsive, irresponsible, and abusive (e.g. subject its workers to deplorable working conditions).

- Physically attractive (Han and Ki, 2010; Washlag and Edison, 1979).

For the organization, locating itself in a central location may work. This possibly explains why offices in central business districts in major cities generally command far higher prices than those on the outskirts. Even if it is not centrally located, it would be helpful to have an assessable location and nice working environment.

- Competent and possess expert abilities (Han and Ki, 2010; Washlag and Edison, 1979).

For the organization, this may mean being good at what it does, and regarded as a leader. Peer recognition helps. A strong financial performance, market leadership, corporate governance, coupled with visible corporate social responsibility initiatives are some of the indicators.

- Approachable and sociable (Washlag and Edison, 1979).

For the organization, this may mean being responsive to customer feedback, answering queries expeditiously and respectfully, delivering quality products at reasonable prices, and relevant to changing market needs.

Enduring image: shared image of first mention
One insight from Sanders' (2010) Character Impression Formation Model was that the final impression formed could be either a category-based or attribute-based impression. Extending this argument, this author argues that organizations should begin thinking about the images they leave in the stakeholders' minds, what this author calls enduring image. Enduring image is the shared image of first mention: When stakeholders think of the organization, what image comes to mind? This can be formed from their last experience, consistent experience, or what they know of the organization through the media.

Fairly or unfairly, after a crisis, particular images, like a gaffe or a photograph, can linger in the minds of the public. These images of first mention can subsequently serve as memory cues for crisis recall. Ho *et al.* (2011) examined this concept by applying it to five crises. They found that enduring images are formed out of spontaneity of action, are unscripted but provocative and they appeal or resonate with people at an emotional level. The images are also unexpected but symbolic. For instance, during the enduring image from the Sichuan earthquake in China in 2008 was that of Premier Wen Jiabao flying to the epicenter of the quake to visit, and encouraging the trapped children by shouting, "I am Grandpa Wen Jiabao. You will certainly pull through and be rescued" (Wang and Yu, 2008). That touched many and Premier Wen eventually became the face of the Chinese government's rescue operations. The media perpetuate this image by recalling it as a symbol of the event or as a backgrounder to other emerging events.

Even though enduring images, argued Ho *et al.* (2011), wear off in official news sources, they maintain a lingering lifespan among informal news sources. It is potent in that it functions like a symbol, which signifies through convention and shared experience. Most of all, it retains its function as prime representations of the crisis or organization even years after its engenderment. Thus, even though enduring image conveys a snapshot, it has a certain form of permanence and representativeness of the crisis. These images are prime representations in stakeholders' perception, recollection and retention of the organization's response in a given crises.

More importantly, enduring images are revisited in and by the media as prime representations of that crisis. Former BP CEO Tony Hayward's lament, "I'd like my life back" was repeatedly played back and symbolized BP's efforts after the Gulf oil spill. It also tied as the quote of the year in the Yale Book of Quotations (South China Morning Post, 2010). Ho *et al.* (2011) found that enduring images linger on long after the crises are over.

Conclusion and limitation
The call, thus, is for organizations to continually:

- *Review its image:* What is the image it conjures in the minds of stakeholders? What kinds of image does the organization want to project?

- *Reinforce its image:* Presuming the organization has a good image in the minds of stakeholders, how can it preserve that? If it does not have a good image, how can that be corrected?

- *Endear its image:* Has the organization done enough to manage and endear itself to stakeholders? Does the current image suit its stage of development, and how it wants to be profiled publicly?

It is hoped that this Crisis Pre-emptive Image Management Model will be instructive on the types of image work organizations can engage in. Since this is a conceptual paper, future study can examine if the image concepts raised apply to the real world.

Three questions remain relevant to practitioners:

(1) How soon could one change its image?
(2) What key framing strategy must one be cognizant of in the course of shaping one's image?
(3) How can the organization align its image with stakeholders?

First, before one could change its image, the more critical task is to create one's public media image. An image that is not created generally leaves an image vacuum (Abidin and Pang, 2012), and that vacuum will either be filled by stakeholders who rely on other sources to fill the vacuum, or by proxies who may share distorted views. Once a public media image is created, the organization can guide stakeholders to co-shape that image. Images created take time for organizations to communicate, and for stakeholders to accept. Anecdotally, one way to change a public media image drastically is for the organization to do something major. For instance, in bidding and winning the bid to host the 2018 World Cup for soccer, Russia hopes that this will end "frightening Cold War image" in the media (*The Straits Times, 2010*, p. A6).

Second, since there are multiple facets of an organization's image, including positives and negatives, the key is to accentuate the positives, as the stronger image and negatives as the weaker. Continual accentuation and communication of the stronger, positive image will inundate the image vacuum, leading to the representation of that as enduring image. For instance, former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown's "positive qualities" was constantly overshadowed by his short fuse (Orr, 2010, p. 3).

Third, organization can align its image with stakeholders by understanding what constitutes image congruency. Wan and Schell (2007, p. 42) found that one way to do so is by collaborating with stakeholders to form the image, one that stresses on a relationship that emphasizes the "balance between the interests of the organizations and their publics". Once an image is aligned with stakeholders' expectations, the authors found that the image congruency exerts a direct positive impact on stakeholders' attitudes and beliefs toward the organization.

As an exploratory study, this conceptual paper has offered suggestions on how organizations can manage their images across the crisis life cycle. One limitation of the study is that though the model is grounded in theoretical rigor, it needs to be validated empirically. Of the concepts raised, several are new concepts, like image strengthening, image transformation, and image reinvention. Conceptual blueprints need to be expanded on these concepts followed by practical strategies. One way to apply them would be through case studies. Case studies, which investigate "contemporary" phenomena "within its real-life context" (Yin, 1993, p. 59) are time-tested methods used in public relations (Pieczka, 2007). Intrinsic case studies, where cases are analyzed in detail, contexts examined, and activities explored (Stake, 1998), can first be embarked on. Researchers can use the insights from several cases to further examine how these

relate to theory building. Applying the method on two or more cases, Yin (1993, p. 64) argued, is an appropriate initial attempt at theory testing, with the aim of building "analytic generalizations" (Yin, 2003, p. 33) from the exploration.

In closing, beauty may be in the eyes of the beholder, but beauty is fickle. It is the organization's prerogative and mission to continually project beauty for the beholder. After all, as a veteran practitioner once said, "A good image – one that's well made and well cared for is something that stands the test of time, it is something that can survive everything – scandal, change, bad earnings" (cited in Lerbinger, 2006, p. 100).

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