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# Post-earthquake crisis communications in Taiwan: An examination of corporate advertising and strategy motives

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**Abstract** This study examines gestures, themes, message copy points and imagery, and strategy motives reflected in corporate advertising appearing in the *China Times* and *United Daily News*, two leading newspapers, in the month following the devastating Chin-Chin earthquake in Taiwan in September 1999. The study identified four possible corporate strategy motives in post-crisis corporate communications: social responsibility, communal relationship building, enlightened self-interest and impression management. A content analysis of adverts (n = 100) suggested communal relationship building drove corporate advertising endeavours. Corporate philanthropy was the most common gesture described in the adverts, and the most frequent themes and message components focused on the restoration of society. No significant differences were found between companies headquartered in Taiwan versus elsewhere, or between companies headquartered in Asia versus the West. Implications for examining crisis communications and underlying motives behind public relations communications are discussed.

**KEYWORDS:** strategy motives, crisis, advertising, earthquake, Taiwan, Chin-Chin

## CHIN-CHIN EARTHQUAKE

On 21st September, 1999, a major earthquake struck the Chin-Chin region of Taiwan. It killed 2,100 people and disrupted life in the Republic of China. The disaster was the largest tremor in Taiwan during the 20th century, measuring 7.5 on the Richter scale, and was followed by thousands of aftershocks. Taiwan's economy was devastated. A full year after the devastation, thousands of Taiwan residents did not have homes, and

the government was blamed for not taking care of victims.<sup>1</sup>

A natural disaster creates a classic crisis situation for corporations as well as governments and citizens. Interestingly, public relations researchers have paid comparatively little attention to recovery processes in natural disasters. Instead, most of their focus has been on responses to human-created crises involving potential corporate culpability or malfeasance. Moreover, almost all of the public

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relations literature focuses on *acute* or *immediate-term* responses, while longer-term efforts to communicate with important constituencies have been overlooked.

This study is an examination of how major corporations operating in Taiwan responded during the first month that followed the 921 earthquake. (The earthquake has become known as the 921 earthquake as it occurred on 21st September, 1999.) Specifically, it examines how these companies used corporate advertising to communicate with the Taiwan populace. In so doing, this study uses quantitative and qualitative content analysis to examine the themes and content of adverts as a way to understand the ostensible motives of these companies.

## **NATURE OF CRISES AND CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS**

Crises have been defined in various ways. Fearn-Banks, for example, defined a crisis as a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome that affects an organisation, company or industry, as well as its publics, products, services or good name.<sup>2,3</sup> Fink defined a crisis as a threatening situation that poses the risk of escalating in intensity, falling under close media or government scrutiny, interfering with normal operations, jeopardising organisational image, and damaging a company's bottom line.<sup>4</sup>

Several typologies of organisational crises have been suggested.<sup>5</sup> For example, a crisis can originate within or outside an organisation, and might or might not involve organisational culpability. Although most public relations case studies focus on human-created crises, natural disasters pose considerably different situations for most organisations when shaping a response.<sup>6</sup> First, natural disasters such as floods, tornadoes or typhoons impact an entire community and disrupt the normal functioning of society,

including the distribution of news and information. Secondly, organisations are not generally blamed for the natural disasters. Thus, the cautious or circumspect responses associated with organisation-centred crises are not appropriate.

Crises involving natural disasters do require organisations, particularly corporations, to anticipate their probability, analyse the organisation's vulnerability and potential consequences, and be prepared to respond. Lerbinger suggested crisis communications responses should be chosen based upon the type of the crisis.<sup>5,7</sup> Coombs and Holladay similarly studied the range of alternative replies that organisations might use, based on the characteristics of the crisis.<sup>8</sup> Fink suggested that all crises follow a four-phase cycle composed of what he labels the prodromal, acute, chronic and resolution stages.<sup>4</sup>

## **THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS**

During the acute and chronic phases of a crisis, organisations strive to restore order and illustrate how they are responding. In this sense, crises create communication opportunities for organisations. Indeed, the Chinese ideograph for 'crisis' is composed of two characters. One character represents danger and the second signifies opportunity.<sup>9</sup>

An examination of the voluminous professional public relations literature reveals considerable advice about tactics and tasks that should be employed in both anticipating and effectively responding to a crisis. However, few analysts have examined crisis responses in a broader theoretical framework.<sup>2,10,11</sup>

### **Crisis responses: Public gestures and public words**

For public relations theorists concerned with crises, the focal interest is not usually on the triggering event that precipitated a crisis, but instead on the uncertainty

created in the event's aftermath. Crises disrupt patterns of routine behaviour and relationships. When disruptive events occur, people naturally rush to restore order out of chaos.<sup>12</sup> People talk with others and seek out information to 1) understand what happened and 2) determine actions they should take.

Organisations confronting a crisis can act and talk and are judged upon their public gestures and public words.

Public gestures are actions taken by organisations. As one adage observes, 'Actions speak louder than words'. Cutlip *et al.* differentiate between actions and communications as strategies that organisations can undertake when organising a public relations programme.<sup>13</sup> Gestures can include changes in policies or procedures designed to accommodate the needs, concerns and interests of publics. Public gestures also include an organisation's outreach efforts — participation in civic affairs and offering financial, volunteer and in-kind assistance to others.

Theorists schooled in symbolic interactionism recognise the notion of the gesture as a fundamental element in the communication process. Mead defined a social act as an initial gesture, a response by another and the result. The meaning of an action does not reside solely in any one of the parts but is rooted in the resulting interaction.<sup>14,15</sup> In this vein, public relations excellence theory suggests organisations accommodate publics through their actions, not merely engage in advocacy.<sup>16,17</sup>

Publics can observe an organisation's gestures or actions directly or learn about them through communications or claims made by the organisation about its activities. *Public words* include all representations that the organisation makes about its activities in response to a crisis. Organisations, of course, use interpersonal and small group communications to carry

out gestures. By contrast, public words focus on formal representations the organisation makes to the public-at-large. Public words thus emphasise advocacy related to an organisation's actions.<sup>18</sup>

### Organisational motives in responding to crises

Some previous research has examined the process of strategic thinking in responding to crises. Bronn and Olson, for example, used conjoint analysis to predict the effects of management contact, written plans and research on decision making and concluded that the process of strategic thinking is no different in a crisis than in the conduct of routine activities.<sup>19</sup>

In strategically-planned communications efforts, organisations specify *organisational* goals that can be measured in terms of business activity (such as the resumption of services, restoration of previous sales levels, etc.) as well as *communications objectives* that can be measured as behavioural changes among an audience's knowledge, attitudes or behaviours. To attain these goals and objectives, organisations specify *communications* strategies, or broad, conceptual approaches for how goals and communications objectives are to be achieved.

Motives behind these elements in a communication programme have not been addressed very much in the public relations literature. A motive is a desire or emotion that underlies or prompts a particular action.<sup>20</sup> Motivations underlie organisational goals (such as the need for success or survival), communications objectives (such as gaining acceptance) and communications strategies (such as desires about *how* people will think about the organisation).

Strategy motives reflect organisational and personal values that are infused into the creation of communications. In this sense, these desires provide a framework or paradigm within which communicators

create strategic messages. Strategy motives can be rooted in social, political, psychological and philosophical concerns such as the pursuit of consensus, conflict avoidance, maintaining power, self-esteem or moral principle. Strategy motives can be stated explicitly by an organisation (such as to be the leader in the field) or inferred by audiences.

Strategy motives are important because perceptions about motives often shape the attributions people make about an organisation and the reasons that it engages in particular activities. Attributions made by audiences can be either consistent or inconsistent with an organisation's actual motive.<sup>21,22</sup> Sallot, for example, demonstrated that people's perceptions about altruistic versus self-serving motives by an organisation affects the acceptance of an organisation's message.<sup>23</sup>

This study focused on how four possible motives common in public relations (but not necessarily recognised in the literature as motives *per se*) are manifested in the post-earthquake responses of corporations in Taiwan. Two of these focus on values some theorists argue *ought* to underlie public relations efforts: social responsibility and relationship building. Two others involve motives commonly cited as reasons *why* organisations engage in public relations: enlightened self-interest and impression management. This study juxtaposed these four notions as alternative explanations for organisational actions in the aftermath of the earthquake — as a preliminary effort to better understand the influence of organisational motives.

*Social responsibility* is grounded in the premise that organisations act as public citizens and thus have an obligation to contribute to society. Organisations motivated by social responsibility genuinely think that good corporate citizens should minimise social costs and maximise benefits that accrue to others. Corporations are expected to act ethically — in other words, within a society's accepted value systems. Corporations are also expected to go beyond merely complying with the law and providing jobs, goods or services.<sup>24</sup> Corporate social responsibility also implies that a part of citizenship involves philanthropy. In a social responsibility context, however, such generosity is a societal obligation, not merely a marketing or PR ploy.<sup>25</sup>

Social responsibility is important because it imbues an organisation with legitimacy.<sup>26–31</sup> Consumers have been shown to prefer purchasing products from socially responsible companies; companies with strong social records also perform better financially in the long run than those that behave irresponsibly.<sup>32</sup>

*Relationship building.* Organisations also can strive to become closer to audiences and to demonstrate a commonality of interests and values as a means to attain organisational goals. Relationship building, as defined here, builds upon theorising among scholars that organisational–public relationships should be the basis for managing and studying public relations.<sup>33</sup> Researchers in the USA and Asia have identified various metrics for measuring relationship quality and

**Table 1:** Comparison of characteristics of four organisational strategy motives

Strategy motives	Social responsibility	Relationship building	Enlightened self-interest	Impression management
Target	Society in general	Individuals in society	Particular publics	Any audience
Benefit orientation	Altruistic	Altruistic	Mixed motive	Self-interest
Exchanges/reciprocity	Not expected	Not expected	Expected	Expected
Temporal orientation	Longest term	Long term	Moderate term	Shortest term
Ethical standard	High	High	Moderate	Low

retention — including trust, satisfaction, commitment, assessments of control mutuality (perceived power sharing), community involvement and reputation.<sup>34–38</sup>

Hon and Grunig argue that establishing communal relationships is central to relationship building in public relations.<sup>35</sup> The authors draw upon the work of psychologists Clark and Mills,<sup>39</sup> who employed the term ‘communal relationship’ to describe the meaning that one party assigns to the welfare of another party. Communal relationships strive for stability and harmony and demonstrate compassion. People in communal relationships are less likely to behave in ways that create negative consequences for others. Similarly, Kim<sup>37</sup> and Ledingham and Bruning<sup>38</sup> incorporated measures of an organisation’s *community involvement* as key variables in measuring organisation–public relationships. Examining relationship building as a motive is consistent with the argument that satisfaction evolves over time,<sup>40</sup> with principles used in relationship marketing,<sup>37</sup> and with the growing recognition of community as a central concept in public relations.<sup>41–46</sup>

*Enlightened self-interest.* This approach originated from the notion of *social investing*, which suggests that financial benefits accrue to organisations from contributing to society.<sup>47–50</sup> Organisations motivated by enlightened self-interest invest in society as a *quid pro quo* because benefits can accrue to stockholders and owners. Gestures such as corporate philanthropy are considered necessary in order to be competitive in the marketplace or can return handsome profits, and thus are undertaken for pragmatic reasons unrelated to altruistic social responsibility or communal relationship building.

Enlightened self-interest is often associated with *strategic philanthropy* and *new corporate philanthropy*, where organisations seek a return on charitable-

giving activities by linking them to promotional activities.<sup>51</sup> Organisations motivated by economic self-interest thus have mixed motives and strive to demonstrate a commitment to social responsibility while also enhancing their market positions.<sup>52</sup> In other words, enlightened self-interest focuses largely on *exchange relationships*, versus communal relationships where no payback is expected.<sup>35</sup> Importantly, enlightened self-interest can be pursued ethically.

*Impression management.* A final strategy motive involves organisations’ uses of gestures and words merely to enhance their reputations so that people will view them favourably. Organisations thus are motivated by concerns about their appearances. This is the shallowest and most cynical view of public relations efforts — albeit one popular among PR’s critics. Corporate reputation can be as defined as the generalised evaluation of an organisation as a whole by its stakeholders or the public at large.<sup>53</sup> Reputation is an intangible asset that provides competitive advantages.<sup>54,55</sup>

Impression management theory stems from the interpersonal communication literature and suggests that social actors purposefully regulate their behaviour in order to create a particular impression on others.<sup>56</sup> Goffman used a dramatic metaphor to compare life to a theatre in which social actors routinely engaged in presenting themselves to others, and where their behaviours rooted in internalised norms and demands for self-identification.<sup>57</sup> In an organisational context, impression management involves a social drama in which organisations pragmatically and deliberately engage in particular actions and regulate information and imagery purposefully in the organisation’s best interests or to achieve organisational goals.<sup>58,59</sup> Impression management focuses exclusively on strategic self-interest (but which also can be a basis for moral actions).<sup>47</sup>

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on this conceptualisation, this study investigated how corporations in Taiwan communicated with the general public in the aftermath of the Chin-Chin earthquake of 1999.

Corporate advertising was selected because it represents one of the best ways to examine actual artefacts of corporate communication efforts. Corporate advertising, also called institutional advertising, focuses on a company's policies, functions, facilities, objectives, ideas and standards. Its purpose, however, is not merely to sell the company's products or services directly but to enhance public perception of the sponsor, advocate a company policy or position, or explain a company's action.<sup>60</sup>

Paid advertising has generally been overlooked as a public relations tool, particularly in crisis communications. Although news pronouncements and news releases are used extensively during the acute stage of a crisis, advertising enables organisations to communicate on a sustained and controlled basis. During the chronic or recovery phase of a crisis, organisations can use repetitive adverts to get their ideas across and to say exactly what they wanted to say. By comparison, news pronouncements are more ephemeral and subject to control by editorial gatekeepers who determine how messages are delivered — if at all. Thus, corporate advertisements were believed to be the most appropriate, useful and readily available texts to analyse in this study.

An organisation's public gestures or actions frequently provide the basis or content for the public words contained in advertising. Advertising themes or key messages summarising organisational actions provide the overall organising idea for adverts and are supported, according to Wilcox, by copy points or individual facts that can appear in headlines, text or visual

images or other artwork.<sup>61</sup>

Specifically, this study focused on four key research questions:

- R1. What *gestures* were made by corporations in Taiwan in response to the earthquake?
- R2. What were the communication *themes* used by corporations in their post-earthquake communication adverts?
- R3. What *message copy points* and *visual images* were used?
- R4. How did each corporate advert suggest one or more of the four organisational *strategy motives* outlined above?

In addition, this study recognised that all corporations are not alike, and that consumer responses might differ based on the industry or the country of origin of the sponsor. No specific differences were hypothesised about industry effects, but it was believed that country where a company was headquartered might impact strategies, based on potentially differential responses from the public. This assumption was based on the extensive marketing literature pertaining to country-of-origin effects showing a bias in favour of domestic products.<sup>62-64</sup> Thus the study also asked:

- R5. Were there any differences in the use of strategies/motives among organisations based on *industry type* or *country of headquarters* (Taiwan vs non-Taiwan or Eastern vs Western)?

## METHOD

### Sample

Corporate adverts appearing in the *United Daily News* and the *China Times* in Taiwan were chosen as the basis for this study. These papers are published by the two major newspaper groups in Taiwan and are among 20 national newspapers in the market. Both groups have strong financial and political footholds in Taiwan, and the daily circulations of these newspapers both exceed 1 million copies. Despite increased

competition, these two newspapers were considered the most popular and credible print media in Taiwan.

To be included in the sample, adverts needed to 1) include content other than routine product information that might have appeared prior to or subsequent to the earthquake, and 2) referred directly or indirectly to the recent devastation. Ordinary product adverts and institutional messages from non-corporate entities were ignored.

Adverts were collected from library microfilm collections and covered a one month period following the 921 Chin-Chin Earthquake from 22nd September to 21st October, 1999. Altogether, 100 unique corporate adverts from 83 companies appeared in the two newspapers, excluding duplicate adverts. Of the adverts studied, half were from companies headquartered in Taiwan (49 adverts). The remaining advert sponsors were from companies headquartered around the world, including the USA (19), Europe (6), Japan (5) and Hong Kong (1), plus one US–Taiwan joint venture (1).

### Operationalisations

The 100 adverts that met the selection criteria were content analysed following standard procedures associated with quantitative and qualitative content analysis methods.<sup>65,66</sup> Adverts were reviewed for both manifest (directly indicated) and latent (implied) content.

The analysed elements were defined as follows and, depending on the circumstances, served as the units of analysis.

- gestures: any action taken by the organisation to respond to the earthquake, including but not limited to efforts to restore society, help victims, advocate the public good or serve customers
- themes: the predominant single idea or key message communicated in each advertisement

- message copy points and imagery: copy points were defined as facts, ideas or claims that supported the dominant theme. These could either denote or connote meaning. These were separately analysed based on whether they appeared in the headline (the large type designed to attract attention) or the body copy (any block of text explaining the headline)
- visual imagery was analysed as message elements used to illustrate, dramatise or reinforce gestures. Visual images included pictures, graphics and signs (icons, indexes, and symbols, but not company logos or logotypes used merely as a signature element)
- strategy motive: each advert was also classified according to the four strategy motives outlined above. To be classified as primarily reflecting a particular strategy motive, the advert must have primarily focused on one of the following applicable concepts:
  - social responsibility: obligation to society, including but not limited to altruistic charity and philanthropy
  - communal relationships: concern for people, coupled with an effort to communicate an affinity or common identity
  - enlightened self-interest: desire for continuing to serve people and society over the long-term, but without any sense of obligation to society or communality implied
  - impression management: focus on the corporation's own actions suggesting its effectiveness or nobleness without suggesting any of the concepts outlined above.

### Coding and reliability

All adverts were coded based on the above criteria by counting the frequency of occurrence of gestures, themes, copy points and images and strategy motives. An extensive coding book was constructed following a pretest of the sample, including underlying terms that served as indicators of the broader concepts explained above. Thematic analysis and

classification of motives required particular care since these primarily involved judgments about latent content.

The senior author, who speaks Chinese and English fluently, performed all coding work. To ensure reliability, a second coder was enlisted to validate the coding work by independently coding 25 of the 100 adverts. The second coder, a Taiwan graduate student, was briefed about the constructs under investigation but was blind to possible anticipated outcomes. The two coders concurred in 88 per cent of all judgments, suggesting adequate reliability.

## FINDINGS

### Gestures

R1 examined the organisational gestures or concrete actions taken to respond to the earthquake. In total, 117 mentions of gestures occurred in the 100 adverts. The most frequent gestures involved direct company contributions (42 companies) and employee salary donations (30 companies). Some 21 adverts offered special business-related services or in-kind contributions. Examples: AT&T provided free wiring services in damaged areas. Honda offered discounted automobile repairs. Several banks provided low-interest housing programmes.

Other companies donated supplies or materials to damaged areas (13), organised mechanisms for the public to contribute money (10), offered search services (10), provided discounts (8), set up rescue centres (8), offered products to charities (6) or entered into cooperative programmes with other institutions, such as a supermarket that worked with an airline to import water (5). Less frequent activities included: in-kind contributions of goods for charity sales (5), discounts on products (5), employee volunteer programmes to deliver necessities (3), and special

programmes related to long-term care for the elderly and orphans (3).

In 29 adverts corporations featured gestures directed solely to customers who had suffered damage. For example, Opel offered discount repairs only to its car owners. Some banks provided low-interest housing loans only for existing borrowers. Companies also focused on customers by creating emergency centres or by providing other direct mechanisms to access services (15 adverts). Ten adverts provided incentives for the general public to make contributions in tandem with purchasing products or services. One internet company, for example, marketed free web access in exchange for a contribution to charity.

### Themes

R2 examined the overall concepts or key messages contained in the post-earthquake corporate advertising. To do so, a single thematic message was identified for each ad. Many adverts, however, prominently featured secondary themes as well, so both predominant and secondary themes were included in the analysis. Table 2 shows the 100 predominant themes identified, as well as secondary themes found in 57 of the 100 adverts. In general, secondary themes paralleled the predominant themes in frequency of occurrence.

The key message in more than half of the adverts focused on what companies were doing to restore Taiwan society and/or help victims (contained in 56 adverts, including 37 adverts where this idea was the predominant theme). In 24 adverts, corporations also leveraged their own efforts and advertising expenditures to encourage the populace to help victims. Advertising also was used to express sorrow, soothe concerns and encourage the restoration of Taiwan (11). One advert primarily appealed for more help from the government, and one advert thanked other institutions for their help.

**Table 2:** Themes of the 100 corporate adverts responding to 921 Chin-Chin earthquake

Theme	Total frequency	Predominant theme	Secondary theme
Organisation efforts to restore society/rebuild homes/help victims	56	36	19
Encourage contributions from others	24	13	11
Corporate efforts to support victims as well as customers	15	10	5
Show general concern/sorrow	13	9	4
Soothe concerns, express optimism	12	11	1
Promote customer recovery services	11	6	5
Sell products/promote company services	10	6	4
Build image	8	3	5
Combination of product promotion and relief gestures	10	6	4
Political appeal for help	1	1	0
Express appreciation to relief organisations	1	1	0
Total	157	100	57

Notably, advertising that featured corporate messages were used for product promotion purposes to a relatively small degree. Fifteen adverts simply explained corporate efforts to help victims and customers, featuring the availability and speed of service. Only 11 adverts promoted services related to the earthquake or attempted to promote company services in general. Eight adverts appeared to be simply corporate reputation efforts, although only three of these engaged in corporate image building as the prominent theme.

**Message copy points and imagery**

R3 investigated the specific message copy points used in headlines and body copy, as well as visual images. As would be expected because these facts, claims and copy points provided proofs for themes, the overall tone and approach in main messages were generally consistent with the emphasis placed on explaining corporate efforts to restore society, encouraging public support and providing encouragement to the populace.

All but two adverts included headlines. Importantly, 28 of the headlines used emotional appeals involving either the expression of sorrow for the tragedy (15 adverts) or optimism for the future (13

adverts). Some 24 headlines were more direct in explaining company efforts to respond. Examples included: ‘Sam Shung Insurance’s 0921 Rescuing Actions’, ‘Kao-Tai Group Donated NTD 150 million to Help Restore Society’, and ‘[US] Georgia [Insurance] Paid [an] Extra 25 per cent for Victims’.

Whereas headlines generally featured only one concept, the body texts of the adverts contained 198 unique ideas and generally were used to support the headline statements. Again, body texts explained corporate gestures (69 adverts), expressed sorrow (39 adverts), encouraged contributions (25 adverts), informed customers about service efforts (24 adverts) and promoted company products or services (19 adverts). Less frequent copy points included: appreciation to others for their relief efforts, restatements of gestures previously explained in the same ad, reminders about personal safety, contact information about where to obtain help and efforts to help employees who were victims.

Visual images were important because they allowed people to process communications quickly, dramatised or explained the main themes of the adverts, and enhanced persuasion. Visual images were both concrete and abstract. Concrete

illustrations that depicted reality appeared in only one-quarter of the advert messages. Of these, 12 featured regular product photos or illustrations. Others included scenes of rescue actions, damaged houses, charitable work and maps or outlines of Taiwan. Importantly, over half of the adverts featured *abstract* symbolism that required inferences by the readers. The most frequent category of abstract symbols communicated hope or encouragement. These ideas appeared 16 times and included sunrises (representing a new dawn/new start) and yellow belts (a classical symbol of hope from an old Chinese tale). Corporate symbols (including company-related icons of various sorts, exclusive of logos and logotypes) were the next most prevalent visual device and appeared in only 11 adverts. Other symbols implied unity (such as holding hands, in nine adverts) or aid (such as water and medicines, in eight adverts). Four adverts featured abstract images that suggested the destructive power of the quake (such as cracked pavement on roads).

### Strategy motives

R4 was the main focus of the study and sought to identify possible motives of the advert sponsors.

In analysing all 100 adverts, fully half of all the corporate messages (51 adverts) could be best classified as engaged in communal relationship building. The messages contained in 32 other adverts suggested that the corporations were driven by enlightened self-interest, while 17 adverts were primarily engaged in impression management. No adverts were found that suggested purely a social responsibility approach.

Communal relationship building involved seeking long-term harmony as well as stabilising relationships between the advert sponsors and people, not merely rebuilding the damaged infrastructure.

'We're all in it together' and 'We must work together toward a common goal' were central ideas related to the communal theme. Adverts exemplifying a communal approach included one by Aetna Insurance that emphasised the company's effort to provide company jobs for victims. Mitsubishi Motors donated necessities and automobile parts and urged the general public to contribute. An advert for Ericsson offered telecommunications equipment in damaged areas and featured the headline, 'Let them hear the voice they expect most; let them get the power they need most'. Volvo similarly established a programme to support the elderly who lost their support families by committing NTD 5,000 per month to a special fund and used caressing hands as a visual to express commonality. (Note: Except for its use of the caring graphics, this Volvo advert came the closest to depicting a purely social responsibility approach.)

A major feature of enlightened self-interest is its mixed-motive approach that looked to provide for both the society's welfare and corporate profitability. Among the 22 adverts in this category, China Securities, a Taiwan bank, highlighted its employees' salary contributions and announced donation of 1 per cent of business income to victims, and a relief fund programme only for company clients. Taiwan EVA Airline said the company would donate NTD 100 for each airline ticket sold. Another strategy of enlightened self-interest adverts combined corporate efforts and product information. For example, Ford expressed genuine encouragement for the future in an advert that also devoted prominent space in its adverts to photos and details about its cars.

The 17 adverts engaging in impression management focused primarily on customers with whom the corporation had a direct relationship. US Georgia Insurance emphasised its customer service acumen in order to gain a favourable impression

among customers and prospective customers. The *Chow-Lien-Ju* magazine for children chose to spend advertising dollars to express its concern for victims. The only other featured gesture was to offer an immediate replacement for undelivered subscriptions.

**Differences in strategy motives among advert sponsors**

R5 sought to explain any differences in motives based upon the corporation’s industry and country of headquarters.

*Industry differences.* Twenty-six industries and 83 companies were represented in the sample. Of these, automobile companies represented the largest industry segment (representing 16 adverts from ten companies). Interestingly, auto company adverts included 12 adverts that promoted communal relationships and only four adverts that embraced an enlightened self-interest strategy. No adverts relied upon purely impression management. By contrast, the insurance industry, the second largest category of advertisers, combined approaches with four communal, seven enlightened self-interest and four impression-management adverts. Banking represented the third largest category of message sponsors and blended communal (four adverts) and enlightened self-interest (seven adverts) approaches. The greater emphasis on enlightened self-interest by financial services firms reflects the fact

these organisations needed to provide critical services (claims processing, loans, deposit services) to customers in the aftermath of the disaster. The remaining 23 categories of businesses showed no particularly notable patterns, although four advertisers representing media organisations all focused on the communal approach.

*Country of headquarters.* Table 3 summarises the frequencies for the three approaches used by corporations based upon the countries where the companies were headquartered. Taiwan-based companies, which accounted for 57 of the adverts in total, used communal approaches in 30 adverts, enlightened self-interest in 17 adverts and impression management in ten adverts. By contrast, non-Taiwan companies used communal approaches in 20 adverts, enlightened self-interest in 14 adverts and impression management approaches in seven adverts. A chi-square test of expected frequencies detected no statistically significant differences ( $\chi^2 = 1.72, p \leq .63$ ). Roughly the same distribution is evident when approaches are compared based on companies headquartered in Asian and firms headquartered elsewhere in the world ( $\chi^2 = 2.62, p \leq .45, n.s.$ ).

**DISCUSSION**

By analysing corporate advertising in the aftermath of the 921 Chin-Chin

**Table 3:** Strategy motives of corporate advertisers, by sponsor’s country of headquarters

	Total Adverts	Asian				Western		
		Taiwan	Japan	Hong Kong	Total	USA	Europe	Total
Relationship building	50	30	5	0	35	12	3	15
Enlightened self-interest	31	17	3	0	20	7	4	11
Impression management	17	10	1	1	12	5	0	5

N = 98. Two adverts from a US–Taiwan joint venture are excluded from the calculation. Social responsibility is omitted due to lack of observations.

earthquake in Taiwan, this study examined how corporations responded to the crisis, both in terms of their public gestures and public words. Evidence supported relationship building, enlightened self-interest and impression management as strategy motives used by corporations in their public relations response.

One clear implication of the study is that crises are triggering events that create the need for relationships and community — an aspect of relationship theory not addressed to date in the literature. Crises create uncertainty in a society, whose members seek out information and interaction with others. People confronting adversity develop close bonds as they empathise and identify with one another, and become dependent upon others to restore a sense of continuity in their lives. The occurrence of the earthquake created a common problem in Taiwan's society. Some people were injured or lost families; others suffered physical anguish or property damage. Hence, corporate communications addressing the restoration of society became highly communal in their orientation. This is a phenomenon that probably is universal, not limited to Taiwan.

Although crises might prompt people in adverse situations to come together, an important alternative explanation exists for the strong communal orientation of the adverts in this study. Various researchers have pointed to the highly collective culture found in Asia compared to many Western countries.<sup>67-69</sup> In Asia, a disaster might be expected to only *intensify* the importance of collectivism. Even in highly individualistic (versus collectivist) cultures, however, people seek comfort from others in the wake of disasters. In European and American cultures, for example, various writers have addressed the tension that exists between wanting to be an individual and wanting to be a part of a community. In the public relations arena, the fostering of

relationships — whether defined as community,<sup>41</sup> communal relationships<sup>35</sup> or collectivism<sup>42</sup> — has emerged as a central theme.

The restoration of Taiwan society, the rebuilding of homes, and the rescue of victims provided a common goal for both corporations and the public at large to come together, despite differences that might have otherwise separated them. Corporations clearly saw themselves as members of a collectivity — and did not view their role in isolation, as critics sometimes contend. Indeed, 42 adverts from the corporations included appeals for help from others and 30 adverts explained how employees were providing financial help.

A second important conclusion is the need for public relations theorists to consider more fully the role of corporate advertising in general, and particularly the role of corporate advertising as a tool that can be effective in crises. This case study suggests that advertising can become an important tool in maintaining ongoing relationships with key constituents, although it is doubtful that any of the companies whose work was examined here actually anticipated the earthquake or the actions that they would take in its aftermath. They undoubtedly reacted quickly. Crisis planners need to consider the longer-term need to communicate effectively for a sustained period with constituencies affected by a crisis — not just focus on effective media relations or online responses in the short term. Advertising can be an important tool that provides both control and continuity. But to be effective, adverts must reflect the cultures and values of a society.<sup>70,71</sup>

A third important issue raised by this study involves the strategies pursued by multinational corporations in crisis responses — an aspect of crisis communications not examined extensively. The fact that no significant differences

were found in the approaches used by Taiwan and non-Taiwan companies, or between corporations based in Asia versus elsewhere in the world, merits further investigation. Theoretically, home-based companies would be expected to be more concerned with social responsibility and communal relationships, and others might be driven more by enlightened self-interest or impression management. Among this admittedly small sample, however, no statistically significant differences were detected. In part, the similarities might be explained by the fact that many of the messages created for non-Taiwan companies were probably produced by Taiwan communications professionals, who either shared those values or were intuitively or consciously guided by community-building motives. Future research needs to examine subtle differences in crisis responses among companies operating across cultures.

Finally, this study advanced theorising in public relations by pointing to the importance of motives in understanding public relations communications. The four concepts examined here represent alternative, sometimes contradictory motives that have all been suggested as foundation for public relations practice. Future research needs to examine the nature of strategy motives and to identify possible alternative approaches to understanding how values and motives shape public relations plans.

Importantly, the four strategy motives identified in this study are rooted in quite different theoretical bases for explaining public relations. Social responsibility is largely a political concept rooted in normative notions of power and citizenship. Relationship building is a sociopsychological approach that focuses on how organisations and people relate to one another. Enlightened self-interest assumes an economic perspective that focuses mostly on exchanges between

organisations and its publics. Impression management is a communications-based explanation for organisational actions that put a premium on mere appearances.

Although no evidence for purely social responsibility motives was found in this study, such a finding is not surprising in light of the extraordinary circumstances surrounding a natural disaster. One explanation might be that social responsibility concerns were simply overpowered by the broader appeal of relationship- or community-building, or were subsumed by it. Future studies need to discriminate more specifically between the two approaches in both crisis and non-crisis contexts — and examine more broadly these alternative public relations motives at both the organisational and practitioner levels of analysis. Meanwhile, this study suggests that different motives, in fact, can be evidenced in public relations practice.

These findings suggest that practitioners should give more thought to contingency planning for natural disasters and crises. Practitioners need to look beyond narrowly defined, quick organisational responses and focus on the psychological impact of crises. Affected constituencies need to make sense of crisis events and to feel connected to others at a time of loss. Organisations that can genuinely empathise with others will undoubtedly relate more effectively to them in crises.

Similarly, longer-term planning horizons are required in crisis planning. Although crisis news can quickly drop from public view, the vestiges of a disaster or crisis linger. Practitioners should review extant crisis plans to anticipate how ongoing communications might be required during the chronic — versus acute — recovery period. Preliminary consideration might even be given to creative approaches, although message specifics will depend on the particular situation. The potential costs of ongoing

communication might also be included in contingency plans — if only to illustrate the true costs to organisations of crises or disasters that otherwise might be avoided.

Finally, practitioners should become conscious of their own strategy motives. The four alternative motives suggested here represent trade-offs between PR as an effort to act in a socially responsible manner, to build relationships, to exploit organisational self-interests, or to merely manage public perceptions. Understanding these underlying motives can help hone the focus of public relations messages — and help practitioners be honest to themselves and to others.

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