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# Negotiation and Conflict Management: Two Valuable Tools in the Public Relations Toolbox

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## Keywords

symmetrical public relations, strategic decision-making, communication behavior of organizations, ethical public relations, behavior of publics, conflict management

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## Abstract

This introductory essay summarizes my research and theorizing over more than 50 years about the nature of public relations, how and why it is practiced in different ways, and how it can be practiced most effectively and ethically. I have concluded that public relations will be most ethical and have the most value for publics, organizations, and society when the function is involved in the strategic management processes of organizations and is practiced with a symmetrical approach rather than a purely asymmetrical approach. Some scholars have criticized this approach, and I discuss and respond to their critiques. The essay also addresses the role of negotiation and conflict management in public relations and explains how public relations can help manage organization-public conflict by steering organizations toward a symmetrical resolution of conflicts and away from the conflicts that eventually occur when organizations engage in one-way, asymmetrical, and unethical communication strategies

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Public relations (or strategic communication, if you prefer) is probably the largest communication profession in the world at this time. I use the term *professional* here to mean a communicator who is employed by someone or paid a salary or other compensation to provide services to an organization or client—as opposed to the everyday formal or informal communication activities of nearly every human being. Fifteen years ago, for example, Toni Muzi Falconi (2006), an Italian public relations expert, estimated that there were between 2.3 and 4.5 million public relations practitioners in the world. This number has continued to grow. For example, the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021) predicts an 11 percent annual increase in the number of PR specialists in the United States from 2020 to 2030. With the decline of traditional media and in the number of journalists in the world, public relations practitioners produce a huge amount of the information that most people have access to about the organizations and institutions that govern their lives, employ them, provide essential products and services, and produce economic externalities such as pollution, discrimination, or inequality. At the same time, few people have a clear understanding of public relations, and most of them distrust its practitioners and believe its practice is a negative force in society.

Public relations has its own body of knowledge, but its scholars and practitioners also use the theories and techniques of many of the other communication subdisciplines—such as journalism, rhetoric, persuasion and attitude change, advertising, organizational communication, interpersonal communication, health communication, risk communication, and intercultural communication. Likewise, scholars and practitioners often use theories from management, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and political science. Because public relations provides a major employment opportunity, it attracts many students of the social sciences, humanities, and communication as well as those who have formally studied public relations. It is human nature for people to apply what they know to the work they do, which means that they do many things and are guided by many theories when they work in public relations.

As a result, there is much confusion, debate, and disagreement about what public relations is, how it should be practiced, what it contributes both to employers and to society, or what harms it causes. When I began to study and practice public relations 50 years ago, it was widely assumed to be a form of applied journalism (if it was viewed as a good thing) or a form of manipulative advocacy (if it was viewed as a bad thing). In either case, public relations was understood to be an asymmetrical diffusion of either informative or persuasive messages from organizations to poorly defined *audiences*.

In the late 1960s, I spent two years in Colombia studying the economic decision-making processes of both large landowners (*latifundistas*) and peasant farmers (*minifundistas*). I also researched how both groups used information from media and public relations sources. I spent many hours interviewing large farmers on their farms or in their offices in Bogotá and Cali and then more hours walking down mule trails to interview peasant farmers. This listening experience taught me two things. First, most of the expert information from agricultural organizations, which was supposed to persuade the farmers to be more modern or productive, had little relevance for them and was mostly ignored. Communication had to be two-way for it to be effective (i.e., listening before telling). Second, I came to understand both sides of the debate over whether land should be expropriated from large farms and redistributed to peasants. The conflict over landownership could not be resolved by one side winning the argument. The conflict had to be managed with the help of what I later came to call symmetrical communication.

In 1969, I began teaching public relations at the University of Maryland, and I expanded my research from understanding the communication behavior of publics to understanding how and why organizations communicate as they do through public relations. I conceptualized the *how* part of this research question by identifying concepts that contrasted one-way and two-way communication and asymmetrical and symmetrical communication—i.e., both the direction and purpose of public relations. Eventually, I synthesized these concepts into what I called four models of public relations—four typical ways in which organizations practiced public relations (engaged in public relations behavior). Two of these models were one-way: press agency and public information. The other two were both two-way, but they differed in whether they were asymmetrical or symmetrical—designed to benefit only the organization or to benefit both the organization and its stakeholder publics.

After many years of research, reflection, and debate, I moved beyond this admittedly oversimplified typology and conceptualized public relations behaviors into combinations of four dimensions: one-way to two-way, asymmetrical to symmetrical, mediated to interpersonal, and unethical to ethical. This was my way of understanding what public relations is. The answer was that it is many things. Some types of public relations are worth emulating and teaching; others are not. Also, some types of public relations are effective and others are not. Effective, in my mind, meant that public relations activities benefit publics and society as well as the organizations doing or paying for the public relations work. Public relations has value for all parties involved, therefore, when public relations professionals successfully cultivate relationships among organizations and publics.

These benefits to publics, organizations, and society, I concluded, can be achieved most often through public relations that uses both one-way and two-way communication at different times but favors two-way communication. It also can be achieved through a judicious combination of symmetrical and asymmetrical communication, but favors symmetrical communication. It also uses both mediated and interpersonal communication, but strives to include listening in both forms. Finally, public relations should be ethical, which I believe can be achieved most easily through symmetrical public relations although it also can be done with asymmetrical public relations.

The *why* part of my research on the public relations behavior of organizations was difficult to answer. We researched the effect of organizational structures, environments, culture, power, and worldviews. We looked at pressure from activist groups. We examined the professionalism, knowledge, schemas and worldviews, gender, and power of public relations practitioners. Most of these research paths came to dead ends. Ultimately, the best explanations of public relations behavior were the knowledge and professionalism of the public relations practitioners and the worldview and expectations of the senior managers or clients who hired them, as well as their respect for gender, racial, and cultural diversity of the practitioners.

In a nutshell, my colleagues, students, and I have concluded that public relations will be most ethical and have the most value for publics, organizations, and society when the function is involved in the strategic management processes of organizations. In that role, public relations can listen to publics to understand the problems they expect an organization to solve, as well as the problems created for publics when management makes irresponsible decisions—thus providing publics (and society of which they are a part) a voice in management decision-making. In a strategic management role, public relations also can help to manage organization-public conflict by steering organizations toward a symmetrical resolution of conflicts and away from the conflicts that eventually occur when organizations engage in one-way, asymmetrical, and unethical communication strategies.

My conclusion that a symmetrical approach to public relations is both more ethical and effective than a purely asymmetrical approach has generated a great deal of discussion, argument, and even condemnation. Some scholars believe symmetrical public relations is idealistic, utopian, and rarely, if ever, practiced. These critics mistakenly believe that I have said that symmetrical public

relations always produces harmony and consensus. Clearly, that rarely happens. Others believe that symmetrical public relations is always accommodative—that it empowers publics too much, especially undesirable or even evil publics. Of course, pure accommodation would be asymmetrical rather than symmetrical—always favoring publics at the expense of organizations. Others believe that symmetrical public relations is entirely organization centered—aimed at neutralizing the power of publics by giving the impression of symmetry without ever changing organizational behavior. If that were the case, public relations would be practicing a pseudo-symmetrical model, not an actual one.

Perhaps the most avid criticism of symmetrical public relations has come from defenders of persuasion, which obviously has been a core concept of communication and rhetoric for centuries. These critics make a valid point that advocacy is an integral part of public relations; and, I would add, to symmetrical as well as asymmetrical public relations. Supporters of persuasion argue that a responsible advocate remains open to the interests of the target of persuasion and does not advocate for ideas or behaviors that injure the other party. To this, I would add that the persuader also must remain open to the ideas of the other and be willing to change, which makes self-persuasion a part of symmetrical public relations. There are several ways to describe the interaction of advocacy and persuasion in a symmetrical model, such as collaborative advocacy (Spicer, 1997), collaborative antagonism (Raiffa, 1982), Noether's theory of conservation and change (Sha, 2004), and agonism (conflicts and confrontations among rivals rather than enemies) (Davidson, 2016). The crucial part of these concepts for symmetrical public relations is that persuaders (public relations professionals) respect their organization's rivals and often act as advocates for publics as well as for the organizations that employ them.

The work of public relations professionals today is dominated by digital media, including social media, online news media, web pages, email, blogs, and podcasts. At one time, I believed that digital media would make symmetrical communication inevitable because powerful organizations would not be able to control the information flowing to their publics. With the internet, people would be able to get information from multiple sources, making it essentially impossible for organizations to lie to them or misrepresent their behaviors. To some extent, I still believe this is true. However, digital media also have made it possible for publics and the organizations they support or oppose to segment themselves into virtual tribes and to reinforce one another with messages that support their pre-existing ideas and behaviors and to foment conspiratorial thinking. The internet has evolved from a free marketplace of ideas to a free marketplace of misinformation (which is unintentional) and disinformation (which is intentional). Public relations practitioners are tempted to take advantage of this dark side of the internet if their aim is to asymmetrically represent their organizations or clients. Doing so, however, accelerates the amount of conflict in society. Symmetrical practitioners, on the other hand must find ways to use digital communication to manage conflict while others take actions that accelerate it.

This brings us to the theme of this special issue: the role of negotiation and conflict management in public relations. The toolbox of public relations is well stocked with both asymmetrical and symmetrical strategies and techniques. Many critical scholars have pointed out that there are far more asymmetrical tools in this toolbox than symmetrical. However, both my values and my research on public relations have led me and others to search for and test symmetrical tools. The concept of symmetrical public relations is a broad one that allows a great deal of theoretical and practical space for its implementation. The only requirement for symmetrical public relations is that it provides both organizations and publics an opportunity to have their voices heard and their problems solved.

My colleagues and I have emphasized research on publics and the development of an organizational infrastructure for listening to them as perhaps the most important symmetrical tools in public relations. In our research on organization-public relationships, we also have identified a

number of symmetrical strategies for cultivating relationships—several of them derived from theories of conflict management. In addition, in the last 10 years, a large number of public relations scholars have embraced theories of dialogical communication, which are symmetrical tools even though most of these theories require more stringent conditions for dialogue to take place than does the broader two-way symmetrical model.

Our first foray into conflict management as a symmetrical public relations strategy used the theories of the Harvard Negotiation Project as a source of ideas (*Getting to Yes* and *Getting Together*). In his doctoral dissertation at the University of Maryland in 1999, Kenneth Plowman integrated negotiation and conflict management styles into the symmetrical model, and with William Griggs and Yi-Hui Huang elaborated on this integrated model in the first *Handbook of Public Relations* in 2001. Lastly, in 2018, Lan Ni, Qi Wang, and Bey-Ling Sha made conflict management a central concept in their book *Intercultural Public relations: Theories for Managing Relationships and Conflicts with Strategic Publics*. Much research needs to be done, however, to make conflict management a relevant tool for public relations professionals.

I hope I have set the stage for the research on conflict management and public relations reported in this special issue. Symmetrical public relations typically includes an asymmetrical element, which both results from and produces conflict. Today's public relations relies heavily on digital communication, which has enormous potential for creating conflict as well as managing it. I look forward to reading what my colleagues have written about conflict management and its potential in the discipline that I have spent most of my life studying.

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# “Don’t Go, Don’t Buy”: Understanding the Motivations of the Anti-Japan Boycott Movement in South Korea During an International Conflict

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## Keywords

consumer animosity, boycotting intentions, patriotism, susceptibility to normative influence, government-public relationship, international conflict, peer communication

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## Abstract

Using the case of the 2019 boycott of Japanese products in South Korea, this study aims to investigate how consumers are motivated to participate in a national boycott movement during an international conflict via a theoretical model. Drawing insights from conflict management, consumer behavior, and public relations literature, this study identified key predictors of consumer animosity, which motivated Korean publics to engage in negative peer communication and boycott Japanese products and services. The results of an online survey revealed that Korean consumers’ patriotism, susceptibility to normative influence, and perceived quality of relationship with the foreign (Japanese) government significantly increased their animosity toward the country, Japan. Consumer animosity played an important role in publics’ conflict management strategies, including activeness in negative communication with their peers about Japan and Japanese products and intentions to participate in the national boycott movement. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

A large boycott movement against Japan and Japanese products has been actively conducted in South Korea since the summer of 2019. The unprecedented calls for South Koreans to boycott Japanese goods ranging from food, beer, cosmetics, and automobiles to travel intensified after the Japanese government placed restrictions on exports of semiconductor materials and removed South Korea from its “white list” of preferred trading partners (Lee & Dooley, 2019). Sales of Japanese fashion brands, such as UNIQLO, plummeted in South Korea, and airline companies reported a sharp decrease in bookings for Japan. This trade tension between the two countries has shown how foreign consumers in the globalized market environment are sensitively influenced by political conflicts (Brazinsky, 2019).

When facing a conflictual situation, in general, individuals tend to experience negative emotions and engage in behaviors to manage and cope with the emotional state (Nair, 2008). The conflict management literature explains the role of emotions in affecting individuals’ conflict resolution strategies (e.g., Bell & Song, 2005). In an international setting, scholars have also shown that individuals are increasingly behaving collectively in response to the negative emotion they have toward a hostile country. For example, existing consumer behavior research has identified consumer animosity, referring to antipathy toward countries due to previous or ongoing military, political, or economic events (Klein, Ettenson, & Morris, 1998), as a major driver for public behaviors especially when there is an ongoing conflict between the countries (e.g., Huang, Phau, & Lin, 2010; Luo & Zhai, 2017). In the context of the anti-Japan boycott movement in South Korea, one of the biggest motivators of individuals’ collective actions has been negative emotions shared by publics (Tai, 2019). Consumer animosity toward a foreign country becomes more salient when an international event or conflict occurs (Ettenson & Klein, 2005), and it tends to last longer and poses a severe threat to the country (Shoham, Gavish, & Rose, 2016).

An important question is, can foreign publics’ animosity be managed so that the negative impacts of publics’ collective movements (e.g., boycott) are minimized? As the conflict management literature has suggested, conflict resolution focuses on ways that parties can work toward ending animosities and repair relations (Chaitin, Steinberg, & Steinberg, 2017), arriving at agreed-upon solutions through mediation and negotiation (Schellenberg, 1996), trust-building (Lewicki, 2006), emotion management (Lindner, 2006), cultural sensitivity (Kimmel, 2016), and dialogical and non-violent modes of communication (Rosenberg, 2015). This is, in fact, consistent with the notion of public relations, which aims to increase organizational effectiveness “by building quality, long-term relationships with strategic constituencies” (Grunig, Grunig, & Ehling, 1992, p. 86) and manage conflict and reduce the cost of conflict that results from regulation, pressure, and litigation between the organization and its publics (Grunig, Grunig, & Verčič, 1998). In an international setting, the government-foreign public relationship as a “soft-power” (Tam et al., 2018) may play an important role in managing the conflict between the two countries. Strategic relationship management efforts at a national level are thus necessary to minimize publics’ animosity during an international conflict and avoid any collective movements against the country.

Existing studies on animosity and consumer behaviors have focused on individual-level motivators of animosity such as patriotism, ethnocentrism, or nationalism (Ishii, 2009; Park & Yoon, 2017; Yang et al., 2015). Given that a national boycott movement, such as the anti-Japan boycott movement in South Korea, may indicate a lack of relationship management efforts between the two countries, a public relations perspective can provide significant insights to understand publics’ collective behaviors toward a foreign country and its products derived from negative emotions in a conflicting situation. However, only a few studies have adopted an integrative approach using public

relations and consumer behaviors to examine the public's collective actions as their conflict management strategies in the context of an international conflict.

Therefore, the current study aims to understand foreign publics' motivations to engage in a collective movement (i.e., national boycott) toward a hostile country's products/services, integrating insights from multiple disciplines including conflict management, public relations, and consumer behavior. Specifically, individuals' patriotism, susceptibility to normative influences, and perceived relationship quality established between a foreign government (i.e., Japanese) and the public (i.e., South Korean) are suggested as key antecedents of consumer animosity during an international conflict. Furthermore, focusing on three categories of the boycott movement (i.e., food, clothing, and travel), this study tests how animosity and individuals' active communicative actions with peers affect boycotting intentions in the context of the South Korea-Japan international conflict. The present research will contribute to the extant conflict management literature by extending the context of individuals' conflict management strategies in response to emotions to an international conflict setting. By incorporating a relational perspective from public relations and using concepts from consumer behavior research in a conflict situation, this study will present one of the few empirical efforts testing the simultaneous effects of individual-level characteristics and managerial-level factors on publics' animosity, communicative behaviors, and boycotting intentions.

## Literature Review

### Conflict Management Strategies and Emotion

There is no generally accepted definition of conflict, but for the purpose of this study, conflict is conceptualized as the situation arising when parties hold or perceive incompatible interests, goals, resources, prestige, power, and so on (Deutsch, 1973; Putnam, 1995). Scholars have extensively studied individuals' specific behavioral patterns to effectively manage conflict situations, namely, conflict management strategies (e.g., Rahim, 1983). For instance, one of the predominant typologies of conflict resolution strategies was categorized into five types based on one's level of concern for self and concern for others (e.g., Rahim & Bonoma 1979): avoiding (low concern for self, low concern for other), dominating/contending (high self, low other), obliging/accommodating (low self, high other), integrating (high self, high other), and compromising (moderate self, moderate other).

Recognizing that emotion and conflict are inextricably linked (Nair, 2008), scholars have emphasized the role of emotions in conflict management strategies. Incompatibility perceived in a conflict situation produces emotions, mostly negative, and influences individuals' subjective experience and response to the conflict situation (Forgas & George, 2001). By predisposing a person toward specific behaviors, emotions can impact one's conflict resolution strategies (Roseman, Wiest, & Swartz, 1994). Given that, Ting-Toomey et al. (2000) extended the conflict typology by including three more styles (i.e., emotional expression, third-party help, and neglect), highlighting that individuals who use the emotional expression style rely on the expression of feelings to guide their responses to conflict situations (Khakimova et al., 2012). Hawdon et al. (2017) also noted that "self-help" conflict management style was the handling of a negative emotion (e.g., grievance) with unilateral aggression, and it ranged from acts of disapproval to mass violence. In particular, anger, one of the most common negative emotions, was relevant to more exploitative conflict behaviors (e.g. Allred, 2000) and aggressive thoughts and impulses (Roseman et al., 1994), producing inefficient outcomes.

Similarly, in an international conflict situation, individuals tend to feel negative emotions against the opponent country, making them engage in conflict management strategies. Previous conflict research has extensively examined individuals' conflict management strategies in various

contexts, including a team or an organizational setting (e.g., Behfar et al., 2008; De Dreu et al., 2001), hospitals (e.g., Valentine, 2001), online (e.g., Dineva et al., 2020; Hauser et al., 2017), and environmental setting (e.g., Soliku & Schraml, 2018). The current study attempts to extend this line of research by investigating how individuals use conflict management strategies in an international context, especially in response to their negative emotions. Specifically, in the context of the anti-Japan boycott movement in South Korea, this study views publics' boycotting behaviors and negative communication behaviors as their conflict management strategies respectively, in response to animosity toward a country.

### **Consumer Animosity in Response to International Conflict**

Studies found that consumers responded to international conflicts with multiple behaviors, ranging from product quality judgments to avoidance, purchase intentions, and intentions to visit a country to boycott movements (e.g., Antonetti, Manika, & Katsikeas, 2019; Leonidou et al., 2019; Pandya & Venkatesan, 2016; Sánchez, Campo, & Alvarez, 2018; Yang et al., 2015). One of the most important drivers of such actions is animosity or negative emotions toward a foreign country (e.g., Yang et al., 2015). The reason is that negative emotions or feelings toward a given country are vital in their purchasing decisions about foreign products, thereby resulting in a decrease in consumption (Park & Yoon, 2017). Thus, extensive research has theorized consumer animosity (CA) to understand consumption behaviors.

Klein et al. (1998) introduced the concept of CA, defined as the remnants of antipathy related to previous or ongoing military, political, or economic events. In the earlier conceptualization of CA, two major types of animosity were identified, namely, war animosity (i.e., CA ignited by past war or military issues) and economic animosity (i.e., CA resulting from a fierce economic rivalry between the countries). Since then, scholars have suggested different dimensions of CA depending on various contexts. For example, in their four-dimensional construct of animosity, Nes, Yelkur, and Silkoset (2012) suggested two additional dimensions—people and politics/government animosity—along with economic and military/war animosity. Other scholars (Ang et al., 2004; Jung et al., 2002) identified four types of animosities: stable versus situational and national versus personal animosities. Stable animosity is based on general antagonism accumulated over the years due to historical events, whereas situational animosity is situation-specific and temporary in nature. National animosity stems from acts that harm the nation, while personal animosity is derived from individuals' personal experiences (e.g., losing jobs due to economic troubles initiated by the hostile country).

Developing this taxonomy of four types of animosities, scholars have summarized that CA can be facilitated by longstanding antipathy (i.e., historical animosity) and "recent" or temporary hostility newly instigated by a conflict between countries (i.e., contemporary animosity; e.g., Nijssen & Douglas, 2004; Rose, Rose, & Shoham, 2009; Yang et al., 2015). In the dual-dimension model, Lee and Lee (2013) conceptualized historical animosity as strong antagonistic emotions accumulated over time that stem primarily from past war/military hostility, and contemporary animosity as situational and underpinned by recent hostile economic disputes sparked by recent or ongoing conflict, such as South Korean consumers' response to the latest economic crisis.

Among many elements of CA, the present study conceptualizes and tests a multidimensional CA by delineating economic, historical, and contemporary animosity as three distinct constructs given the background of the current study (i.e., anti-Japan boycott movement in South Korea). The animosity of South Korean consumers against Japan is multi-faceted, as it is not merely derived from the historical problems that the two countries have faced but also from a contemporary economic issue.

First, historically, many disputes between South Korea and Japan have existed since diplomatic relations were established in 1965 (Kazianis et al., 2019). Statements about Japanese colonial rule in South Korea made by several prominent politicians and officials in Japan have created outrage and anti-Japanese sentiment among South Koreans owing to Japan's insincerity, thereby leading to chronic diplomatic scandals in Korea-Japan relations. One of the most notable disputes between the two countries was compensation for "comfort women," who were forced to work in Imperial Japanese military brothels during World War II. The Korean comfort women were enlisted to the military "comfort stations" by force, including kidnapping, coercion, and deception; the majority of the women were under 18 years old and forced to serve as sex slaves for Japanese soldiers (Choe, 2015). As the few surviving comfort women continued to demand acknowledgment and sincere apology, the Japanese court rejected their compensation claims, causing longstanding antipathy among South Korean citizens toward Japan.

With this historical background, South Korea and Japan engaged in a massive trade spat in 2019. In July, Japan placed restrictions on the exports of semiconductor materials key to South Korea's manufacturing industry by removing South Korea from a list of trusted trading partners (i.e., "white list"; Denyer, 2019). This trade dispute, a so-called Japan-South Korea economic war, has been perceived as Japan's attempt to subjugate South Korea economically (Choe, 2019). Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe attributed the responsibility for the tensions between the two countries to South Korea, saying that the conflict was initiated by South Korean court rulings that required Japanese companies to compensate South Koreans for forced labor during World War II (Yamaguchi, 2019). This economic conflict is therefore rooted in a dispute over the legacy of Japanese colonialism of the Korean peninsula, particularly the issue of compensation for forced labor and comfort women. Infuriated by this action, Koreans began to punish the Japanese government by boycotting Japanese brands and canceling or avoiding travel to Japan.

As shown, Korean publics' animosity toward Japan is derived from their feelings of economic dominance or aggression directed toward South Korea (i.e., economic animosity; Nijssen & Douglas, 2004) and antagonism accumulated over the years because of historical events (i.e., historical animosity; Rose et al., 2009). At the same time, contemporary animosity is salient when an international conflict occurs (Lee & Lee, 2013); Korean publics' animosity is exacerbated by a recent and ongoing conflict between the two governments, specifically the Japan-Korea trade dispute in 2019. Therefore, the combined effects of a recent government conflict, previous historical clashes, and ongoing economic trade disputes between the two countries have resulted in a wide range of boycotting movements and a major disruption in sales of Japanese products. To understand the role of animosity in publics' conflict management strategies during the conflict between Japan and South Korea, we propose patriotism, susceptibility to normative influence, and government-public relationship as antecedents of CA in the following section.

### **Antecedents of CA**

#### ***Patriotism***

Patriotism, which is defined as love of one's own country and the level of one's identification with one's nation and its symbols (Sharma, Shimp, & Shin, 1994), has been studied to understand consumers' motivations for purchasing foreign products. Patriotism is related to two different perceptions of the sense of belonging to one's nation: instrumental and sentimental attachments (Meier-Pesti & Kirchler, 2003). Instrumental attachment implies the benefits that a person can gain as a citizen of a certain country. By contrast, sentimental attachment develops in situations in which

personal values coincide with national ones. Kosterman and Feshbach (1989) suggested that patriotism was associated with individuals' sentiments of attachment, affection, and loyalty to their own country. Patriotism is also based on emotional attachment to one's own country, thereby acting as a defense mechanism for the in-group (Mihalyi, 1984). Therefore, people with patriotism feel a sense of pride and affection for domestically made products that leads them to prefer domestic products over foreign ones (Han, 1988).

Consumer behavioral studies found that consumers who were patriotic are likely to have high levels of animosity toward a hostile country (Klein & Ettenson, 1999). Given that patriotism indicates inherently favorable attitudes toward one's native country, consumers' strong patriotism was closely related to their animosity toward another country (Yang et al., 2015). According to the realistic group conflict theory, which has been used to explain the nature of consumer animosity (e.g., Fernández-Ferrín et al., 2015; Huang et al., 2010), when individuals perceive threats to the in-groups' survival, prejudice and discrimination with respect to out-groups are likely to occur (Bobo, 1983; Levine & Campbell, 1972). Feelings of membership, solidarity, cohesiveness, and common identity within the in-group strengthen this perceived out-group threat, causing individuals to regard the out-group as potential rivals in a zero-sum conflict and develop hostile attitudes accordingly (Correll & Park, 2005; Esses et al., 1998).

In the context of the study reported here, South Korea is in an intergroup conflict with Japan as the result of a long history of political and economic conflicts as well as situational conflict. Individuals who feel a greater emotional attachment to the country (i.e., high level of patriotism) are thus more likely to view the conflictual situation as a threat by the out-group (i.e., Japan), which may enhance their feelings of animosity. The present study thus expects that when an international dispute such as Japan–South Korea economic crisis occurs, patriotic South Korean consumers are likely to have antagonistic emotions toward Japan. That is, South Korean consumers who are highly patriotic toward Korea may exhibit substantial animosity toward Japan during periods of international dispute. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- H1.** Patriotism is positively associated with South Korean consumers' animosity toward Japan during an international conflict.

### ***Susceptibility to Normative Influence***

Normative influence is defined as the motivation to blend in with a group's norms, characteristics, and attributes (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955) or conformity with the beliefs and behaviors of others to align with the expectations of referents (Park & Lessig, 1977). This concept has been used as a key individual-level factor to understand consumer behaviors. Scholars coined the term "susceptibility to normative influence" (SNI; Bearden et al., 1989) to indicate consumers' tendency to choose products as a vehicle for conforming to the expectations of another person or group (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975) or for improving their social image within a reference group (O'Cass & Frost, 2002).

Numerous studies suggested that this influence of others affected consumers' attitudes and behaviors (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Individuals who are susceptible to normative influence became substantially concerned with public appearance and seek to gain social acceptance by conforming to others' expectations (Wooten & Reed, 2004). Moreover, consumers' decisions are affected by their desire to be respected by their reference groups and avoid presenting themselves in a manner that may result in socially unacceptable outcomes (Wooten & Reed, 2004). In line with realistic group conflict theory, consumers who are susceptible to normative influence are also hostile to products

and services from “out-group” countries (in this case, Japan) because they tend to follow the negative opinions of their referents (in this case, other Korean consumers) (Tharp & Marks, 1991) and their judgment, evaluation, and behaviors are influenced by a desire to be respected by fellow members of their in-group.

Supporting this viewpoint, several studies have empirically demonstrated the positive effect of SNI on consumer animosity (Abraham & Reitman, 2018; Huang et al., 2010; Park & Yoon, 2017). These consumers also easily join their peers who participate in boycott movements (Sen, Gürhan-Canli, & Morwitz, 2001). Sari, Mizerski, and Liu (2017) similarly noted that peer pressure was a strong reason for consumers to boycott foreign products. Based on these previous studies, we propose that South Korean consumers who are susceptible to normative influence will feel considerable animosity toward Japan during conflict situations owing to their tendency to comply with social norms or their reference groups (e.g., other Korean consumers). Therefore, we present the following hypothesis:

**H2.** SNI is positively associated with South Korean consumers’ animosity toward Japan during an international conflict.

### ***Government-Foreign Public relationship***

This study also examines how the relationship quality established between Japan and South Korea will predict consumers’ animosity toward a foreign country. Studies in public relations have long emphasized the significant role of the relationship management approach (i.e., OPR) in increasing organizational effectiveness (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002; Hon & Grunig, 1999). The quality of the relationship between various types of organizations and the public has been extensively studied in diverse contexts (e.g., Huang & Zhang, 2013 provides a review), including the four components of trust, control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction. In the public sector, this concept has also been applied and tested in terms of the relationship between the government and its citizens (Hong, 2013; Chon, 2019), or the relationship between a foreign government and the public (Lee & Jun, 2013; Tam & Kim, 2017). We draw from this line of research and conceptualize the government-foreign public relationship as the relationship quality between the government of Japan and its foreign public (i.e., South Koreans).

Relationship management theory particularly noted the value of relationship quality between an organization and the public in a conflict or a crisis situation. A positive relationship established has a “buffering” effect when a conflict occurs, as it enables the public to trust an organization to address the situation (Kim & Sung, 2016), reduce negative actions (Huang, 2001), encourage information behaviors (Ni et al., 2019), and advocate an organization externally in a crisis situation (Lee, 2019). Although there is little evidence in the literature of the direct effect of relationship quality on publics’ negative emotions (i.e., animosity) during a crisis, previous studies have provided several important cues. For example, in the government setting, it was suggested that a positive relationship between the government and its publics led to favorable outcomes, ranging from publics’ positive attitudes to behavioral intentions to benefit the government (e.g., Hong, 2013; Waymer, 2013). Moreover, in an international context, a good-quality relationship between the government and its foreign publics discouraged foreign publics’ behaviors of sharing negative things about a country with people around them, while encouraging their positive information-sharing behaviors (Tam et al., 2018). These studies imply that a negative government-foreign public relationship results in unfavorable outcomes during a crisis such as publics’ antagonistic emotions toward a country. Leong et al. (2008) further noted that deep-rooted negative perceptions toward the country caused individuals to feel even more negative emotions when a crisis occurred. Based on this line of reasoning, we predict that South Korean publics

or consumers who perceive an unfavorable relationship with the Japanese government will be more likely to have a negative emotion or animosity toward a country when an international conflict occurs. The following hypothesis is thus proposed:

- H3.** The relationship quality between the government (i.e., Japan) and foreign publics (i.e., South Koreans) is negatively associated with Korean consumers' animosity toward Japan during an international conflict.

### **CA, Negative Peer Communication, and Boycott Intentions**

The literature has strongly established the negative effects of CA on the willingness to buy products of countries for which consumers have animosity (e.g., Klein et al., 1998; Nijssen & Douglas, 2004; Yang et al., 2015). Apart from testing the effects of CA on the public's boycotting intentions in the context of the South Korea-Japan conflict, the current study further aims to extend the existing consequences of CA. By incorporating a communication perspective, we consider consumers' communication behaviors, namely, negative peer communication, as their conflict management strategies in response to CA and expect that this behavior plays a critical role in encouraging boycott intentions.

Peers generally refer to people who have similar backgrounds in terms of age, education, or social hierarchy (Pedersen, Razmerita, & Colleoni, 2014), and peer communication is defined as evident peer interactions among the public (Churchill & Moschis, 1979). Interactions with peers who act as important socialization agents influence individuals' attitudes and decision-making processes (Churchill & Moschis, 1979). Accordingly, the importance of consumers' peer communication (as information giver) in determining their choices of purchasing or recommending products or services has been emphasized (Lee, 2010; Wang Yu, & Wei, 2012).

Although individuals are likely to engage in positive and negative peer communication, the current study particularly focuses on negative peer communication, given the context of this research. During the periods of a boycott movement derived from international conflict, the public is more likely to share negative things than positive things about an event, country, or relevant phenomena. Therefore, we draw from the previous literature on peer communication (e.g., Men & Muralidharan, 2017) and define *negative peer communication* as a type of interpersonal communication by which people proactively engage in negative discussions with peers regarding a country or its products/services.

When the public is annoyed because of a "hot" international issue, such as the 2019 Japan-South Korea trade dispute, they are likely to actively talk about it with people close to them to manage the negative emotion caused by the conflictual situation. Public relations scholars explained that emotions such as anger considerably affected the public's behaviors (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2012). That is, the public utilizes various communication strategies to address crisis-stimulated stress, such as obtaining information and taking actions to deal with the situation. Harmeling, Magnusson, and Singh (2015) also similarly noted that individuals engaged in communicative behaviors as coping processes for animosity.

Similarly, negative emotions (i.e., animosity) experienced due to an international dispute may encourage publics to communicate about the dispute to cope with their stress and vent negative feelings. Numerous consumer behavior studies have suggested that the desire to vent their negative feelings was one of the important motivations for consumers to engage in negative word-of-mouth (WOM) behaviors about a company or its products/services, which is conceptually similar to negative peer communication (e.g., Wetzler, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2007). CA is thus expected to not only evoke

the public's intention to boycott foreign products but also their engagement in conversations with peers. Hence, we propose the following hypotheses:

**H4.** South Korean consumers' animosity toward Japan is positively associated with their negative peer communication during an international conflict.

**H5.** South Korean consumers' animosity toward Japan is positively associated with their boycotting intentions during an international conflict.

Negative peer communication is also expected to increase individuals' behavioral intentions. According to socialization theory, individuals' attitudes and behaviors affect and are affected by peer groups (Churchill & Moschis, 1979). Normative influence is established through interactions with peer groups, which play an important role in socialization, motivating them to follow and conform to peer groups' behaviors (Moschis & Churchill, 1978). Thus, public behaviors are significantly affected by peer communication as a form of socialization (Wang et al., 2012). That is, as an outcome of the socialization process when the public expresses negative opinions on objects with peers, these peers are likely to develop similar perceptions of it (Men & Muralidharan, 2017). In the context of an organization, if peers convey negative attitudes toward an organization, then the public can develop unfavorable perceptions of the organization and vice versa (Malthouse et al., 2013). Similarly, in the present study, it is expected that when consumers communicate with their peers (e.g., family members, friends) by talking negatively about Japan, they are likely to share similar negative perceptions of this country, thereby prompting them to engage in boycott movements. Therefore, we formulate the following hypothesis:

**H6.** Negative peer communication is positively associated with South Korean consumers' boycotting intentions during an international conflict.

The conceptual framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

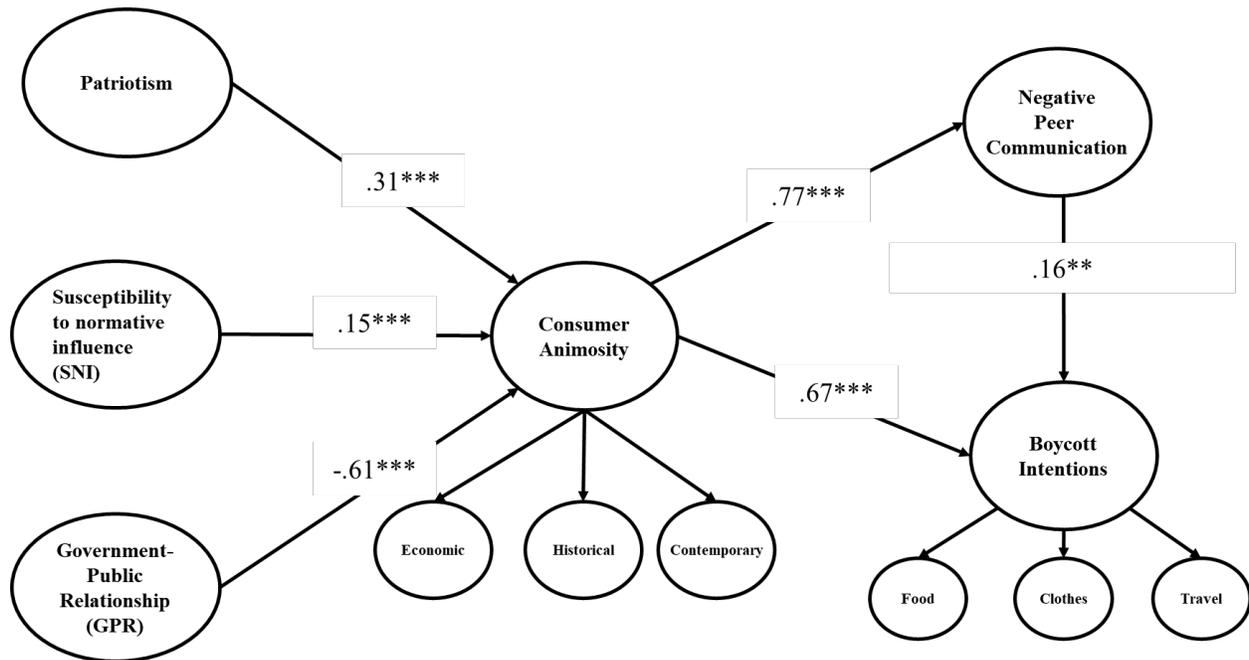
## Method

### Participants

The researchers conducted an online survey with South Korean consumers recruited through a Korean research firm, Embrain, located in Seoul, South Korea. Research panels from Embrain were asked to participate in the survey through a web page created by the research firm. The data were collected during one week in the early stage of the boycott movement, between July 26 and July 31, 2019. Participants received 4,500 won (approximately \$4.50) from the research company for completing a 15-minute survey. The questionnaire was originally developed in English. Two bilingual Korean researchers translated the questionnaire following the back-translation method. The translated version and the source version were carefully compared to ensure translation equivalence.

Using a nonprobability stratified sampling method through the research firm, participants were recruited from different gender and age groups as well as household income and education levels. The final sample included 470 people (54% male,  $n = 254$ ; 46% female,  $n = 216$ ). The age range of participants was from 20 to 59 years old, with an average age of 39.7. In terms of education level, 75.9% ( $n = 357$ ) of the participants had at least a bachelor's degree. A large portion of the participants ( $n = 225$ , 47.8%) had an annual income of more than \$50,000. Regarding political identification, 56.4%

**Figure 1**  
Results of the Hypothesized Model



\*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$   
CFI = .951,  $\chi^2(549) = 1674.166$ , RMSEA = .066 [.062, .070], SRMR = .046.

of the respondents ( $n = 265$ ) identified themselves as politically neutral. Table 1 summarizes the sample characteristics.

In the survey, each participant was asked to answer the questions of boycott intentions about all three product/service categories (i.e., food, clothes, and travel). The researchers controlled for the order in the survey by randomly assigning a sequence of questions to the participants. Given the purpose of the current study, participants were also asked whether they have visited Japan and whether they have purchased Japanese products in the past six months. A total of 36.6% ( $n = 172$ ) of the participants responded that they had not ever visited the country. Approximately 53.4% ( $n = 251$ ) had experiences of purchasing Japanese food products (e.g., beer, snacks) in the past six months, while 38.9% ( $n = 183$ ) had purchased Japanese clothing brands (e.g., UNICLO). The majority of the participants ( $n = 380$ , 80.9%) said that they know well about the recent international conflict between Japan and South Korea.

**Table 1**  
Participant Profiles (N = 470)

Sample Characteristics	Frequency	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	254	54.0
Female	216	46.0
<i>Age</i>		
20-29	120	25.5
30-39	112	23.8
40-49	102	21.7
50-59	136	28.9
<i>Education level</i>		
High school diploma or equivalent	62	13.2
Some college, no degree	51	10.9
Bachelor's degree or equivalent	301	64.0
Master's degree or higher	56	11.9
<i>Annual income</i>		
\$0 - \$10,000	21	4.5
\$10,001 - \$30,000	89	18.9
\$30,001 - \$50,000	135	28.7
\$50,001 - \$70,000	121	25.7
\$70,001 - \$99,999	80	17.1
\$100,000 or more	24	5.1
<i>Political identification</i>		
Liberal	132	28.1
Neutral	265	56.4
Conservative	73	15.5

## Measures

A 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree was used to measure all items in the current study.

First, consumers' boycott intentions for three product/service categories (i.e., food, clothes, and travel) were measured.<sup>1</sup> Five items adopted from Antonetti et al. (2019) were used for food ( $\alpha = .98$ ) and clothes ( $\alpha = .98$ ), respectively. Consumers' intentions to visit Japan were measured with three items ( $\alpha = .92$ ) adopted from Sánchez et al. (2018) and reverse-coded to indicate consumers' boycotting intentions.

To measure consumer animosity, we used 14 items adopted from previous research (Yang et al., 2015), including four items for economic animosity ( $\alpha = .73$ ), five items for historical animosity ( $\alpha$

<sup>1</sup> Although Koreans participating in the boycott refused to buy a wide range of Japanese products (e.g. car, cosmetics), three product/service categories (i.e., food, clothes, and travel) are selected in this study as examples because these are the major goods/services that Koreans joined in boycotting and that took the hardest hit in their industry especially during the early stage of the boycott movement (*The Korea Times*, 2019), the time when the data was collected.

= .88), and five items for contemporary animosity ( $\alpha = .93$ ). CFA results showed that the second-order model fit the data well (CFI = .971,  $\chi^2(332) = 887.217$ , RMSEA = .052 [.044, .060], SRMR = .043), providing evidence that the three types of animosity were key indicators of consumer animosity.

Negative peer communication was measured with six items ( $\alpha = .89$ ) adapted from Wang et al. (2012). Next, in terms of the antecedents of consumer animosity, patriotism was measured with five items ( $\alpha = .92$ ) adopted from Kosterman and Feshbach (1989). To measure the government-foreign public relationship, we used five items adapted from Tam and Kim (2017) ( $\alpha = .87$ ). Susceptibility to normative influence (SNI) was measured with four items ( $\alpha = .87$ ) from Bearden et al. (1989). Table 2 provides a list of all items.

**Analysis**

To test the proposed model, the researchers used two-stage structural equation modeling (SEM<sup>2</sup>), following Anderson and Gerbing (1988). A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was first conducted to assess the reliability and validity of the measurement model, followed by testing the structural model. Hu and Bentler’s (1999) joint-cutoff criteria were used to evaluate the acceptable model fit: comparative fit index (CFI) > .95 and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) < .10 or root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) < .05 and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) < .10 were considered as a satisfactory model fit.

**Table 2**  
*Measurement Items*

Constructs	Measurement Items	Standardized Factor Loadings	CR	AVE	The square root of AVE
<b>Boycott Intentions</b>					
	<i>Food</i>	.99*			
	<i>Clothes</i>	.97*			
	<i>Travel</i>	.77*			
<b>Boycott Intentions (Food)</b>	I intend to participate in Boycotting the food products related to Japan.	.95*	.97	.86	.93
	I would avoid purchasing Japanese food products whenever it is possible.	.98*			
	If possible, I would choose another food product over Japanese food products	.94*			
	From now on, I am less willing to buy Japanese food products.	.97*			

<sup>2</sup> Structural equation modeling (SEM) is used to identify a model that explains the interrelated relationships among multiple latent variables (Kline, 2016). As SEM is a statistical tool to test the hypotheses through empirical data, sampling methods do not affect SEM results if sample size is secured (Hair et al., 2018; Kline, 2016).

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	I would spend as little as possible on Japanese food products.	.79*	.97	.86	.93
<b>Boycott Intentions (Clothes)</b>	I intend to participate in Boycotting the clothing products related to Japan.	.94*			
	I would avoid purchasing Japanese clothing products whenever it is possible.	.98*			
	If possible, I would choose another clothing product over Japanese food products	.95*			
	From now on, I am less willing to buy Japanese clothing products.	.97*			
	I would spend as little as possible on Japanese clothing products.	.78*			
<b>Boycott Intentions (Travel) ®</b>	I intend to visit this country (Japan) in the future.	.89*	.93	.81	.90
	I would choose this country (Japan) for my next holiday.	.96*			
	I would prefer to visit this country (Japan) rather than other similar destinations.	.84*			
<b>Consumer Animosity</b>					
<i>Economic</i>		.70*			
<i>Historical</i>		.88*			
<i>Contemporary</i>		.95*			
<b>Economic</b>	Japan takes advantage of Korea in trade.	.75*	.72	.53	.73
	Japan causes economic problems in Korea.	.74*			
	Japan has too much economic influence in Korea.	.66*			
	The Japanese are doing business unfairly with Korea.	.76*			
<b>Historical</b>	I have always disliked the Japanese.	.64*			
	I have always felt angry toward the Japanese.	.66*	.86	.56	.75
	I dislike this country because of past historical events.	.83*			
	I will never forgive Japan for the Japanese military sexual slavery.	.86*			
	Japan should pay for what it did to Japanese military sexual slavery.	.74*			
<b>Contemporary</b>	Recently, I dislike the Japanese.	.77*	.94	.75	.87

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	These days, I feel annoyed by this country.	.89*			
	I will never forgive Japan for the current economic retaliation.	.94*			
	Japan should pay for what it did to Korea during economic retaliation.	.91*			
	Japan has recently caused political conflicts between Japan and Korea.	.81*			
<b>Negative Peer Communication</b>	I talk negatively about Japan with my friends or family members.	.80*	.89	.59	.77
	I talk about boycotting the Japanese products with my friends or family members.	.82*			
	I obtain negative information about Japan from my friends or family members.	.80*			
	My friends or family members encourage me to boycott the Japanese products.	.73*			
	I ask my friends of family members for advice about boycotting the Japanese products.	.74*			
	I talk about negative experiences with Japan with my friends and family members.	.71*			
<b>Patriotism</b>	I love my country.	.87*	.93	.72	.85
	I am proud to be Korean.	.88*			
	I am emotionally attached to my country and emotionally affected by its actions.	.92*			
	Although at times I may not agree with the government, my commitment to South Korea always remains strong.	.82*			
	When I see the Korean flag flying I feel great.	.74*			
<b>Government-public Relationship</b>	Japan seeks to build mutually beneficial relationships with South Korea.	.76*	.88	.59	.77
	Japan considers South Korea's interests when making decisions.	.63*			
	Japan treats South Korea fairly and justly.	.84*			
	Japan is satisfied with their interactions with South Korea.	.81*			

	Japan wants to maintain a long-term relationship with South Korea.	.77*			
<b>Susceptibility to normative influence</b>	It is important that others like the products (and brands) I buy.	.66*	.81	.52	.72
	I like to know what products (and brands) make good impressions on others.	.71*			
	I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products (and brands) they purchase.	.71*			
	I often identify with other people by purchasing the same products (and brands) they purchase.	.81*			
* $p < .001$					
Note. CR(composite reliabilities); AVE(average variance extracted)					

## Results

### Preliminary Data Analysis

Table 3 reports the means, standard deviations, scale reliabilities, and correlations among the variables used in this study. Respondents overall reported high levels of animosity ( $M_s > 3.6$ ) and boycott intentions ( $M_s > 4.4$ ). All types of animosity had positive and significant correlations with negative peer communication and boycott intentions ( $p_s < .01$ ). The scale reliabilities were satisfactory as the values of Cronbach's  $\alpha$  ranged from .73 to .98.

A series of  $t$ -tests, ANOVAs, and regression analyses were conducted to examine the effects of demographic variables on the main variables. Results showed that female respondents were more likely to participate in the boycott movement ( $t[468] = 3.25, p = .001$ ), negatively talk about Japan with peers ( $t[468] = 3.73, p < .001$ ), and feel animosity toward the country ( $t[468] = 3.05, p = .002$ ) than male counterparts. The more an individual was liberal, the more he/she was likely to participate in the boycott movement ( $\beta = .26, p < .001$ ) and engage in negative peer communication ( $\beta = .23, p < .001$ ). Age also had a significant and positive effect on boycott intentions ( $\beta = .28, p < .001$ ), negative peer communication ( $\beta = .19, p < .001$ ), and animosity ( $\beta = .26, p < .001$ ). Participants' purchasing experiences of Japanese food ( $\beta = .12, p = .007$ ), clothes ( $\beta = .10, p = .026$ ), and traveling experiences ( $\beta = .26, p < .001$ ) all significantly influenced their intentions to boycott Japanese products. Respondents' education level and income level had no significant effects on any of the variables used in this study. Based on these results, participants' gender, age, political affiliations, and their experiences of purchasing Japanese products or visiting Japan were controlled in the following SEM analysis.

### Assessment of Measurement Model and Structural Model

The results of CFA showed that the measurement model reached satisfactory model fits overall: CFI = .996,  $\chi^2(547) = 1275.217$ , RMSEA = .062 [.059, .075], SRMR = .048. All factor loadings were significant at the  $p < .001$  level. To assess the reliability and validity of the model, we estimated

**Table 3.** Means, standard deviations, and correlations among the variables (N = 470)

	M (SD)	$\alpha$	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>1. Patriotism</b>	4.12 (0.77)	.92	-									
<b>2. Susceptibility to normative influence</b>	2.89 (0.84)	.87	.03	-								
<b>3. Government-public relationship</b>	1.62 (0.75)	.87	-.16**	.06	-							
<b>4. Economic animosity</b>	3.98 (0.73)	.73	.23**	.09	-.42**	-						
<b>5. Historical animosity</b>	3.65 (0.90)	.88	.37**	.07	-.49**	.44**	-					
<b>6. Contemporary animosity</b>	4.09 (1.01)	.93	.38**	.12*	-.57**	.51**	.72**	-				
<b>7. Negative peer communication</b>	3.40 (0.91)	.89	.33**	.19**	-.39**	.38**	.60**	.65**	-			
<b>8. Boycott intentions (food)</b>	4.43 (0.99)	.98	.24**	.09	-.53**	.45**	.62**	.77**	.64**	-		
<b>9. Boycott intentions (clothes)</b>	4.48 (0.96)	.98	.24**	.07	-.52**	.45**	.61**	.75**	.62**	.96**	-	
<b>10. Intentions to visit country</b>	4.48 (0.87)	.92	.24**	.04	.55**	.40**	.58**	.63**	.54**	.72**	.73**	-

composite reliability (CR) for each latent variable. All the variables indicated acceptable CR values, ranging from .72 to .97 (see Table 2). The average of variance extracted (AVE) values were also calculated. As shown in Table 2, all the values were higher than .5 and the values of the square root of AVE were greater than the correlations among the variables. The convergent and discriminant validity of the measures were thus satisfactory. As the measurement model demonstrated its construct validity, the researchers then tested the structural model. The model fits were all acceptable CFI = .951,  $\chi^2(549) = 1674.166$ , RMSEA = .066 [.062, .070], SRMR = .046. Thus, the hypothesized paths were interpreted.

### Hypotheses Testing

In H1, we expected a positive effect of patriotism on consumer animosity. As expected, the path was positive and significant ( $\beta = .31, p < .001$ ; see Figure 1). H1 was thus supported. H2 investigated the effect of susceptibility to normative influence (SNI) on consumer animosity, and the effect was positive and significant ( $\beta = .15, p < .001$ ). Therefore, H2 was also supported. H3 examined whether the government-public relationship had a negative effect on consumer animosity. Results showed that the path was negative and significant ( $\beta = -.61, p < .001$ ). Therefore, H3 was supported. That is, Korean consumers who were patriotic and susceptible to normative behaviors of other consumers and perceived an unfavorable relationship with Japan were more likely to exhibit higher levels of animosity when an international conflict occurred.

H4 examined whether consumer animosity was associated with consumers' negative peer communication. It had a significant and positive influence on negative peer communication ( $\beta = .77, p < .001$ ), which supported H4. In H5, the relationship between consumer animosity and Korean consumers' boycotting intentions toward Japanese products was examined. Results showed that consumer animosity had a positive and significant effect on Korean consumers' intentions to boycott Japanese products ( $\beta = .67, p < .001$ ). Thus, H5 was supported. Therefore, consumer animosity played an important role in encouraging Korean consumers to negatively talk about Japan to their peers and to participate in the national boycott movement. H6 investigated the effect of consumers' negative peer communication on their boycotting intentions. As shown in the results, it had a significant and positive effect on consumers' boycotting intentions ( $\beta = .16, p = .005$ ), which supported H6. This suggested that Korean consumers were more likely to boycott Japanese food and clothing products and not to travel to Japan when negatively talking about Japan.

### Discussion

Guided by conflict management, public relations, and consumer behavior literature, this study attempted to understand through a theoretical model why Korean publics engage in an anti-Japan boycott movement when their government is in conflict with the Japanese government. The results of this research showed that individuals' patriotism, SNI, and negative government-foreign public relationship are critical antecedents that increase CA, thereby enhancing negative peer communication and boycott intentions. Given the results, we suggest the following theoretical and practical implications.

The current study advances the conflict management literature by emphasizing the importance of negative emotion, animosity in particular, in an international conflict setting. Focusing on the Japan-South Korea trade dispute in 2019, this study investigated publics' behaviors (e.g., boycotting, negative peer communication) as a type of individual conflict management strategy in response to negative emotions toward another country. Our results showed that animosity, which

comprises economic, historical, and contemporary animosity, significantly increased South Korean consumers' boycott intentions against Japanese products. Supporting realistic group conflicts theory, this result indicates that conflict at an international level leads to publics' hostility to another group (country) as the conflict itself is perceived as a root of threat for their in-group, resulting in a collective movement that is largely driven by animosity. More importantly, the results demonstrated that consumers' animosity triggered their boycotting intentions across product categories (e.g., food, clothes, and travel). This finding suggests that regardless of product categories, national sentiment during an international conflict has significant power to motivate the public to engage in a collective boycotting movement.

Moreover, this study provides evidence that consumers' negative communication about a country (i.e., Japan) or its products with their peers partially mediates the relationship between CA and boycott intentions. That is, individuals tend to communicate with others who are close to them to manage their negative emotions caused by a conflict situation their country is involved in, which in turn enhances their intentions to boycott Japanese products. In line with socialization theory, a norm is established by peer groups through negative peer communication during a conflict, and it plays an important role in motivating publics to follow peer groups' behaviors, boycotting in this case. Therefore, the current study sheds light on conflict management research by revealing the role of negative emotions (i.e., animosity) in affecting the way individuals manage the conflict situation, that is, communicating with peers and joining collective actions.

Second, this study advances communication and public relations research in the global setting by suggesting the relationship quality between the government and its foreign publics as an important antecedent of consumer animosity. Boycotting behaviors have been extensively studied in consumer research (e.g., Yang et al., 2015). From an organizational-level perspective, the present study adds to the previous line of research that has generally theorized animosity from the individual perspective. By incorporating the public relations perspective, specifically relationship management theory, the current research empirically demonstrated that relationship quality between the government (e.g., Japan) and its foreign public (e.g., Korean consumers) is a strong predictor of CA. The government-foreign public relationship has been suggested as an important outcome of public diplomacy and public relations (Tam & Kim, 2017). Given that, the findings of the current study suggest the importance of the government's public relations effort in effectively solving and preventing conflicts, specifically by showing that the long-term relationship critically influences the extent to which the foreign public is angered toward a country during a conflict situation and their intentions to participate in the public movement against the country. In other words, the findings of this study highlight the value of relationship management in managing publics' affective and behavioral responses to an international conflict; public relations can thus function as a critical international conflict management strategy. By showing the theoretical utility of the relationship management approach in conflict management, the study further suggests ample spaces for future research on conflict management integrating a public relations perspective.

Third, this study enhances the theoretical understanding of CA by revealing the positive and significant effects of individuals' patriotism and susceptibility to normative influence in an international conflict. Consumers who are patriotic inherently have favorable attitudes and high levels of emotional attachment toward their home country. Therefore, they are likely to have a sense of pride and affection for domestically made products. When an international conflict occurs, patriotic South Korean consumers in the context of economic tension between South Korea and Japan are likely to have antagonistic emotions toward Japan, which threatens their own identity. In the context of the present study, consumers' susceptibility to normative influence was also significantly related to animosity. During periods of a boycott movement caused by international conflict, consumers with

high-level SNI may feel enormous pressure to form a negative attitude to comply with social norms or expectations of reference groups. Those consumers tend to avoid presenting themselves in a manner that may result in social disapproval. Thus, they are likely to follow the social atmosphere during international conflict situations by generating animosity.

This study also provides several practical implications. As shown in the results, a favorable nation-to-nation relationship established between the two countries can mitigate the foreign public's animosity, negative peer communication, and boycotting behaviors during international conflicts. From the public relations perspective, this result emphasizes the important role of relationship management approaches in government and diplomatic relations in preventing and managing a nationwide crisis during conflict situations. Thus, governments should work together to build a positive national relationship in the long term. Given that the relationship management approach that aims to achieve "mutually beneficial" outcomes by communicative practices is aligned with public diplomacy efforts (Tam & Kim, 2017), governments should endeavor to resolve trade disputes or potential future issues by engaging in active public diplomacy through public and private exchange-based diplomacy strategy. For example, existing exchange programs (e.g., joint higher-education programs) between the two countries organized by local governments and private-sector organizations should be continued and developed, regardless of ongoing international conflicts, to cultivate people-to-people exchanges at an individual level. In addition, given that networked effects may be generated through negative peer communication among the foreign public, governments should establish a system to listen and respond to the foreign public's needs, concerns, or interests and to incorporate those opinions in the decision-making process through a variety of communication channels. These relational efforts will promote mutual understanding and influence between the publics in different countries and help the government to build a positive relationship with the foreign public, thereby minimizing the threats and facilitating a "buffering" effect of relationships when an international dispute occurs.

### Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations of this study should be addressed in future research. First, this study examined consumers' boycotting intentions toward three categories (e.g., food, clothes, and travel) without considering individuals' product involvement level. Future researchers should examine the effects of product characteristics because individuals' preferences and purchasing habits for each product category may differ from one another (Park & Yoon, 2017). Second, although the current study provides a rigorous conceptual model, it is limited to the context of the South Korea-Japan international conflict that occurred in 2019. Therefore, future researchers should replicate the model in other international contexts to provide enhanced insights. Third, although the boycott movement persisted for more than a year, the survey was conducted during the "hot issue" period (Aldoory & Grunig, 2012) when extensive negative media coverage was generated in South Korea in July 2019. This situation limits the understanding of whether and why consumers consistently avoid foreign products after the issue has cooled down. Therefore, replicating studies should be conducted using a variety of research methods, such as a longitudinal design, for an in-depth understanding of consumers' motivations to participate in a national boycott movement.

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# Toward a Contingency Theory of Relating Management: Exploring Organization-Public Relationships (OPRs) in Conflicts

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Contingency theory, organization-public relationships (OPRs), conflict management, theoretical model, public relations

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## Abstract

This paper presents the theoretical rationale for a contingency theory of relating management. The purpose of building such a contingency approach is to assist organizations in assessing and managing the dynamics of relationships with their external and internal publics when conflicts arise. Through integrating interdisciplinary literature from public relations and conflict management, this theoretical framework argues that contingent organization-public relationships (COPRs) in the conflict management process are highly dynamic and complex. COPRs influence relationship qualities and depend on three main categories of antecedents, including predisposing, situational, and contextual elements. An up-to-date case about conflicts between Johnson & Johnson and its baby powder consumers was analyzed to illustrate propositions from the postulated theory. Implications of this article help to move public relations theory beyond static and micro-level measurements of relationships and add value to the conflict theory literature, which mainly focuses on intra-organizational or interpersonal conflicts.

When organizations develop relationships with their publics, such as customers or employees, inevitably they must face different types of conflicts over issues, values, or negative emotions (Pondy, 1967). Regarded as a “process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party” (Wall & Calister, 1995, p. 517), conflict in an organizational setting has evolved itself into a typology in the past decades. Scholars (e.g., Liu et al., 2009), following a contingency perspective, subdivided conflict into two main types, task and relationship conflicts. Task conflict refers to “task oriented” disagreements on the objective tasks or issue-related differences in opinion. Relationship conflict included debates on “people oriented” matters such as tension and annoyance among group members, or other subjective emotional positions (Liu & Zhai, 2010). Depending on specific types of conflicts, scholars in conflict management found that each party might conduct different relational behavior; variables such as satisfaction, commitment, or trust (Lu & Guo, 2019) constituted important dimensions of relational outcomes. Previous conflict research also broadly covered four main levels of conflict management (Lewicki et al., 2003), including intergroup, intragroup/intra-organizational, interpersonal, and intrapersonal conflicts. However, the existing scholarship on challenges of relationship management between an organization and its key publics in conflicts has been lacking. Meanwhile, the contingent and dynamic properties of relationships have received limited attention.

Within the current public relations literature, organization-public relationships were frequently mentioned. It has been almost 40 years since Ferguson (1984) presented her conference paper on relationships between organizations and their publics. In 2018, Ferguson republished this conference paper in the *Journal of Public Relations Research* and emphasized relationship management as a public relations research paradigm by stating “the unit of study should not be the organization, nor the public, nor the communication process. Rather, the unit of study should be the relationships between organizations and their publics” (p. 164). Following this relational approach, scholars examined relational outcomes (e.g., Ledingham & Bruning, 2000), antecedents of relationships (e.g., Hung, 2005), relationship process (e.g., Cheng & Cameron, 2019; Dougall, 2005), and relationship structure (e.g., Yang & Taylor, 2015). For almost three decades, public relations aimed at maintaining mutually beneficial relationships (Cheng, 2020). The complexity perspective of relationships between organizations and their affected publics in conflicts remained largely unexplored. Organizations and their publics might not desire a win-win negotiation or choose mutual benefits as their ultimate goals (Cheng, 2016a, 2020; Stoker, 2015) during conflicts. Instead, the “dual concern theory” model (Thomas, 1992) suggested that each party could choose from a variety of conflict management styles such as compromising, competing, avoiding, collaborating, or accommodating based on self-interest or the interests of others.

To fill the above-mentioned research gaps, this article presents the theoretical underpinnings for a contingent theory for the assessment and management of relationships in conflicts. The purpose of this article contains three dimensions. First, this article presents a review of key concepts from interdisciplinary literature on public relations and conflict management and lists major antecedents and outcomes of OPRs in conflicts. Second, this article moves forward public relations theories by providing a co-oriented perspective to conceptualize and operationalize relationships in conflicts and proposing a continuum to examine changes of relationship modes, which go beyond adopting scales that originated from interpersonal relationships (Sha, 2018). Finally, this article applies Johnson and Johnson’s conflict on the issue of baby powder as a case to illustrate the proposed theoretical framework and describes both qualitative and quantitative research programs as future directions.

### Theory Development: A Contingent Perspective of Relationships Definitions and Assumptions

In the relational paradigm of public relations, there are many definitions of OPRs. For instance, Ledingham and Bruning (1998) defined the concept of OPRs as the relationship state that brought economic, social, or political impacts in the field of public relations. Ledingham (2003) directed researchers to focus more on what public relations was about, rather than what public relations did. Hung (2005) interpreted OPRs' origins and stated, "OPRs arise when organizations and their strategic publics are interdependent, and this interdependence results in consequences to each other that organizations need to manage constantly" (p. 396). Scholars also applied the ecological theory (Monge & Poole, 2008) and conceptualized OPR as "inherently communicative and dialogic" meanings between social networks of multiple organizations (Yang & Taylor, 2015, p. 15).

The contingency theory of relating management adopts the concept of contingent organization-public relationships (COPRs), initially proposed by Cheng and Cameron (2019), as a core element and defined OPR as a relating process between at least two parties who maintain the continual information exchange surrounding common issues or topics. Through a relating management process via "structural decisions, individual reactions, and subsequent actions" (Stoker, 2015, p. 354), the current framework assumes that OPR depends on stances of all involved parties, including organizations and their key stakeholders (Cheng, 2020). Following the co-orientation model (Chaffee & McLeod, 1973), this framework assumes the relationship is not solely based on one party's perceptions, instead it is the result of both parties' perceptions toward common issues. Through informational interactions, organizations and their publics are connected and relational partner's perceptions of the other party's adoption of a stance will directly impact the stance of the other (cf. Chaffee & McLeod, 1973). For instance, Dougall (2005) interpreted relationship processes between banks and activists in conflicts as the intensity and reciprocity of information flow. Longitudinal analysis of news reports indicated that the more aggressive banks' stances were, the more competitive those activists were in conflicts.

Second, this theory argues that both organizations and their publics make conscious decisions to form stances, protecting their own interests first, and when possible the interests of others (Cheng, 2018). According to the contingency theory of accommodation, organizations strategically chose their stances/positions at any point along a continuum ranging from aggression to accommodation during crises or conflicts (Cancel et al., 1997; Cancel et al., 1999). Aggression represented the position to achieve self-benefits while accommodation represented the desire to consider the welfare of others. In a conflict situation, regarded as a "process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party" (Wall & Calister, 1995, p. 517), expressions of stances such as aggression, neutral, or accommodation would trigger informational interactions between organizations and publics, and provide the means with which to track their relationships longitudinally (Cheng & Cameron, 2019; Dougall, 2005).

Third, the premise for developing this theory has been that organizations and affected publics may stay within a dynamic information interaction ranging from full conflict to full cooperation. According to Ledingham (2003), relationships could change over time. On the one hand, cooperation might occur when a management team functions effectively to focus on shared interests and maintains a positive relationship with publics. On the other hand, players in a strategic setting seek conflicts with each other, and the relationship could end itself as highly conflictual without reaching an agreement (Cheng, 2018).

### The COPR and its Relationship Mode

According to Coombs and Holladay (2015), the traditional relationship management research (e.g., Hon & Grunig, 1999; Ledingham, 2003) relied on a multi-layered scale of relationships originated from interpersonal communication literature. For instance, Hon and Grunig (1999) offered control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, and commitment as four basic dimensions of relationships and this operational approach of OPR was based on a micro-level analysis of individuals' perceptions at one point (Coombs & Holladay, 2015).

To advance the existing measurement, this contingency theory of relating management adopts a co-oriented approach to track six relationship modes, reflecting how one party relates to the other one over time. For instance, if both parties choose aggression as their stances, then we identify such a relationship mode as a competing relationship (Cheng & Cameron, 2019). In this state, both organizations and affected publics would adopt the competing conflict style and confrontation tactics (Tatum & Eberlin, 2006; Thomas, 1992) to maximize self-benefits and desired outcomes, which is symptomatic of "malignant social conflict" (Deutsch & Schichman, 1986, p. 229). In contrast, if both parties use the accommodation as stances, then the relationship mode has been defined as the cooperating relationship, where cooperative protagonists follow the compromising conflict style and mitigation tactics to understand each party's perspective, reach an agreement, and resolve conflicts through satisfying each other's interests (Plowman et al., 2001).

COPR thus contains two extreme modes such as competing and cooperating relationships along a relational continuum. As relationship modes are highly fluid and could change along such a continuum, a capitulating relationship (stances: aggression vs. accommodation), for instance, can occur when one party is aggressively pushing the other party to accommodate their requests in conflicts (Cheng & Cameron, 2019); A neutral relationship (stances: neutral vs. neutral) is located in the middle along the continuum, referring to the mode when both parties choose neutral stances through inaction or the ignoring negotiation style. This type of relationship might happen frequently during conflicts if both parties reach a low level of accuracy and cannot precisely predict what the other is thinking. As both parties in conflicts could change their conflicting styles and stances, accordingly, evading (stances: aggression vs. neutrality) or accommodating relationship (stances: accommodation vs. neutrality) would occur. For instance, an evading relationship mode was used when sports fans continued their aggressive interactions with an organization that then avoided direct responses and diverted the public attention toward other irrelevant topics (Brown & Billings, 2013). COPR thus is dynamically changing along a continuum, ranging from pure competing to pure cooperating orientation (Cheng, 2018). The changing of relationship modes over time is the manifestation of the ongoing information exchange process that defines the concept of COPR. Based on the above-mentioned literature, this article thus proposes the first proposition to study the COPR and its changes during conflicts.

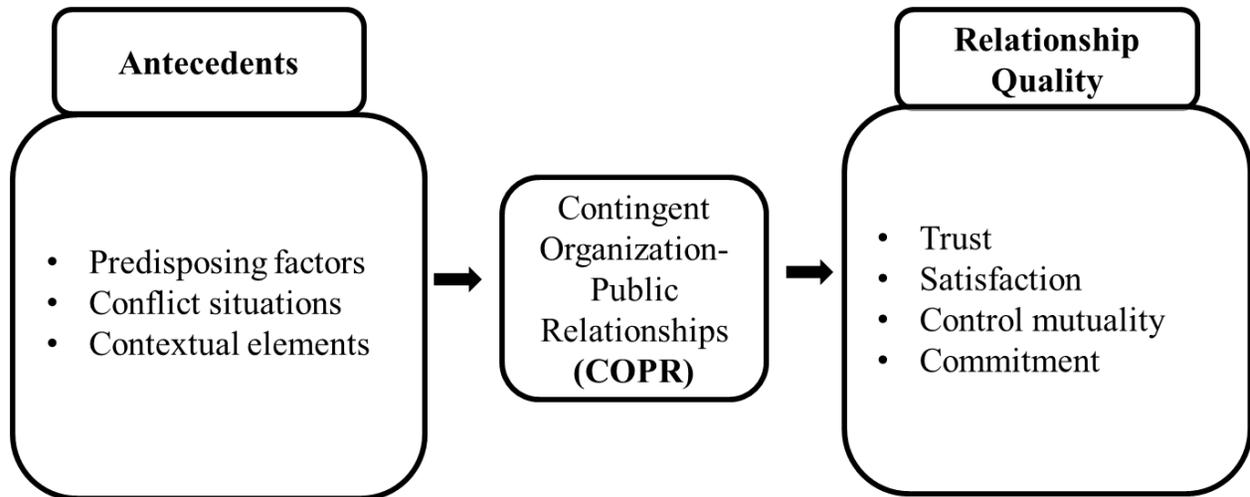
**Proposition 1(P1).** There are different types of relationship modes between organizations and publics, and such relationship modes will change across stages in conflict(s).

### Relationship and its Antecedents

In the literature of conflict management, scholars suggested that relationships were complex and were determined by varieties of conditions in conflicts (Speakman & Ryals, 2010). Several public relations scholars also noted that the stances and relationships depended on contingency factors. The most prominent work was conducted by Cameron and his colleagues (cf. Cancel et al., 1997), who challenged the normative excellence theory and posited the contingency theory of accommodation. This contingency theory argued that the practice of public relations was too complex and organizational stances were impinged by the 87 contingency variables such as organizational culture, industrial environment, size and power of publics, and so on. Cancel et al.'s theory provided a realistic view of practicing public relations, while these 87 contingency factors were criticized for losing parsimony and operational value. Meanwhile, theoretical foundation and

empirical evidence on which types of antecedents might take effects to influence relationships and perspectives of publics in conflict management have been lacking. To fill the gap, this article integrates literature from public relations and conflict management (e.g., Cancel et al., 1997; Cancel et al., 1999; Pang et al., 2010) and presents predisposing, situational, and contextual elements as three main categories of antecedents in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**  
*Antecedents and Consequences of COPRs in Conflicts*



**Predisposing Variables**

From a co-oriented perspective, both organizations and their publics preexisted before they entered a conflict situation, and thus attributes of both parties might spur relational changes in conflicts and these factors are considered in this contingency theory of relating management. As shown in Table 1, predisposing factors include prior conflict history between organizations and publics, socioeconomic factors, motivations of publics, and organizational characteristics such as size, culture, and prior reputation. These preexisting characteristics were found to be significantly related to stances and states of relationships. For instance, organizational culture has been found as a key antecedent that influenced conflict management styles (Mehr, 2012). In a charitable crisis in mainland China, Cheng (2016b) found that the closed culture of a Chinese non-profit organization determined its defensive stances in conflicts, which triggered a highly competitive relationship with angry donors. Reber et al. (2003) also indicated that organizational characteristics such as past negative experiences with conflicts are likely to reduce organizational willingness to interact with the public, leading to an avoiding conflict style and neutral stance in conflicts.

**Table 1**  
*Antecedents of Relationships in Conflicts*

<b>Predisposing Factors</b>	Industry	Organization	Publics	
	Industrial environment; Industrial practice Cameron et al. (2001); Cancel et al. (1997); Cancel et al. (1999)	Organizational culture; Willingness to dilute its cause/request/claim Cameron et al. (2001); Cancel et al. (1997); Cancel et al. (1999)  Organizational justice and culture Mehr (2012) Tatum and Eberlin (2008)	Demographic attributions such as gender, generation, and culture Rahim and Katz (2019)  Public familiarity with organizations Yang (2007)  Prior history with organizations; Power, size, or number of publics Cameron et al. (2001); Cancel et al. (1997); Cancel et al. (1999)  Public emotional intelligence Chen et al. (2019)	
<b>Conflict Situations</b>	Situational conflict	Relationship conflict	Task conflict	
	Levels of escalations Jameson (1999)  Urgence of the situation; Time pressure to resolve issues Pang et al. (2010) Jameson (1999)	Emotions or personal problems Liu and Zhai (2010)	Costs or benefits for either party Cheng (2016b)  Potential threats or material outcomes Cameron et al. (2001)	
<b>Contextual Elements</b>	Legal/Regulation	Morality	Culture	Politics
	Legal/Regulatory restrictions; Justifications Moral conviction Cameron et al. (2001) Pang et al. (2010)	Moral development Chow and Ding (2002)	Cultural influence Huang et al. (2015)	Political interruption Cheng (2016a)

In the public relations literature, Cancel et al. (1997) listed several individual characteristics such as size and number of publics and prior history with organizations that might influence the adoption of an accommodative stance. In conflict management literature, studies have intensively discussed the impact of public attributes in interpersonal, intergroup, and intrapersonal conflicts (Speakman & Ryals, 2010). Scholars such as Rahim and Katz (2019) presented that gender and generation could significantly determine publics' conflict management styles: Employees changed their conflict-management styles across generations; male employees frequently applied more competing strategies such as dominating styles than female employees. Yang's model (2007) also indicated that individual familiarity with an organization was likely to result in positive relationships and a favorable impression of organizations.

### **Conflict Situations**

According to Pang et al. (2010), situational factors referred to antecedents that were most likely to influence strategic decision-making and relationship management processes during crises or conflicts. When organizations managed relationships with their publics such as customers or employees, inevitably they had to face and react to three main conflictual situations: 1) task conflict referring to "task oriented" disagreements on objective tasks or material outcomes; 2) relationship conflict focusing on emotional or personal problems and it might negatively influence the relationship between parties (Liu & Zhai, 2010), and 3) situational conflict talks about time pressure, degree of escalation, and the impact of such conflict on organizations, which are relevant to relational interactions (Harrison & Dorefel, 2006).

By setting deadlines and giving high time pressure on the local government, for instance, protestors in Hong Kong aggressively pushed the government to accommodate and shelve the plan of implementing national education, leading to a capitulating relationship (Chong & Tam, 2012). In Cancel et al.'s (1999) study, factors such as the urgency of situations, internal or external threats, and potential costs or benefits of choosing a predisposed accommodative or adversarial stance were supported as significant situational factors. In addition, Cheng (2016b) argued that both parties would balance costs and benefits of adopting a stance in their relationship process. When the Red Cross of China, for example, chose to accommodate and maintain a capitulating relationship with donors during the 2011 credibility crisis, they must have considered the potential negative outcomes of lacking significant donations from the public in the next few years while publics aggressively sought information as their after-tax donations might be inappropriately used.

### **Contextual Elements**

This theory not only considers attributes of organizations and publics and their conflictual situations, but also accounts for external contextual elements as antecedents of COPRs. According to Cameron et al. (2001), six proscriptions within external contexts such as moral conviction, moral neutrality, regulatory restraints, legal constraints, prohibitions from senior managers, and jurisdictional concerns "did not necessarily drive increased or extreme aggression, but did preclude compromise or even communication with a given public" (p. 253). For instance, Zhang et al. (2004) found that the dominant coalition's moral conviction precluded the adoption of an accommodative stance in conflicts. Tatum and Eberlin (2008) also found that if managers were insensitive to organizational justice issues, then it was likely they would address conflicts in a dominating style rather than a collaboration. Huang, Wu, and Cheng (2015) in crisis communication found that Eastern cultural elements such as Confucianism and "Mianzi" (Face) would significantly influence organizations to choose ambiguity or diversion strategies, leading to an evading or accommodating relational pattern with publics.

In conflict management literature, some contextual impacts were mentioned as well. Moral development, regulatory restraints, or legal constraints would affect publics' stances and relationships with

organizations. Chow and Ding (2002) found that in the Chinese or Hong Kong context, moral development was significantly related to individuals' conflict styles. When people developed a higher stage of moral development and contained ethical considerations, the more likely they would adopt integrating conflict styles. Meanwhile, cultural elements of individualism and masculinity strongly influenced individuals' adoption of a competing style of conflict management (Mohammed et al., 2008). Chinese publics for example prefer to use avoiding, integrating, or compromising conflict styles rather than dominating styles (Chow & Ding, 2002). Finally, political interruption strongly influenced the state of COPR as well. For instance, Alphabet Inc's Google once actively cooperated with and supplied the Android operating system to Huawei in the smartphone market, then the recent political restrictions of the Trump administration forced them to suspect business and stop original cooperating relationships with this Chinese company on apps and services (Moon, 2019).

In sum, Table 1 presents all the above-mentioned predisposing, situational, and contextual attributes. Following a contingent perspective, this theory proposes the second proposition to establish the relationship's linkage to its antecedents:

**Proposition 2 (P2).** Three categories of antecedents such as predispositions, conflict situations, or contextual elements, could significantly influence the relationship modes between organizations and their publics in conflict(s).

### **Relational Outcomes: Consequences of COPRs**

Organizations' relationship quality in conflicts has been a key term in both public relations and conflict management scholarship (Cheng, 2018; Speakman & Ryals, 2010). Relational outcomes, as a composite measure of relationship strength include four major dimensions: satisfaction, trust, commitment, and control mutuality. Scholars such as Grunig and Huang (2000) and Yang (2007) both constructed integrated models and they successfully supported control mutuality, trust, relationship satisfaction, and relational commitment as consequences of OPR. Cheng and Shen (2020) conceptualized trust as the level of mutual confidence between two or more relational partners. Relational satisfaction refers to "a satisfying relationship is one in which the distribution of rewards is equitable and the relational rewards outweigh the cost" (Stafford & Canary, 1991, p. 225). With information exchange between involved parties, increasing academic attention in recent years has been paid to people's satisfaction and affection (Curhan et al., 2010). Commitment is another important relational outcome, and Morgan and Hunt (1994) defined it as "an exchange partner believing that an ongoing relationship with another is so important as to warrant maximum efforts at maintaining it; that is, the committed party believes the relationship is worth working on to ensure that it endures indefinitely" (p. 23). Control mutuality means "the degree to which parties agree on who has rightful power to influence one another" (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 19).

Past literature also suggested that the relating management process between organizations and their publics might significantly affect their relationship quality. For instance, Trudel (2010) found that organizational commitment, as one dimension of relational outcome in workforce, was determined by different conflict styles and relationship modes. For instance, the dominating conflict management style (Rahim, 2004) and the capitulating relationship mode were negatively related to organizational commitment. Integrating conflict management styles associated with the cooperating relationship mode in contrast received a higher level of organizational commitment. Harrison and Doerfel's (2006) research also demonstrated that an open and integrative conflict management style and relational interactions could help restore trust and commitment in the organization. We thus propose the third proposition:

**Proposition 3(P3).** The contingent organization-public relationships (COPR) might significantly influence the relationship quality between organizations and their publics in conflict(s).

### The Case Illustrations

To further apply the above-mentioned research propositions, this article adopted an illustrative case on the conflict between Johnson and its talc-based baby powder consumers. This approach allowed researchers to understand the complexity of dynamic relationships, delve into essential processes of information interactions between organizations and their key publics, and explore the connection between these relational processes with a larger context (Wimmer & Dominick, 1997). In the following sections, we first briefly introduced the case background of Johnson’s conflict with its baby powder consumers, and then we applied the theoretical propositions (P1-P3) in the analysis of this case.

#### Brief Introduction

Johnson & Johnson, an American international medical products corporation, publicly announced on their website on May 19, 2020 that they would be discontinuing the sale of their talc-based baby powder (Johnson & Johnson, 2020). A “barrage of litigation advertising” came after stories published in Reuters and the New York Times (NYT), both on December 14, 2018, alleged that Johnson was aware that there was a link between their talc-based products and ovarian cancer and mesothelioma, as asbestos occurred underground near talcum and their products would test positive for trace amounts of asbestos (Girion, 2018). The Johnson’s baby powder consumers brought media attention to the potentially hazardous product by suing in droves-nearly 19,000 lawsuits were filed- and refusing to continue buying the product which makes up “half a percent of its total consumer health business in the United States” (Hsu & Rabin, 2020, para. 19). A timeline of this conflict was presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
*Timeline of Johnson & Johnson’s Baby Powder Conflict*

Date	Actions of Johnson	Responses from Consumers
<b>Stage 1: Starting of a Competing Relationship</b>		
<b>1970s-2000s</b>	-Internal documents show Johnson was aware of the potential health risk of their talc-based baby powder -Internal tests show trace amounts of asbestos in talc-based Johnson’s baby powder	-The public is initially unaware of these documents and continue to use Johnson’s baby powder -Regulations on talcum increase as it is linked with asbestos contamination in scientific studies
<b>October 2017</b>	-Documents unsealed that stated Johnson was aware of the potential contamination of their baby powder	-22 plaintiffs win a case against Johnson in connection to cancer to Johnson’s talc-based baby powder, \$4.69 billion in damages awarded -Groundbreaking win for consumers

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<b>April and May 2018</b>	-Johnson loses more cases but maintains the safety of their product	-Consumers continue to demand discontinuation of talc-based Johnson's baby powder
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<b>December 14, 2018</b>	-Reuters and New York Times (NYT) reports that Johnson knew about potential health hazards of the product, in the following days their stocks plummet -Johnson continues to appeal litigation against them, maintaining that their product is safe	-High numbers of cases filed by consumers against Johnson as more people come forward with cancer linked to talc-based products - There's a \$40 billion dollar stock sell-off as consumer's trust in Johnson decreases in response to Reuters and NYT articles
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### Stage 2: Moving Toward a Capitulating Relationship

<b>October 5, 2019</b>	-CEO of Johnson testifies to the safety of their talc-based baby powder	-Consumers continue litigations
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<b>October 18, 2019</b>	-Johnson recalls 33,000 bottles of talc-based baby powder for trace asbestos contamination	-Consumers call for the discontinuation of talc-based Johnson's baby powder
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### Stage 3: Finalizing as a Cooperating Relationship

<b>May 19, 2020</b>	-Johnson discontinues its talc-based Johnson's baby powder in Canada and the U.S.	-Consumers agree with the settlement as Johnson discontinues its baby powder.
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## The COPR in Conflicts

The first proposition (*P1*) was about the state of relationships between the organization (i.e., Johnson & Johnson) and publics (i.e., baby powder consumers), and how the relationship changed across stages in this conflict. Below we presented and analyzed three stages of contingent relationships.

### Stage 1: Start of a Competing Relationship

Both Johnson and talc-based baby powder consumers had aggressive stances during this stage of their conflict, therefore they had a competing relationship.

**Johnson's Stance - Aggression.** Before the release of the Reuters and NYT Reports on the potential health hazards posed by Johnson's baby powder, Johnson took an aggressive stance against consumers who were suing them due to an alleged connection between their talc-based baby powder and ovarian cancer and mesothelioma. They displayed this stance by appealing cases against them and the presence of internal documentation, "hundreds of pages of memos, executives worried about a potential government ban of talc, the safety of the product and a public backlash over Johnson's baby powder, a brand built on a reputation for trustworthiness and health" stated the NYT report that, along with a similar Reuters article, sparked Johnson's baby powder crisis (Rabin & Hsu, 2018, para. 4).

**Public Stance - Aggression.** Johnson's baby powder consumers took an aggressive stance by suing the company, as there was a connection made between their cancer and the talc-based baby powder. There were 22 female consumers who had sued Johnson and won \$4.7 billion, "one of the largest personal injury verdicts ever" (Hsu & Rabin, 2020, para. 9). Johnson's baby powder consumers had federal regulation to back this litigation, as scientific evidence connecting talcum-based products to ovarian cancer and mesothelioma had prompted the FDA to tighten regulations protecting consumers (Girion, 2018).

### ***Stage 2: Moving Toward a Capitulating Relationship***

As Johnson moved away from their aggressive stance and consumers continued to demand the discontinuation of the baby powder, the relationship moved towards capitulating.

**Johnson's Stance - Accommodation.** Up until a voluntary recall, Johnson maintained an aggressive stance by appealing cases they lost and maintaining that their baby powder was safe (Girion, 2018). In October of 2019, they moved toward an accommodating stance when they voluntarily recalled 33,000 bottles of talc-based baby powder due to trace amounts of asbestos contamination (Hsu & Rabin, 2019).

**Public Stance - Aggression.** The Reuters and NYT stories prompted "a stock selloff that erased about \$40 billion from the company's market value in one day" (Terhune et al., 2019, para. 30). There were around 19,000 lawsuits, as of late March, against Johnson made by consumers who believed that their ovarian cancer or mesothelioma was caused by its talc-based baby powder, which brought about negative media attention and cost Johnson billions (Hsu & Rabin, 2020). After the October 2019 recall, consumers called for a discontinuation of the talc-based baby powder (Hsu & Rabin, 2019).

### ***Stage 3: Finalizing as a Cooperative Relationship***

Johnson's stance became accommodative, meeting the consumer's demands to discontinue their baby powder, moving the relationship toward cooperative.

**Johnson's Stance - Accommodation.** "The decision to wind down sales of the product is a huge concession for Johnson & Johnson, which has for more than a century promoted the powder as pure and gentle enough for babies" (Hsu & Rabin, 2020, para. 2). After continued litigation and both reputational and economic losses, Johnson discontinued their Johnson's baby powder product stating that it was no longer economically viable (Johnson & Johnson, 2020).

**Public Stance - Accommodation.** Consumers successfully pressured Johnson into discontinuing the product through continued pressure in the media and continued court cases and allegations against Johnson. Their demand had been met and agreed with the settlement in the United States and Canada (Hsu & Rabin, 2020).

In summary, Johnson's relationship with its talc-based baby powder consumers became a competing relationship when those consumers were made aware of the potentially carcinogenic effects of Johnson's baby powder in the 1970s and began suing Johnson (Rabin & Hsu, 2018). The lawsuits increased after the release of Reuters and The NYT articles confirming Johnson knew its baby powder was potentially unsafe and could contain asbestos. As Johnson continued to defend itself in court, consumers called for Johnson to remove its product from sale (Rabin & Hsu, 2018). The relationship mode became capitulating as Johnson voluntarily recalled 33,000 bottles of Johnson's baby powder on October 18, 2019, which tested positive for trace amounts of asbestos (Hsu & Rabin, 2019). The call from consumers for a total recall of all bottles continued until Johnson took the accommodative stance and discontinued the talc-based baby powder on May 19, 2020, moving the relationship to a cooperative one where Johnson met the demands of its consumers (Johnson & Johnson, 2020).

### The Antecedents of COPR in Conflicts

Antecedent categories such as predisposition, situational variables, and contextual variables could influence the relationship between talc baby powder consumers and Johnson during this crisis. Based on this second proposition (*P2*), the following section delineated antecedents and their impact during this conflict.

#### Predisposing Factors

Johnson had an organizational culture of promoting their brand as a family-friendly health organization and a history of appealing lawsuits against them and taking aggressive stances against consumers who found issues with their products (Rabin & Hsu, 2018). Johnson's baby powder consumers used the precedents set by product safety laws that predispose consumers to litigation as a tool of aggression (Girion, 2018). Meanwhile, public familiarity with Johnson and the size of the public calling attention to its issues-over 19,000 lawsuits- with its talc-based baby powder increased the negotiation power, resulting in a competing relationship with the company in early stages of conflicts (Coleman, 2020).

#### Conflict Situations

The conflict situation involved potential threats and costs to Johnson's reputation and the economic viability of their talc-based baby powder (Johnson & Johnson, 2020). Johnson had a \$40 billion market loss after a stock sell-off the day after the NYT and Reuters stories came out (Terhune et al., 2019). Johnson also had to pay \$4.7 billion in one of the over 19,000 cases against them by consumers (Hsu & Rabin, 2020). The total cost of the baby powder conflict was estimated between \$5 billion and \$10 billion in 2019 (Hsu & Rabin, 2019), pushing Johnson to finally comprise and discontinue its baby powder in 2020. For consumers, the potential threats were both to their health and the potential for a settlement from Johnson for the damages caused to those consumers by the product (Girion, 2018), leading toward an aggressive stance. As consumers and Johnson moved through the levels of escalation that led up to the change to a capitulating relationship, the conflict situation also shifted. This is because accommodative moves by Johnson served to de-escalate the conflict due to high levels of costs.

#### Contextual Elements

Regarding contextual variables, we found that moral conviction, regulatory/legal restraints, and jurisdictional concerns all influenced the relational interactions between Johnson their public. For instance, as laws and regulations developed around the use of talc-based products, so did the responses of both consumers and Johnson. Consumers felt a moral conviction for removing the talc-based baby powder from circulation. Many consumers held Johnson's baby powder responsible for their cancer. One consumer, who had used the powder since she was ten years old and survived ovarian cancer twice, went as far as to state that its ultimate removal meant that "no more little girls are going to go through what we went through" (Hsu & Rabin, 2020, para. 9). For Johnson, initially the legality of previous cases was against them as it was found that "J&J didn't tell the FDA that at least three tests by three different labs from 1972 to 1975 had found asbestos in its talc - in one case at levels reported as rather high" (Girion, 2018, para. 5). As these internal documents were released to the public, they gave credibility to new lawsuits and negatively impacted consumer opinion of Johnson. More recently, they had to accommodate and recall products as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) was alerting customers that a type of asbestos was found from a sample of Johnson's products (Girion, 2018).

### The Outcomes of COPRs in Conflicts

The third proposition stated that contingent OPR would influence the relationship quality in terms of the control mutuality, satisfaction, trust, or commitment between organizations and their publics. In other words, more cooperative and less conflicting relationships were of a higher quality than high conflict relationships. Indicators like control mutuality- authentic, pertinent, and responsive discourse- and trust- an attempt at communication that will show the competence, dependability, and integrity of the organization- show how relationships changed (Charbonnet, 2012). These indicators showed negative results by publics or organizations when the relationship wasn't positive and leaned toward a competitive relationship. For instance, early on in the conflict, consumers on social media said that the link between Johnson's baby powder and cancer was "scary"; consumers claimed that they "distrusted" the brand and would not use the product anymore (Athavaley, 2016).

When the COPR improved and moved toward the cooperating orientation, relationship quality such as control mutuality and trust would increase as well. For instance, Johnson showed that it attempted to regain consumer trust by discontinuing its sale of the talc-based baby powder in Canada and the United States. Consumer advocates even stated that other companies should follow Johnson's example, as several companies still use asbestos in their manufacturing process, and that the action will save lives (Hsu & Rabin, 2020). This indicated increasing trust by consumers for Johnson and its decision to discontinue its talc-based baby powder. As sales declined and the baby powder failed to perform, Johnson's change in stance toward accommodation allowed for a resolution of the conflict between consumers and themselves (Hsu & Rabin, 2020). This exhibited control mutuality as Johnson considered what consumer's reactions have been to the talc-baby powder and responded to their concerns. Consequently, the contingency theory of relating management took into consideration the effects of both organizational responses and consumer's reaction and how the relationship modes might have significantly influenced the relationship quality.

### Discussion and Conclusion

According to Hazleton and Botan (1989), "a theory consists of at least two concepts and a statement explaining or predicting the relationship between those concepts" (p. 7). Different from a model, a theory should be used to explain a phenomenon (Littlejohn, 1995). Grounded in public relations and conflict management literature, this article presented contingency theory of relating management, as a contingent approach illuminating the phenomenon (i.e., dynamic relationship process between organizations and their publics) and elements of the condition (i.e., antecedents such as predisposing, situational, and contextual factors) to produce such a phenomenon in conflicts. Aiming to clarify "what enables the organization to change, what causes the changes to occur in relationships" (Cheng & Cameron, 2019, p. 690), and what might be the outcomes of relationships, this contingency theory emphasized COPRs as the domain and its connections with antecedents and relational outcomes. Operationally, this article specified operational definitions and measures of relationships. A case illustration of conflicts between Johnson and its baby powder consumers was analyzed to support propositions of this theory. Implications were delineated from the three dimensions below.

First, this article and its theoretical framework provide an alternative approach to the normative theory of public relations and shift our focus from one-time snapshots of relationships to a holistic overview of the relational state between two or multiple parties in conflicts. As shown in the conflict between Johnson and its consumers, each demonstrated their own stances implemented through diversified conflicting management strategies. Both parties co-oriented toward each other in decision-making processes, and perspectives of both parties were counted. Meanwhile, results supported the dynamic nature of the relationship process using an empirical case study (Broom et al., 1997; Dougall, 2005). Across the three

stages of Johnson's conflicts, we noticed that the relationships between the company and their publics changed over time, starting from a highly competitive mode to a capitulating one in past decades. Then, after negotiations, both parties reached a cooperating relationship in 2020.

Second, this theory advances current public relations literature on conflicts (Cancel et al., 1997; Dougall, 2005; Kelleher, 2003; Murphy & Dee, 1996; Shin et al., 2005). As conflict is an inevitable aspect of relationships in organizational contexts, a few researchers have investigated OPRs in conflicts (Cheng & Cameron, 2019; Dougall, 2005). However, within the limited discussions, the characteristics of conflicts such as time pressure and levels of escalations were ignored, and antecedents of relationships were not fully considered (Cheng, 2018). The contingency theory of accommodation (Cancel et al., 1997), for instance, has been widely applied in conflicts or crises for strategic management. However, this theory did not elaborate on the relationship management in conflicts and the unit of analysis focused on organizations only. This new established theoretical frame, thus contributed to strategic emphases of public relations in conflict management via explicating three categories of antecedents: predispositions about attributes of organizations and publics; situational variables like time pressure, levels of escalations, or perceived threats during crises or conflict communication process; and contextual elements such as cultural characteristics and political interruption. The outcomes of COPRs were also delineated in this article, supplementing previous discussions on contingency factors (Cancel et al., 1997; Cancel et al., 1999). At the end of a particular point in time, relational outcomes might serve as the antecedents of COPRs for the next point in time.

Third, this new model of COPRs adds value to the existing conflict theory, which mainly focuses on intra-organizational (e.g., Guinot et al., 2015; Jameson, 1999; Oliveira & Lumineau, 2019) or interpersonal conflicts (e.g., Ayoko, 2016; Thomas, 1992). However, to date, there has been little theoretical discussion in conflict management focusing on the relationships between organizations and their publics. Organizations nowadays are facing conflicts with their diversified stakeholders such as employees or customers, whether the organization is a corporate or a non-profit or whether the conflict is about resources, relationship, identity, or justice (Lu & Guo, 2019). Thus, it is important to propose the contingency theory of relating management to advance theoretical lens about the interactive and changing relationships during conflicts and synthesize both organization and publics' perspectives that might determine the dynamic relationships in conflicts. By introducing public relations literature into the social conflict paradigm, this contingency theory is not only descriptive, but it can also be utilized as a strategic toolkit that serves both organizational and public interests and predicts directions for decision-making processes in conflict management.

### **Limitation and Suggestions for Future Research**

Built on existing literature of public relations and conflict management, this contingency theory of relating management fulfills the criterion of a theory set by Littlejohn (1995), serving as a heuristic for further empirical research on COPRs in conflicts and a practical toolkit for negotiators and crisis managers as well. Although this theory is built on extensive literature review and evidence from a case illustration, its applicability and universality remain unknown. Future empirical studies should be conducted to validate these propositions in single- or multiple-cases. Below section briefly introduces qualitative and quantitative research programs that can be implemented in the future.

### **Qualitative Research**

The first stage in research derived from this theoretical work should include a program of qualitative research such as in-depth interviews or focus groups with both public relations practitioners and publics to explore the proposed antecedents, how they may relate or affect each other, and further influence COPRs. Specifically, both organizations and their key publics (e.g., consumers or employees) in conflicts can be asked

if and when a certain stance occurs, what factors motivate them to adopt that stance, and what factors drive more competing or accommodating conflict styles. Interviewees could also help to review the entire matrix of antecedents of COPRs and identify possible missing factors for further validation and refinement of the existing framework.

### Quantitative Research

Grounded in quantitative work, quantitative research methods such as computational content analysis and machine learning techniques could be utilized to collect generalizable data in the second stage. Specifically, the massive structured or unstructured sources of data achieved from social media tools are likely to provide manifest contents for understanding the contingent relationships between organizations and their publics over time (Cheng & Cameron, 2019; Spence et al., 2016). This theory allows scholars to take advantage of new technologies, analyzing the “continuous information flows and issue dynamics among relational parties” in communication (Cheng & Cameron, 2019, p. 702). By recognizing and identifying the different modes of relationships across time, this theory also helps to foresee future relational states and relationship qualities and test the OPR state’s association with its antecedents and outcomes. We expect that the publics and organizations benefit to varying degrees and develop a better understanding of each other, even if they may not necessarily agree with each other. Comparative research utilizing this theoretical framework in both Western and non-Western countries can be examined in future studies as well.

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# Conflict Positioning in Crisis Communication: Impact of Antecedent Conditions on Negotiation

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## Keywords

contingency theory of strategic conflict management, image repair theory, crisis communication, negotiation, dual concern model, cylindrical model of communication behavior in crisis negotiations

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## Abstract

Organizations need to position themselves favorably in times of crisis. The conflict positioning conceptualization offers a framework for organizations to do so by integrating insights of crisis communication with negotiation through the following steps. First, understanding the factors that will affect an organization's ability to handle the crisis. Second, based on the influence of these factors, examine the stance the organization will adopt. Third, examine the strategies the organization will embrace. Fourth, the strategies adopted will impact the conflict property it aims to resolve which will in turn influence the negotiation approach and the relationship dynamics between the organization and its publics. Last but not least, how these will impact the tactics enacted. Ten propositions, based on examination of five a priori factors which have also been validated in other studies, are examined. This is followed by application of how conflict positioning can occur in two real-life cases. This framework offers practical applications and theoretical implications.

Even as this study is being examined in 2020, governments all over the world are battling Covid-19, which the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared as a global pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020). The pandemic can be examined as a global conflict that requires the collaboration of all governments to resolve it (United Nations, 2020).

Conflict is defined as “an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities” (Rahim, 2002, p. 207). Jin et al. (2012a), citing Maslow (1943), argued that conflicts stem from a root cause: A threat that leads to crisis. For organizations, scholars have argued for public relations (PR) professionals to be at the forefront of managing conflict (Bowen, 2010; Hutton, 2010; Wilcox et al., 2015). As boundary spanners – representatives of the organization who monitor and facilitate organizational interaction with the external environment (Vasquez, 1996) – PR practitioners are expected to engage in strategic communications and conflict management to benefit the organization in a crisis (Wilcox & Cameron, 2007, p. 243). PR as a communication function ought to be viewed as negotiation, and more thought needs to be put into understanding how to develop the role, argued Vasquez (1996). Negotiation is communication, argued Ni et al. (2018), while Varma (2011) contended that it should form part of crisis communication.

Increasingly, scholars have argued for crisis communication to be positioned as, recognized as, and evolved into opportunities for organizational strategic thinking (Coombs, 2019). Strategic thinking is when organization uses the crisis occasion as a platform to validate its mission, values, and operations (Lerbinger, 1997). This involves an examination of the organization’s epistemology, hierarchy, and existence (Seeger et al., 2003). Ulmer and Pyle (2016) argued that crisis communication should lead to the creation of favorable outcomes by negotiating with the parties involved. This study argues that organizations can do so through conflict positioning, i.e., situating themselves “favorably in anticipation of conflicts” (Wilcox et al., 2015, p. 260). To expand on the idea, this study proposes that organizational factors critical in determining its position are identified, and its position, or what this study terms conflict stance, enacted. Conflict stance will influence crisis response strategies, and thereafter impact negotiation approach and tactics.

The significance of this study is three-fold. First, it is arguably one of the first studies that integrates crisis communication with conflict management. Diers-Lawson and Pang (2021) noted that traditionally, conflict and crisis were pursued as separate streams with little overlap. This ought to change given the interconnectedness of issues, organizations, and publics. Second, conflict positioning conceptualization calls for a synoptic and systemic rather than a symptomatic approach to crisis communication and negotiation. This framework not only integrates stance and strategies, but also explicates negotiation approach and tactics. Thus far, each set of literature, be they crisis, negotiation or conflict management, has been scant in addressing this. Vasquez (1996) argued that there is a greater need to integrate negotiation into crisis communication. This framework aims to do that. It forms what Liu and Viens (2020) described as multiphase scholarship, understanding how crisis proceed, take shape and is resolved. Third, conflict positioning conceptualization is theory building. By integrating crisis and conflict theories with insights from negotiation, this study proposes a new theoretical perspective that builds new grounds in understanding how organizations can conduct themselves from how they communicate in times of crises to how negotiation can be enacted. Liu and Viens (2020) reflected the arguments among scholars that theory must advance practice, and it is hoped that the theoretical and practical insights drawn from this study can benefit them.



organization on the continuum at a given time towards a given public (Pang et al., 2020). The theory, thus, sought to understand the dynamics, within and outside the organization that could affect an organization's stance. There are factors that influence the organization's position on the continuum *before* it interacts with a public; and those *during* the interaction. The former are categorized as predisposing variables, while the latter, situational variables. Some well-supported predisposing factors included: (1) The size of the organization; (2) Corporate culture; (3) Business exposure; (4) PR to dominant coalition; (5) Dominant coalition enlightenment; (6) Individual characteristics of key personnel, like members of the crisis management team. The dominant coalition can be defined as members of senior management, or people who enact policies (Sriramesh, 2010). Situational variables shift the organization from a predisposed accommodative or adversarial stance when the organization interacts with the public. Some well-supported situational factors included: (1) Urgency of the situation; (2) Characteristics of the other public; (3) Potential or obvious threats; (4) Potential costs or benefit for the organization from choosing various stances.

Moral, legal, and regulatory factors that affect accommodation are labelled as proscriptive variables. Six were identified: (1) When there is moral conviction that an accommodative or dialogic stance towards a public may be inherently unethical; (2) When there is a need to maintain moral neutrality in the face of contending publics; (3) When legal constraints curtail accommodation; (4) When there are regulatory restraints; (5) When the dominant coalition prohibit an accommodative stance; and (6) When the issue becomes a jurisdictional concern within the organization, and resolution of the issue takes on a constrained and complex process of negotiation (Pang et al., 2020).

CTSCM thus offered two critical insights in crisis communication: First, **contingency factor**: What are the key antecedent factors that impact crisis communication? These antecedent factors were drawn from the roles they play in predisposing, situational and proscriptive variables in CTSCM; Second, **conflict stance**: How do the key antecedent factors impact the organization's position on the contingency continuum?

### ***Image Repair and Situational Crisis Communication Theories: Strategies-Driven Approach***

IRT is based on the assumption that maintaining a favorable reputation is a key goal in communication (Benoit & Pang, 2008). Face, image, and reputation are threatened during a crisis and the theory provides a series of options that communicate and repair bruised image. There are five general strategies and 14 options (Benoit & Pang, 2008). They are:

- Denial, with two variants: *Simple denial* involves either denying that an offense occurred, or refuting allegations that the accused performed the offense. *Shifting the blame* asserts that another party is responsible.
- Evasion of responsibility, with four variants: *Provocation* suggests that the offense was committed in response to a prior offense by another party. In *defeasibility* the accused contends a lack of information or control. *Accident* asserts that the situation occurred unintentionally. *Good intentions* suggest that the offense was committed with expectations of a positive outcome.
- Reducing offensiveness, with six variants: *Bolstering* highlights positive traits of the accused. *Minimization* suggests that the offense is less serious than perceived. In *differentiation*, the offense is compared to a more undesirable event. *Transcendence* are attempts to reframe the offense positively. *Attacking the accuser* strives to reduce the credibility of accusers and *compensation* occurs when something of value is offered to the victims.
- Corrective action reassures that steps are being taken to solve or prevent future crisis.
- Mortification involves an admission of wrongdoing and apology.

While IRT is textual, SCCT is contextual (Frandsen & Johansen, 2020). The latter proposes that strategies be selected based on intensifying factors like prior reputation, attribution of responsibility and crisis history of the organization. The SCCT presents 10 strategies divided into three postures: Deny, diminish, and deal (Coombs, 2008).

- Deny has three sub-categories. *Denial* is that no crisis occurred. The accused may *attack the accuser* by confronting their claims or employ a *scapegoat*, blaming others.
- Diminish has two strategies. *Excuse* is responsibility minimization – denying intent to commit offense or claiming a lack of control. In *justification*, the accused minimizes the seriousness of the offense.
- Deal includes five sub-categories. In *ingratiation*, publics are praised to remind them of the good work. *Concern* may be expressed for victims or *compensation* provided in the form of gifts or money. The accused *express regret* by indicating remorse for the situation or issue an *apology* by taking responsibility and seeking forgiveness.

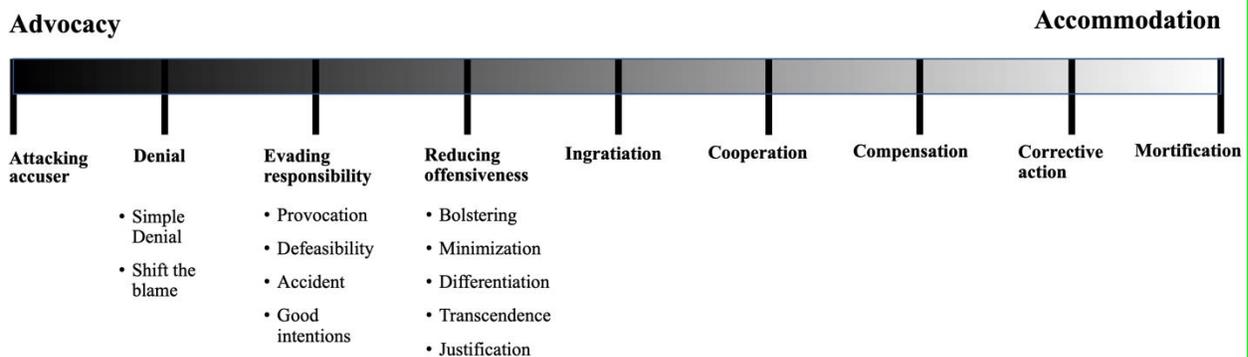
### Amalgamation of Crisis Strategies

Pang et al. (2012) proposed the Extended Crisis Responses Framework (ECRF) by integrating IRT and SCCT with CTSCM. Ismail et al. (2019) considered the ECRF as a collection of the most comprehensive set of strategies in crisis response.

In many respects, the three communication theories and the combination in the ECRF are complementary and supplementary in understanding how stance impact crisis response strategies. CTSCM is based on analyzing an organization’s stance before it enters into communication whereas crisis response strategies are based on analyzing an organization’s strategies as it enters into communication. Given the natural integration of stance and strategies, (Benoit, 2004, Coombs, 2010b; Marcus & Goodman, 1991), one framework that attempted to integrate them can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Extended Crisis Response Framework (Pang, Ho, & Malik, 2012)



The **response strategies**, particularly the ECRF, thus offered a critical insight in crisis communication: How would the strategies be enacted based on the contingency factor and conflict stance?

## From Crisis Communication to Negotiation: Filling Theoretical Gap

While the integration of stance with strategies fills a gap in research, it has not addressed the next part of the puzzle: How does this inform negotiation. This study attempts to do so by drawing on insights on conflict (Ni et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2012); negotiation (Dreu et al., 2000; Pruitt & Rubin, 1986; Rhoades & Carnevale, 1999; Wang et al., 2012) and crisis negotiations (Taylor, 2002; Taylor & Donald, 2004).

To fill the theoretical gap, three lines of research to integrate crisis communication with conflict and negotiation are proposed: First, **conflict management**. This addresses the conflict property that needs to be resolved. The properties are drawn from Ni et al. (2018) who defined conflict as “perceived incompatible verbal or nonverbal activities between interdependent parties in achieving salient goals; it is prone to arouse emotional responses” (p. 120). The six properties are: (1) “perceived interdependence with the other party”; (2) “perceived incompatibility” of goals; (3) “perceived incompatibility of verbal and nonverbal activities; (4) “these activities often involve goal-oriented, or intentional communicative acts”; (5) “these activities are prone to arouse intense emotions”; (6) “these activities may evolve based on the dynamics of the encounter” (p. 120).

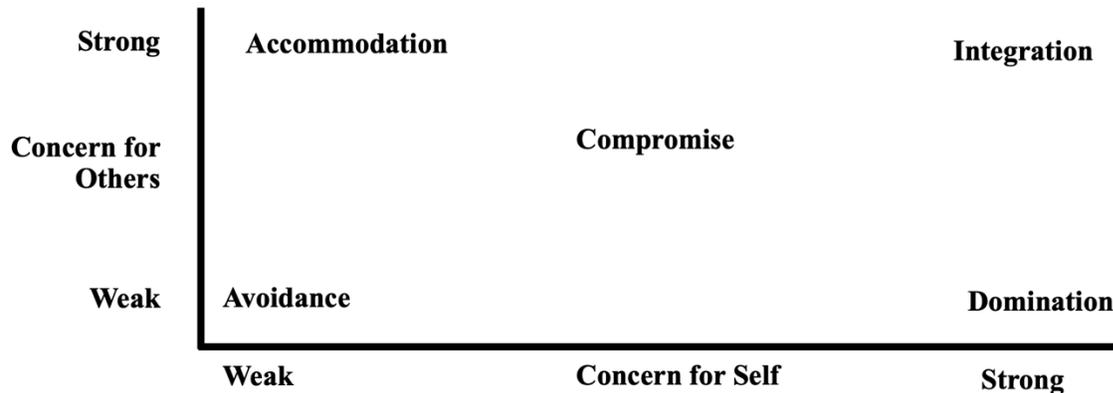
Second, the **negotiation approach and relationship dynamics**. Based on the dual concern model discussed above, the organization can either adopt high other-concern or high self-concern. High other-concern emerges when organizations are motivated to cooperate while high self-concern appears when organizations are motivated to compete or demonstrate toughness (Dreu et al., 2000). Anchored on two axes, self-concern on the X and other-concern on the Y is a mix of responses. Wang et al. (2012) argued where there is high self-concern and low other-concern, the strategy is domination, i.e. “demanding that others give in to one’s positions” (p. 227). Where there is low self-concern but high other-concern, accommodation – “a strategy of giving in to satisfy another party’s interests” (p. 227) – is used. Where there is high-concern for positive outcomes for both parties, integration, “a strategy of maximizing gains for both parties” (p. 227), is exercised. Where there is low concern for self and others, avoidance, “a strategy of inaction” (p. 227) is used. Compromise, “a strategy of finding a middle ground for both sides” (p. 227) occurs when there is moderate concern for both parties’ outcomes. Wang et al. (2012) further elaborated two tasks or functions in interpersonal relationships. The socioemotional function “reflects an affective connection” (p. 225) while the instrumental function “reflects the degree of usefulness” (p. 225) to achieve personal gains (see Figure 2).

Third, **negotiation behaviors**. Insights are drawn from Taylor (2002) and Taylor and Donald’s (2004) cylindrical model of communication behavior in crisis negotiations. The framework postulates three levels of orientation: Integrative (cooperative), distributive (antagonistic) and avoidance (withdrawn) (Taylor, 2002). Underlying each level are identity, instrumental and relational themes, which describes the motivation of the engagement. These are manifested in behaviors adopted (see Table 1 for orientation, motivation and behavior).

Integrating these components, the conflict positioning conceptualization is based on a series of theoretical propositions. Favorable positioning in a crisis, thus, involves understanding a series of components. First, the factors that affect an organization’s ability to handle the crisis, and based on the influence of these factors, the stance the organization is likely to adopt; second, the strategies adopted based on the stance; third, the conflict property the organization aims to resolve; fourth, the adopted negotiation approach and the relationship dynamics between the organization and its publics; and fifth, the tactics to be enacted (see Figure 3).

**Figure 2**

*Dual concern model (adapted from Wang, Fink, & Cai, 2012)*



***Conflict Positioning in Crisis Communication for Negotiation: A Conceptualization***

This section begins with contingency factors. The five contingency factors examined are involvement of dominant coalition, influence of PR in the crisis, influence of legal in the crisis, importance of the primary publics to the organization, and the organization's perception of threat to its reputation. Validated in studies (Hwang & Cameron, 2008, 2009), these *a priori* factors are derived from the importance they play in the clusters of variables in CTSCM. The role of the dominant coalition is examined in the predisposing and proscriptive cluster of variables; PR is examined in the predisposing cluster of variables; legal is examined in the predisposing and proscriptive cluster of variables; primary publics is examined in the situational and proscriptive cluster of variables; and threat is examined in the situational cluster of variables. These five factors, both internal and external, are critical (Jin et al., 2021). In CTSCM, the dominant coalition has been examined for its leadership roles (Jin et al., 2006, 2007; Pang et al., 2006) with PR (Li et al., 2010; Shin et al., 2006) and legal (Reber et al., 2003) as important components in the crisis management team (Jaques, 2016). As these internal factors are examined, two external factors of threat (Pang et al., 2006) and the importance of primary publics (Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2010b) remain critical to study. While not exhaustive, these five factors represent an important first step in the synthesis of theoretical insights.

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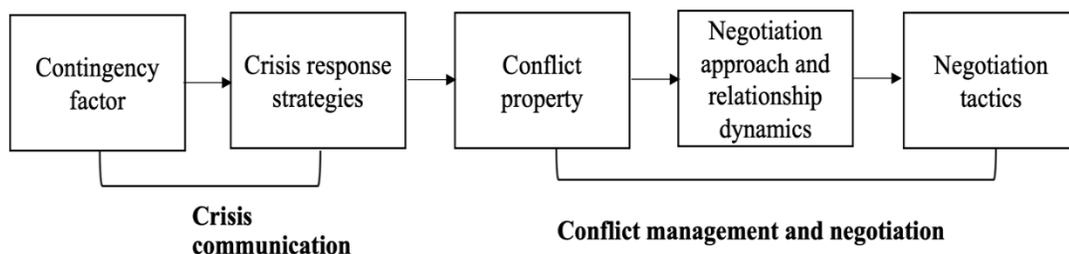
**Table 1**

*Cylindrical Model of Communication Behaviour in Crisis Negotiation (Taylor & Donald, 2004)*

Orientation	Motivation	Behavior		
Integrative	Instrumental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer</li> <li>• Integrative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compromise</li> <li>• Comply-Demand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promise</li> <li>• Accept-Offer</li> </ul>
	Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allure</li> <li>• Compliment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empathy</li> <li>• Negative-Self</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apology</li> <li>• Common</li> </ul>
	Relational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reassure</li> <li>• Confidence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage</li> <li>• Discourage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Humour</li> <li>• Agree</li> </ul>
Distributive	Instrumental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reject-Demand</li> <li>• Threat-Action</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reject-Offer</li> <li>• Demand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alternative</li> </ul>
	Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Criticism</li> <li>• Commitment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insult</li> <li>• Profanity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal Superiority-self</li> </ul>
	Relational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excuse</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Justify</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appeal</li> </ul>
Avoidance	Instrumental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid</li> <li>• Shift</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retract</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inaction</li> </ul>
	Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Denial</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accuse</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provoke</li> </ul>
	Relational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negative-Reply</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submissive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interrupt</li> </ul>

**Figure 3**

*Conflict Positioning for Negotiation*



external, are critical (Jin et al., 2021). In CTSCM, the dominant coalition has been examined for its leadership roles (Jin et al., 2006, 2007; Pang et al., 2006) with PR (Li et al., 2010; Shin et al., 2006) and legal (Reber et al., 2003) as important components in the crisis management team (Jaques, 2016). As these internal factors are examined, two external factors of threat (Pang et al., 2006) and the importance of primary publics (Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2010b) remain critical to study. While not exhaustive, these five factors represent an important first step in the synthesis of theoretical insights.

### ***Contingency Factor: Involvement of Dominant Coalition***

CTSCM describes the dominant coalition in various characteristics, such as its values, style, altruism level, and support and understanding of communication. Using CTSCM to study how the United States and China resolved the crisis over the collision of a US Navy reconnaissance plane with a Chinese fighter jet in the South China Sea in April 2001, Zhang et al. (2004) found the hawkish characteristics of the dominant coalition in the US government a key factor in its less than accommodative stance. Pang et al. (2006) also found that the singular weight of the dominant coalition overwhelmed all other factors, namely PR department characteristics, PR access to the dominant coalition, and characteristics of line managers in deciding how far crisis preparation could go. Other studies also supported the importance of the dominant coalition during crisis (Coombs, 2019; Marra, 1998; Ulmer, 2001).

**Conflict Stance.** Current studies, however, are not conclusive as to what stance, more or less accommodative, an organization is likely to adopt should the dominant coalition determine the direction in crisis communication. CTSCM argues that this is dependent on the situation. Proscriptive factors in the theory, like whether the organization maintains a moral conviction to enter into dialogue, or if dominant coalition agrees to an accommodative stance, can perhaps provide some indication the stance the organization is likely to take.

What is clear, however, is that if the dominant coalition decides on a particular stance, it is highly likely to maintain it (Reber et al., 2003). The authors found that the dominant coalition's less accommodative stance left "no room for compromise or accommodation" (p. 7). Leichy (1997) found that if there is a shared mission of progress with the public, there would likely be an accommodative stance. Depending on the situation, a dominant coalition heavily involved in crisis communication may adopt either a more accommodative or less accommodative (advocacy) stance.

**Crisis Response Strategies.** Benoit (1995a) argued that a crisis demands that the dominant coalition act decisively and immediately. Englehardt et al. (2004) found the dominant coalition employing more accommodative strategies like mortification. Similarly, Drumheller and Benoit (2004) found that when the dominant coalition employed mortification and bolstering strategies, they were effective in defusing an emerging crisis.

**Conflict Property to Resolve.** The organization needs to decide on three key conflict properties: Are the goals compatible with the publics? Is there interdependence with the publics? What are the evolving dynamics of the situation?

**Negotiation Approach and Relationship Dynamics.** Based on the above arguments, the organization appears to have three options: Exercise high self-concern, exercise high other-concern, or exercise low concern for self and others, informed by whether they regard their relationship with publics as socioemotional or instrumental.

**Negotiation Behaviors.** Taylor (2002) and Taylor and Donald (2004) had not addressed what factors caused the organization to adopt certain tactics. Assumptions from the model's workings with insights from crisis leadership (Argenti, 2017; Lucero et al, 2009; McLean & Ewart, 2020; Pang & Appasamy, 2019) suggest that the dominant coalition sets the tone of organization engagement (Orientation). If the tone calls into question the organization's *raison d'être*, vision, mission and values, then it would draw on its identity or relational themes (Motivation).

### **Theoretical Propositions Concerning Dominant Coalition**

The following propositions are posited.

**Proposition 1.** When the dominant coalition is involved in crisis communication, the organization is likely to:

- a) Adopt a less accommodative stance if moral, legal, regulatory and jurisdictional factors prohibit it from accommodating its publics;
- b) Utilize less accommodative crisis response strategies like denial, evading responsibility, and reducing offensiveness;
- c) Manage the evolving dynamism of the situation to resolve the conflict;
- d) Exhibit low concern for self and others, thereby adopting the strategy of avoidance as it enters into negotiation; likely to view relationship with its publics as instrumental;
- e) Employ tactics that are more avoidance in orientation, instrumental in motivation, and behaviors would likely be to avoid, shift, retract or demonstrate some form of inaction.

**Proposition 2.** When the dominant coalition is involved in crisis communication, the organization is likely to:

- a) Practice a more accommodative stance if the moral, regulatory, legal, and jurisdictional factors *do not* prohibit it from accommodating its publics;
- b) Utilize crisis response strategies like ingratiation, cooperation, compensation, corrective action, and mortification.
- c) Resolve the conflict to emphasize interdependence;
- d) Exhibit high concern for others, thereby adopting the strategy of accommodation as it enters into negotiation; likely to view relationship with its publics as socioemotional;
- e) Employ tactics that are more integrative in orientation, identity or relational in motivation, and behaviors would likely be to compliment, empathize, apologize, reassure or agree.

### **Contingency Factor: Influence of PR in the Crisis**

CTSCM describes the influence of PR practitioners through its position in the organizational hierarchy; its representation in the dominant coalition; and the potential of PR to practice various models of communication. Ahmad and Idid (2020) found practitioners to be “dominant and important” in shaping crisis responses (p. 11). Yeo and Sriramesh (2009) stated that for them to be effective, they must play strategic roles. Bowen (2009) suggested that PR could demonstrate value to the dominant coalition if they work through a crisis situation, thereby creating value for the organization (Zerfass & Viertmann, 2017).

**Conflict Stance.** Reber and Cameron (2003) found that the greater the influence PR had on the crisis, the greater the likelihood the organization would enter into dialogue with its publics. Hoger and Swem (2000) submitted that PR “move quickly from reaction to effective pro-action and interaction” (p. 430) to generate collaboration. This can be done by shaping public perception through the use of media (Pang, 2013; Pang et al., 2018). Bowen (2009) described PR as “ethics counsel” (p. 271) while Lee and Cheng (2011) described them as demonstrating ethical leadership. These suggest that where possible, PR would likely recommend more accommodative stances aimed at protecting image and reputation (Coombs, 2019).

**Crisis Response Strategies.** Benoit (2004) argued for a “prominent company spokesperson” (p. 276) to manage the crisis, while Zhang and Benoit (2004) found that when PR had influence, it generated positive outcomes for the organization. Englehardt et al. (2004) found that PR could help the dominant coalition position the organization favorably; and when PR took charge proactively, the dominant coalition followed (Drumheller & Benoit, 2004).

**Conflict Property to Resolve.** The organization needs to decide on three key conflict properties: How can incompatibility be bridged through verbal and nonverbal activities? How to build interdependence with the publics? How can communication be goal-oriented and intentional?

**Negotiation Approach and Relationship Dynamics.** Based on the above arguments, organization appears to have two options: Exercise high concern for others and self, informed by their socioemotional relationship with its publics.

**Negotiation Behaviors.** The cylindrical model did not examine the factors that caused the organization to adopt certain tactics. Assumptions from the model’s workings with insights from studies examining the interplay of roles between organizational leaders and PR (Lucero et al, 2009; Jaques, 2016, 2020; Vasquez, 1996) suggest that if PR had influence on the dominant coalition, they would be able to advise on the tone of organization engagement and possibly recommend integrative approach (Orientation). The advice moving forward could be instrumental or relational (Motivation).

### ***Theoretical Propositions Concerning PR***

Based on the above discussion on the influence of PR in crisis communication, the following propositions are posited.

**Proposition 3.** When PR practitioners have influence in crisis communication, the organization is likely to:

- a) Be more accommodative with the aim of positioning the organization in a good light;
- b) Mount a consistent defense based on crisis response strategies such as ingratiation, cooperation, compensation, corrective action and mortification;
- c) Underscore interdependence and bridge incompatibility of goals;
- d) Exhibit high concern for positive outcomes for both parties as it enters into negotiation; the strategy is integration – informed by PR – and regards the relationship with its publics as socioemotional;
- e) Employ tactics that could be integrative in approach (Orientation), utilizing instrumental or relational themes (Motivation). The behavior could be instrumental (offer, compromise, comply) and relational (reassure, encourage, humor, agree) for integrative orientation.

**Proposition 4.** When PR practitioners have less influence and autonomy in crisis communication, the organization is likely to:

- a) Be less accommodative
- b) Utilize crisis response strategies such as attacking the accuser, denying, evading responsibility, and reducing offensiveness;
- c) Focus on incompatibility of goals and disregard the intense emotions felt by publics;
- d) Adopt a low concern for others, which may or may not necessarily be accompanied by high concern for self as it enters into negotiation. Strategy is likely to be avoidance, informed by its regard of its relationship with its publics as instrumental.
- e) Employ tactics that could be distributive or avoidance in approach (Orientation), utilizing either instrumental or relational themes (Motivation). The behavior could be instrumental

(reject, demand, threat, alternative) and relational (excuse, justify) for distributive orientation, or instrumental (avoid, shift, retract) and relational (negative reply, submissive) for avoidance orientation.

### ***Contingency Factor: Influence of Legal in the Crisis***

CTSCM labels this factor as the existence or impact of the legal department. Their role in a crisis cannot be underestimated as they can exert much influence (Fitzpatrick, 1996). Of the six proscriptive factors prohibiting accommodation and communication, three relate to legal: Legal constraints, regulatory constraints, and jurisdictional constraints. Martinelli and Briggs (1998) argued that traditionally, PR and legal practitioners often took diametric approaches in crisis communication. Attorneys, noted Fitzpatrick and Rubin (1995), tended to advise organizations to adopt any of the following strategies: Never admit blame; say nothing; say as little as possible and release information as quietly as possible; cite privacy laws, company policy or sensitivity as reasons for not releasing information; deny guilt and/or act indignant against accusations; and shift/share blame. Termed “traditional legal strategy” (p. 25), it often runs contrary to “traditional public relations strategy” (p. 25) where practitioners promise to investigate allegations, announce and implement corrective actions.

**Conflict Stance.** It would seem that if legal is deeply influential, the organization would be less accommodative, with minimal communication to prevent legal liability (Jaques, 2016). Reber et al. (2003) also found that when both legal and PR shared a common goal during a crisis, with PR practitioners setting the communication strategies and legal practitioners reviewing these strategies, the organization would be more accommodative. However, if legal assumes stronger influence, the stance is likely to be more advocative (Jaques, 2020).

**Crisis Response Strategies.** Benoit (2004) implied that the legal department could potentially damage the image of an organization if it was given too much responsibility during a crisis. It could, for a start, prevent the organization from engaging in mortification, even if the organization was, indeed, responsible for the offensive act because “admission of guilt could exacerbate legal difficulties” (p. 276). Benoit (1995b) found that using an attorney to communicate during the crisis was ineffective because (1) it “fostered the impression that upper management considered the allegations of fraud unworthy of their attention” (p. 97); and (2) attorneys might recommend denying the problem existed, even when evidence showed otherwise, “to avoid litigation” (p. 97).

**Conflict Property to Resolve.** The organization, through its legal counsel, is likely to highlight a key conflict property – incompatibility.

**Negotiation Approach and Relationship Dynamics.** Based on the above arguments, it appears one approach is likely – low concern for others and high concern for self.

**Negotiation Behaviors.** The cylindrical model did not examine the factors that caused the organization to adopt certain tactics. Assumptions from the model's workings with insights from examining the interplay of roles between legal and PR (Fitzpatrick, 1996; Fitzpatrick & Rubin, 1995; Hoger & Swem, 2000; Jaques, 2016, 2020) suggest that if legal practitioners had more influence, the tone of engagement would likely be distributive or avoidance in approach (Orientation). The themes utilized would be instrumental (Motivation), targeted at resolving the issue at hand.

### ***Theoretical Propositions Concerning Legal***

The following propositions are asserted.

**Proposition 5.** When legal is more influential, the organization is likely to:

- a) Be less accommodative;
- b) Utilize crisis response strategies like attack the accuser, deny, evade responsibility, and reduce offensiveness;
- c) Focus on incompatibility of goals;
- d) Adopt a low concern for others and high concern for self, informed by its regard of the relationship with its publics as instrumental when it enters into negotiation. The strategies are avoidance if there is low concern for others, or domination, if there is high concern for self.
- e) Employ tactics that could be distributive or avoidance in approach (Orientation), utilizing instrumental theme (Motivation). The behaviors could be instrumental (reject, demand, threat) and relational (excuse, justify, appeal) for distributive orientation, or instrumental (avoid, shift, retract) and relational (negative reply, interrupt) for avoidance orientation.

**Proposition 6.** When legal is less influential, the organization is likely to:

- a) Be more accommodative;
- b) Utilize crisis response strategies like ingratiation, cooperation, compensation, corrective action and mortification;
- c) Either address the intense emotions from publics and focus on finding common grounds to build interdependence or address the incompatibility of goals.
- d) Compromise if it seeks to find moderate concern for both self and others aimed at developing common ground to resolve the situation, informed by its regard of its relationship with its publics as socioemotional as it enters negotiation. If it focuses on incompatibility of goals, it is likely to adopt low concern for others. The strategy used would be avoidance when it regards its publics as instrumental.
- e) Employ tactics that could be avoidance or integrative (Orientation), utilizing instrumental or relational themes (Motivation). The behavior could be instrumental (offer, compromise, comply) and relational (reassure, encourage, humor, agree) for integrative orientation, or instrumental (avoid, shift, retract) and relational (negative reply, submissive) for avoidance orientation.

### ***Contingency Factor: Importance of the Primary Publics to the Organization***

Some of the key characteristics describing a public, based on CTSCM, are the degree of source credibility/powerful members or connections; past successes or failures of groups to evoke change; and relative power of the public. A key task for the organization in a crisis is to connect with primary publics (Jin et al., 2012b). Stephens et al. (2005) discussed publics in times of crises as one defined by the management. In listing the best practices in crisis communication, Seeger (2006) inferred that the publics must be important to the organization as a whole. One way to examine who these publics are important to in the organization could be viewed through first, who the crisis messages are intended for (Stephens et al., 2005); and second, which publics are likely to seek these information (Austin et al., 2012); and third, their power, legitimacy and urgency (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). Publics are likely to be employees, customers, members of the community, unions, and stockholders (Fearn-Banks,

2014; Lukaszewski, 1997). Falcao et al. (2020) argued that the publics can be identified by both PR and management. Once identified, the organization must communicate with them through the news media (Seeger, 2006) and social media (Yeo et al., 2020).

**Conflict Stance.** Reber et al. (2003) found it was important to win over “key publics” (p. 8). Reber and Cameron (2003) noted that the publics’ characteristics would predispose an organization to dialogue. If the organization regarded the demands of the primary publics in a crisis as unreasonable or felt that it was bounded by moral conviction not to deal, it would likely adopt a less accommodative stance. If, however, the organization regarded the primary public as important, and its demands reasonable, it would likely adopt an accommodative stance (Pang et al., 2020).

**Crisis Response Strategies.** Benoit and Pang (2008) emphasized the importance of primary publics in a crisis. Benoit (2004) called for identification of salient audiences so as to tailor the messages to them. “The closer the audience is to the harm, the harder persuaders will probably have to work to restore their image” (p. 279).

**Conflict Property to Resolve.** If the organization considers its publics as priority, it would aim to address the publics’ intense emotions and build interdependence through communication. If not, it would focus on incompatible goals.

**Negotiation Approach and Relationship Dynamics.** Based on the above arguments, it appears two approaches are conceivable: high concern for others or low concern for others.

**Negotiation Behaviors.** The cylindrical model did not examine the factors that caused the organization to adopt certain tactics. Assumptions from the model’s workings with insights from crisis leadership (Argenti, 2017; Lucero et al, 2009; McLean & Ewart, 2020; Pang & Appasamy, 2019) suggest that if publics are prioritized, the approach would be integrative (Orientation), utilizing the themes of identity and relational (Motivation).

### ***Theoretical Propositions Concerning Primary Publics***

The following propositions are asserted.

**Proposition 7.** When the organization regards the primary publics as important during a crisis, and if it is not prohibited – out of regulatory, legal, jurisdictional, or moral constraints from accommodating them – the organization is likely to:

- a) Be more accommodative;
- b) Utilize crisis response strategies like ingratiation, cooperation, compensation, corrective action and mortification;
- c) Accentuate interdependence;
- d) Exhibit high concern for others, where the strategy is accommodation, informed by its regard of the relationship with its publics as socioemotional when it enters into negotiation;
- e) Employ tactics that could be integrative (Orientation), instrumental or relational themes (Motivation). The behavior could be instrumental (offer, compromise, comply) and relational (reassure, encourage, humor, agree) for integrative orientation.

**Proposition 8.** When the organization regards the primary publics to be less important during a crisis, it is likely to:

- a) Be less accommodative;
- b) Utilize less accommodative crisis response strategies such as attacking the accuser, denying, evading responsibility, and reducing offensiveness;

- c) Focus on incompatibility of goals and disregard the intense emotions felt by publics;
- d) Adopt a low concern for others, which may or may not necessarily be accompanied by high concern for self when it enters into negotiation. The strategy is likely to be avoidance, informed by its regard of the relationship with its publics as instrumental;
- e) Employ tactics that would be more avoidance in approach (Orientation), utilizing instrumental theme (Motivation), and behaviors would likely be to avoid, shift, retract or demonstrate some form of inaction.

### ***Contingency Factor: Organization's Perception of Threat to its Reputation***

Threat is a well-supported situational variable in CTSCM. It describes the urgency of the situation, potentially damaging publicity and tarnishing the organization's reputation. Jin et al. (2012a) argued that threats can be examined according to type (internal or external), levels (low, medium, or high) and duration (short-term or long-term). Jin et al. (2006) argued threats can be perceived in two ways that affect reputation – culpability and locus of control. If the organization is perceived as culpable, it is highly likely to utilize more accommodative strategies to control the damage. If the locus of control of the crisis lies with the organization, it is likely to be more accommodative; if the locus of control is external, it is likely to be less accommodative.

**Conflict Stance.** Burnett (1998) found that organizations that had strong vulnerability to threat appeared to be better prepared (p. 487). Penrose (2000) argued that perceptions of threat could cause a dramatic shift in message output. Threat could be perceived either as a crisis or an opportunity. Organizations that regarded threat as a crisis tended to restrict communication, leading to the adoption of a less accommodative stance. Those that see threat as an opportunity were more proactive in their communication and adopted more accommodative stances.

**Crisis Response Strategies.** Benoit and Pang (2008) argued that threat is associated with loss of image and reputation, and threats to the image of the organization are "ubiquitous" (p. 244). Brinson and Benoit (1999) found that when the level of threat increased, the organization "wasted no time" (p. 484) to come up with strategies to deal with the looming crisis. Thus, it could be assumed that as the organization's perception of threat level increased, the more proactive it would be in employing accommodative strategies to deal with the crisis.

**Conflict Property to Resolve.** It appears that if the organization considers managing the threat as priority, it would build interdependence through communication. If not, it would focus on incompatible goals.

**Negotiation Approach and Relationship Dynamics.** Based on the above arguments, two approaches are conceivable: high concern for others or low concern for others.

**Negotiation Behaviors.** The cylindrical model did not examine the factors that caused the organization to adopt certain tactics. Assumptions from the model's workings with insights from threat literature suggest that if the organization regards the immediate threat as high, that it jeopardizes the organization's sustainability, its response would be integrative (Orientation), and would draw on its identity and relational themes (Motivation).

### **Theoretical Propositions Concerning Threat**

Based on the discussions of the organization's perception of threat, the following propositions are posited.

**Proposition 9.** When the threat appears to have more severe impact on its reputation, and the organization is perceived to be culpable where the locus of control is internal, the organization is more likely to:

- a) Be more accommodative to resolve the crisis;
- b) Utilize crisis response strategies like ingratiation, cooperation, compensation, corrective action and mortification;
- c) Emphasize interdependence;
- d) Exhibit high concern for others as the organization enters into negotiation, where the strategy is accommodation, informed by its regard of the relationship with its publics as socioemotional;
- e) Employ tactics that would be more integrative in orientation, identity or relational in motivation, and the behaviors would likely be to compliment, empathy, apology, reassure, encourage or agree.

**Proposition 10.** When the threat appears to have less severe impact to its reputation, and the organization is perceived to be less culpable where the locus of control is external, the organization is likely to:

- a) Be less accommodative;
- b) Utilize crisis response strategies that are denial, evading responsibility, and reducing offensiveness;
- c) Focus on incompatibility of goals and disregard the intense emotions felt by publics;
- d) Adopt a low concern for others, which may or may not necessarily be accompanied by high concern for self as it enters into negotiation. The strategy is likely avoidance, informed by its regard of the relationship with its publics as instrumental;
- e) Employ tactics that would be more avoidance in orientation, instrumental in motivation, and behaviors would likely be to avoid, shift, retract or demonstrate some form of inaction.

### **Propositions of Conflict Positioning: Reflection on the Organization**

Having discussed all the propositions above, Table 2 provides an overview of how each component is connected, based on the Conflict Positioning for Negotiation framework set out in Figure 3. The framework examines five factors that impact how the organization conducts itself, from how it engages in crisis communication to how it manages conflict and enacts negotiation approach and tactics.

Based on the propositions, what is evident are two distinct approaches in conflict positioning for negotiation. The first approach is one where the organization appears to be more collaborative. This is one where the dominant coalition is not inhibited (i.e., prohibited by moral, legal, regulatory and jurisdictional factors) and where the public relations function has more influence over legal in times of crises. The organization also regards its primary publics as important and regards the severity of the impact the crisis imposes on the organization. The second approach is one where the organization appears to be less collaborative. This is one where the dominant coalition is inhibited (i.e., prohibited by moral, legal, regulatory and jurisdictional factors) and where legal has more

influence over the public relations function in times of crises. The organization also does not regard its primary publics as important and does not consider highly the severity of the impact the crisis imposes on the organization.

**Table 2**

*Propositions of Conflict Positioning*

Contingency Factor	Stance <i>Accommodation level</i>		Crisis Response Strategies <i>Accommodation level</i>		Conflict Properties		Negotiation Approach <i>Concern for Others</i>		Negotiation Tactics <i>Orientation</i>	
	Less	More	Less	More	Incompatibility	Interdependence	Low	High	Avoidance	Integrative
<b>Dominant Coalition</b> • <i>Inhibited</i> • <i>Not inhibited</i>	✓		✓		Manage Situation		✓		✓	
		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓
<b>Public Relations</b> • <i>More influence</i> • <i>Less influence</i>		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓
	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓	
<b>Legal</b> • <i>More influence</i> • <i>Less influence</i>	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓	
		✓		✓		✓	Moderate Concern			✓
<b>Importance of Primary Publics</b> • <i>More important</i> • <i>Less important</i>		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓
	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓	
<b>Threat</b> • <i>More impact on reputation</i> • <i>Less impact on reputation</i>		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓
	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓	

**Practical Application of Conflict Positioning: How Two CEOs Managed Crisis**

In this section, two crises that made headlines are applied to test the theoretical robustness and ecological validity of the conflict positioning conceptualization. The cases are described and the propositions demonstrated. As the data is drawn primarily from news artifacts, news releases and videos, not all propositions can be fully explored if further organizational insights are required. Each case is explored on its own.

***United Airlines' Dragging Crisis (2017)***

The United Airlines' dragging crisis dominated global attention in 2017. On April 9, 2017, Dr David Dao was forcibly ejected from an overbooked United Express Flight 3411 for refusing to disembark to make space for cabin crew. The incident was captured on video, which went viral the same day with over 19 million Facebook (FB) views. In a press release issued on April 10, CEO Oscar Munoz did not address how Dr Dao was treated but instead focused on how other passengers were inconvenienced. The mismanagement of the crisis was a "total disaster" (Petroff, 2017). By April 11, United's market value had dropped by US\$1 billion. The lawyers for Dr Dao threatened to sue (Aratani, 2017). Two days after the incident, on April 11, CEO Munoz backtracked. That led to a series of events that slowly restored United's reputation.

In the first 24 hours in the management of the crisis, the CEO (**contingency factor of dominant coalition**) appeared to be less accommodative (**conflict stance**). Applying **crisis response strategies** in his statement, the CEO wrote, "This is an upsetting event to all of us here at United

[denial of the dragging]. I apologize for having to re-accommodate these customers [reducing offensiveness]. Our team is moving with a sense of urgency to work with the authorities and conduct our own detailed review of what happened [reducing offensiveness]. We are also reaching out to this passenger to talk directly to him and further address and resolve this situation [reducing offensiveness]" (Associated Press, 2017). The **approach** used was low concern for Dr Dao, the victim, and the **strategy** was avoidance, informed by the relationship dynamics as instrumental. The **tactics** appeared to be avoidance in orientation, instrumental in motivation, and the behaviors exhibited appeared to be shift attention. **Proposition 1** is argued to apply.

On April 11, the CEO's position (**contingency factor of dominant coalition**) became more accommodative (**conflict stance**) in orientation as the organization finally recognized the importance of the public, the victim who was hurt, and the other publics – the customers who were offended by the mistreatment of a passenger (**contingency factor of importance of the publics**). Applying **crisis response strategies** in his statement, he addressed the mistreatment of Dr Dao for the first time: "The truly horrific event that occurred on this flight has elicited many responses from all of us: outrage, anger, disappointment. I share all of those sentiments, and one above all: my deepest apologies for what happened [Mortification]. Like you, I continue to be disturbed by what happened on this flight and I deeply apologize to the customer forcibly removed and to all the customers aboard [Mortification]. No one should ever be mistreated this way. I want you to know that we take full responsibility and we will work to make it right [Corrective action]. It's never too late to do the right thing. I have committed to our customers and our employees that we are going to fix what's broken so this never happens again [Corrective action]. This will include a thorough review of crew movement, our policies for incentivizing volunteers in these situations, how we handle oversold situations and an examination of how we partner with airport authorities and local law enforcement. We'll communicate the results of our review by April 30th [Corrective action]" (Associated Press, 2017).

The approach showed high concern for Dr Dao, reconstructing the relationship as socioemotional. The strategy was accommodation and tactics were integrative in orientation, identity in motivation, and the behaviors exhibited were apology and empathy. Propositions 2 (contingency factor of dominant coalition) and 7 (contingency factor of importance of primary publics to the organization) are argued to apply. Proposition 9 is argued to hold as the threat to its reputation (contingency factor of organization's perception of threat to its reputation) was high; culpability and locus of control were internal. It is not known the influence of PR and legal in this case. However, PR experts not involved in the case said the CEO should have "quickly offered an unreserved apology" (Petroff, 2017) right at the start. If that is the case, proposition 3 (contingency factor of influence of PR in the crisis) is argued to apply.

### ***Marriott International's Crisis Management of Covid-19 (2020)***

The United Airlines CEO's actions is contrasted with how the late Marriott International CEO Arne Sorenson, who passed away on 15 Feb 2021 from cancer, managed Covid-19. On March 19, 2020, Marriott International posted a six-minute video on its FB and Twitter page to employees. Sorensen addressed how Covid-19 had affected Marriott's businesses globally. Its revenue had fallen nearly 75% worldwide (Marriott CEO Speech, 2020). The crisis had "a more severe and sudden financial impact on our business than 9/11 and the 2009 financial crisis – combined" (Marriott CEO speech, 2020). As a result, Marriott had to take unwelcome action, said Sorensen. These included suspension of non-essential travel for staff; requiring an estimated two-thirds of their staff at their headquarters and across properties abroad to be on furlough (Marriott CEO Speech, 2020). Even as he called for

sacrifices from his employees, Sorensen discussed how he and the dominant coalition would do their part to manage Covid-19. Several propositions could be examined here.

First, the involvement of the CEO and top management (**contingency factor of dominant coalition**). Sorensen said, "Both Mr Marriott and I will not be taking any salary for the balance of 2020 and my executive team will be taking a 50 percent cut in pay" (Marriott CEO Speech, 2020). The **conflict stance** was more accommodation, using the **crisis response strategy** of corrective action. The **conflict property** underscored interdependence. The negotiation **approach** was one of high concern for others, thereby adopting the strategy of accommodation, informed by their relationship with their publics as socioemotional. The **tactics** was more integrative in orientation, relational in motivation, and the behaviors exhibited were compliment, empathize, apologize, reassure or agree. **Proposition 2** is argued to apply.

Even as Sorensen set the context, it was how he communicated that drew attention. First, his communication with his key publics, the employees, and how the situation would impact them. He said, "As a leader, I have experienced so many wonderful highs and a good number of challenging lows. I can tell you that I have never had a more difficult moment than this one. There is simply nothing worse than telling highly valued associates, people who are the very heart of this company that their roles are being impacted by events completely outside of their control. I have never been more determined to see us through than I am at this moment." Applying the conceptualization, it could be seen that **Proposition 7** applies. The **conflict stance** was more accommodative, the **crisis response strategy** was ingratiation, the **negotiation** approach showed high concern for others, and he regarded them as socioemotional. The **tactics** could be integrative in approach (Orientation), utilizing relational themes (Motivation). The behavior exhibited was relational (reassure, encourage, humor, agree) for integrative orientation.

The threat imposed by Covid-19 on the organization (**contingency factor of the organization's perception of threat to its reputation**) is also evident. Since this was an externally driven crisis and culpability on the organization was less severe, **proposition 10** is argued to apply. This has meant adopting a less accommodative stance towards managing the threat by imposing belt-tightening measures on employees through the foregoing non-essential travel, requiring an estimated two-thirds of the staff at their headquarters and across properties abroad to be on furlough (Marriott CEO Speech, 2020).

Additionally, what was instructive was the circumstances in which the video was made. Sorensen appeared bald and went against the advice of his team to appear on this video. He said, "Our team was a bit concerned about using a video today because of my new, bald look. Let me just say that my new look is exactly what was expected as a result of my medical treatments. I feel good and my team and I are 100 percent focused on overcoming the common crisis we face". In May 2019, Marriott disclosed that Sorensen had stage two pancreatic cancer (Bhattarai, 2019), and had undergone surgery after chemo, radiation and immune therapy (Armental, 2019). The team, presumably the PR, was reluctant to let him appear on camera (Schaal, 2020). It appears **proposition 2** outweighs **proposition 3** – to good measure. Forbes reported that Sorensen was "candid, vulnerable, humble, emotional and hopeful" (Gallo, 2020, para. 4). Harvard Business Review noted that his openness and honesty won over Marriott employees worldwide and the general public (Sundheim, 2020). He was awarded The Legend in Leadership Award by the Yale School of Management's Chief Executive Leadership Institute (Chief Executive Leadership Institute, 2020).

## Conclusion

This study first argues the gap between crisis communication, conflict management and negotiation and how that gap can be bridged. The conflict positioning conceptualization is developed in this study and the implications are considerable. First, negotiation and crisis communication have been operating in silos. This is an opportunity to integrate the work through inter-disciplinary research. Second, this new framework can serve as a predictive model. By understanding the confluence and integration of these elements, it gives organizations greater insights into how its crisis communication can impact negotiation. Third, this work is about building theoretical insights to advance systematic and rigorous understanding of the respective fields. It is hoped this framework will be the first step in developing a new theory.

One limitation of this framework is that while it has identified the antecedent factors, it is not able to assess the possibility of cross-contamination of factors and the relative weightages of each of these factors in conflict positioning. The next step is to test how each factor impacts the others. Future studies can also examine other contingency factors other than those derived in this conceptualization that would affect stance, strategies and negotiation tactics. Another limitation is that this framework examines from the organization's perspective and does not examine publics' perspectives, which Coombs (2010b) argued required further attention. A future iteration of the model can include understanding publics' perspectives in order to help PR practitioners fulfil their roles as boundary spanners more effectively.

Theory building and development has been gradual (Frandsen & Johansen, 2017). Yet it is imperative to continually build a structure to help us order, explain, predict and control, argued Chaffee and Berger (1987), and in this case, particularly one that integrates different fields of studies. In theory building for crisis communication, Coombs (2008) argued that it must go "beyond the explanatory function of theory to prediction and control" (p. 263). This conceptualization, besides aiming to develop theoretical insights, hopes to provide a framework to guide organizations to predict the course of their actions to give them some semblance of control.

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