

# Effect of Spokesperson Types and the Use of First Person Pronoun in Crisis Communication on Food Organization Reputation and Purchase Intention

## การใช้ประเภทขององค์กรและสรรพนามบุรุษที่หนึ่งในการสื่อสารในภาวะวิกฤติ: ผลกระทบต่อชื่อเสียงองค์กรอาหารและการตัดสินใจซื้อของผู้บริโภค

### Article History

Received: July 25, 2019

Revised: November 15, 2019

Accepted: November 18, 2019

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### Abstract

This study aims to better understand the effectiveness of using spokespersons and first person pronouns in two crisis situation clusters on food organization's reputations and purchase intentions. Two hundred and eight students were randomly assigned into 12 experiment groups, creating a 2 (crisis clusters: victim vs preventable) X 3 (spokesperson types: CEO vs cartoon vs non-spokespersons) X 2 (first person pronouns: "I" vs "we") factorial design.

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Data were collected using a questionnaire and analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and 3-way MANOVA. The results showed no significant effects of using different spokesperson and first person pronoun types on organization reputations in both victim and preventable crisis situation clusters, but the different effects were found on purchase intentions in both crisis clusters. When the organization was in the victim situation cluster, using cartoon with “I” first person pronoun can generate the highest purchase intention score. In the preventable crisis cluster, using CEO with “I” first person pronoun can generate the highest purchase intention score.

**Keywords:** Crisis Communication, Spokespersons, First Person Pronoun Choices, Organization Reputation, Purchase Intention

## บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้ศึกษาการใช้ประเภทโฆษณาของคุณภาพและสรรพนามบุรุษที่หนึ่งในการสื่อสารในภาวะวิกฤตของประเทศไทย และผลกระทบที่มีต่อชื่อเสียงองค์กรอาหารและการตัดสินใจซื้อของผู้บริโภค ผู้วิจัยแบ่งนักศึกษาที่เป็นกลุ่มตัวอย่างจำนวน 208 คน ออกเป็น 12 กลุ่มทดลอง โดยกำหนดเป็นการวิจัยแบบ  $2 \times 3 \times 2$  แฟคเตอร์เรียง ซึ่งประกอบด้วยตัวแปรอิสระ 3 ตัว คือ 1) ภาวะวิกฤต 2 สถานการณ์ คือ แบบองค์กรเป็นเหยื่อและแบบป้องกันได้ 2) โฆษณาของคุณภาพ 3 ประเภท คือ ประธานเจ้าหน้าที่บริหาร การรัฐนูน และการไม่มีโฆษณา และ 3) สรรพนามบุรุษที่หนึ่ง (ดิฉัน/ผู้ชาย และ เธอ) ผู้วิจัยเก็บข้อมูลโดยใช้แบบสอบถาม และวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลโดยใช้ค่าเฉลี่ย ค่าเบี่ยงเบนมาตรฐาน และการวิเคราะห์ความแปรปรวนสามทางแบบพหุ ผลการวิจัยพบว่า การใช้โฆษณาของคุณภาพและสรรพนามบุรุษที่หนึ่งที่แตกต่างกันไม่มีผลกระทบอย่างมีนัยสำคัญต่อชื่อเสียงองค์กรอาหารในภาวะวิกฤติ ทั้งสองสถานการณ์ แต่มีผลกระทบอย่างมีนัยสำคัญต่อการตัดสินใจซื้อของผู้บริโภค สำหรับภาวะวิกฤติแบบองค์กรเป็นเหยื่อ การใช้การรัฐนูนและ “ดิฉัน/ผู้ชาย” เป็นสรรพนามบุรุษที่หนึ่งจะนำไปสู่การตัดสินใจซื้อที่สูงที่สุด

**คำสำคัญ:** การสื่อสารในภาวะวิกฤต โฆษณาของคุณภาพ สรรพนามบุรุษที่หนึ่ง ชื่อเสียงองค์กร ความตั้งใจซื้อ

## Introduction

Crisis situation can directly destroy organizational reputations and purchase intentions (Coombs, 2014) and can threaten economy, society, safety, and national security (Kim & Sung, 2014; Lee & Lariscy, 2008; Vidoloff & Petrun, 2010). Based on previous crisis situations, food was one of the serious crisis situations because customers were concerned about their health, such as illness and death (Avery, Graham, & Park, 2016; Kim & Sung, 2014). As a result, there exists a room to study about several communication strategies to maintain and enhance organizational reputations in crisis situations (Kiambi & Shafer, 2016).

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) focuses on the ability of a company to defend itself in a crisis situation (Allen & Caillouet, 1994;

Benoit & Brinson, 1994; Coombs & Halladay, 1996). However, there are a few studies on crisis situation in Thailand especially those using crisis communication strategies. This study will fill in the gap of using communication strategies in a crisis situation. The research therefore investigates the effectiveness of using crisis response strategies and adds two more variables: spokesperson and the first person pronoun choices.

The SCCT researches focus on finding the effectiveness of using different spokespersons, media, message, and crisis types. According to previous researches, the focus was on comparing the effectiveness of using spokespersons in a crisis situation, such as CEOs, firm owners, employees, bloggers, endorsers, celebrities, experts, and the third parties (Gorn, Jiang, & Johar, 2008; Hayes, & Carr,

2015; Hong & Len-Ríos, 2015; Len-Ríos, Finneman, Han, Bhandari, & Perry, 2015; Muralidharan & Xue, 2015). This study will focus on the effects of three spokespersons types which are CEO, the cartoon, and non-spokesperson on organizational reputation and purchase intentions.

Cartoon spokespersons are created with specific purposes as communication strategy tools and used in many fields such as education, advertising, sports, public relations, history, and politics (Brantner & Lobinger; 2014; Fernando, 2013; Lan & Zuo, 2016). In marketing and advertising communication, cartoons are created to generate attractiveness, purchase intention, and positive attitude (Kraak & Story 2015; Thawornwongsakul, 2010) especially among children, teenagers and young adults (Suntornpitug, 1998). However, the investigation of using cartoon in crisis communication of food organizations is still lacking.

Selecting the first person pronoun can refer to the different levels of relationship among the speakers and the listeners. The effect of using the first person pronoun can lead to forgiveness (Karremans & van Lange, 2008), positive attitude (Ahn & Bailenson, 2011), close relationship (Zeevat, 2010), customer perception, and purchase intention (Packard, Moore, & McFerran, 2015). The first-person pronoun is powerful and meaningful (Loftus, 2015; Yilmaz, 2011) as one of the communication strategies in politics, education, and linguistic studies (Brown & Gilman, 1960; Lee, 2012; Moberg & Eriksson, 2013; Raymond, 2012). In crisis response strategies, it also associates with identity, social status, social interaction, relationships, and self-presentation (Abbuhl, 2012; Lee, 2012; Manns, 2012; Moberg & Eriksson, 2013; Raymond, 2012; Sickinghe, 2015). Hence, a big research gap is depending on using and applying the first person pronoun in crisis response communication to maintain organizational reputations and purchase intentions.

Crisis communication in food organizations has largely been explored. Claeys and Cauberghe (2014), for example, used drinking water in their experimental study to find out appropriate crisis responses in victim and preventable situations. Kim and Sung (2014) also used soup as the food crisis in the experiment to compare crisis responses between victim and preventable situations. This paper, therefore, will emphasize specifically on investigating the communication effects in the victim and preventable crisis clusters, especially in food crisis situation because customers were concerned about their health (Greenberg & Elliott, 2009). This study will use an experimental study to compare three different spokespersons: CEO, cartoon, and non-spokesperson; and the “I” and “we” as the first person pronouns choice in crisis response communication in the victim and preventable clusters to maintain organizational reputations and purchase intentions.

## **Literature review**

### **Crisis responsibility and crisis response strategies**

Previous studies claimed that different crisis types could lead to different crisis situational responses to public (Kim & Sung, 2014; Lee & Lariscy, 2008; Liu, Fraustino, & Jin, 2015). Coombs and Holladay (2002) supported that “crisis manager chose crisis response by identifying the crisis types,” which were based on the level of attribution of crisis responsibility (Coombs, 2014).

The victim cluster referred to the crisis situation in which the organization was the victim along with its stakeholders, and so the organization had little responsibility in the crisis situation (Coombs, 2014). The second type was the accidental cluster that includes challenges, mega damage, technical breakdown accidents, technical breakdown-recall, and low responsibility organization for the crisis situation. The third type was the preventable cluster

which mostly required responsibility from the organization because the crisis situation in this cluster might or could be avoided (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Moreover, this crisis cluster involved with dangers to its stakeholders, and the organization did not prevent the crisis situation carefully (Coombs, 2014).

The effect of crisis response strategies on organizational reputation and purchase intentions was derived from spokespersons (credibility) and the first person pronoun choices (social attraction). While previous researches focused on three different clusters in crisis situations and crisis response strategies, there were numerous experimental research papers comparing only two clusters; preventable and victim clusters.

### **Spokesperson credibility in crisis response**

In this study, cartoon, CEO, and non-spokesperson were added as communication strategies. There were many empirical studies on crisis communication that focused on using CEO as a spokesperson (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2014; Claeys, Cauberg, & Leysen, 2013; Gorn, Jiang, & Johar, 2008; Hong & Len-Rios, 2015). However, using CEO as crisis communication strategy might also be uncontrollable. For example, Hong and Len-Rios (2015) claimed that black CEO spokespersons led to higher credibility than white spokespersons on crisis communication responses. Therefore, this study applied a cartoon as another option which is successfully used in marketing and advertising communication to persuade and enhance purchase intentions (Heiser, Sierra, & Terres, 2008).

Atcha (1998) pointed out that using cartoons increases purchase intentions, especially when the organization created their own cartoons, because they were able to generate positive emotions (Manaf & Alallan, 2017), long term relationship with brands (Folse, Burton, & Netemeyer, 2013) and can be associated with audiences (Neeley & Schumann,

2004). Hence, it can be deduced that using a cartoon as a crisis communication strategy might persuade the receivers more which might lead to credibility, organizational reputations and purchase intentions.

Spokesperson credibility in crisis situation relates to audiences' perceptions of organizational reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Crisis communications needed a combination of communication strategies and persuasive communication for stakeholder engagement. Using spokespersons also built positive relationship between organizations and their customers. This study measured the spokesperson credibility using trustworthiness and goodwill. Trustworthiness of the spokespersons can lead to both negative and positive effects on brand reputations. Moreover, Garretson and Niedrich (2004) explained that trustworthiness could lead to customers' attitudes because spoke cartoons were created by the intention of companies. Goodwill, on the other hand, is the level of caring and having interest of the source from the perception of the audiences (McCroskey & Teven, 1999).

### **First person pronoun choices**

This study compared the use of first person pronouns "I" and "we" to investigate the most effective pronoun used in crisis communication response that can affect the organizational reputations and purchase intentions. For example, Loftus (2015) studied in accounting case, and found that the managers who used "we" had been perceived as more competent than using "I". Using "we" might be beneficial for organization in crisis communication. Shaikh, Foldman, Barach, and Marzouki (2016) supported that using the first person plural pronoun generates more arousal than using the first singular pronoun on social media. Using "we" as the first person pronoun can also lead to forgiveness (Karremans & Van Lange, 2008). Moreover, Moberg and Eriksson (2013) explained using "we" can avoid responsibility in difficult situations, especially as a

political communication strategy when the company is in difficult situations.

In advertising, positive attitude towards brand is caused by using “we” (Ahn & Bailenson, 2011; Moberg & Eriksson, 2013; Sickinghe, 2015; Yilmaz, 2014). Yilmaz (2014) and Ahn and Bailenson (2011) found that using “we” can share social identity between the organization and its audiences, thus leading to positive attitude towards the organization. Therefore, using the first person pronoun might lead to organizational reputation and purchase intention in crisis situation.

### **Effects of crisis communication on organizational reputations**

Organization reputations is how the public perceived an organization when crisis situation happened (Coombs, 2014). “Organizational reputation is developed through information the public receives from interaction with the organization or its employees” (van Zoonen & van der Meer, 2015). To prevent reputational damage in crisis communication, previous studies showed effective communication strategies to protect organizational reputation. For example, using human rather than organization to communicate with their audiences to maintain good reputation (Park & Cameron, 2014), or using both positive and negative messages rather than only positive message (Kim & Sung, 2014). Moreover, Casañ-Pitarch (2016) also supported the use of the pronoun choices in crisis communication response. In order to handle crisis situations as well as protect and maintain organizational reputations and purchase intentions, this study investigated the effectiveness of two communication factors: spokespersons and the first person pronoun choice, on organizational reputation. The aforesaid literature leads to the following hypotheses:

H1a: In victim cluster, a cartoon, CEO, or non-spokesperson that uses “we” as the first person pronoun will generate a different level of

organization reputation from using “I” as the first person pronoun.

H2a: In preventable cluster, a cartoon, CEO, or non-spokesperson that uses “we” as the first person pronoun will generate a different level of organization reputation from using “I” as the first person pronoun.

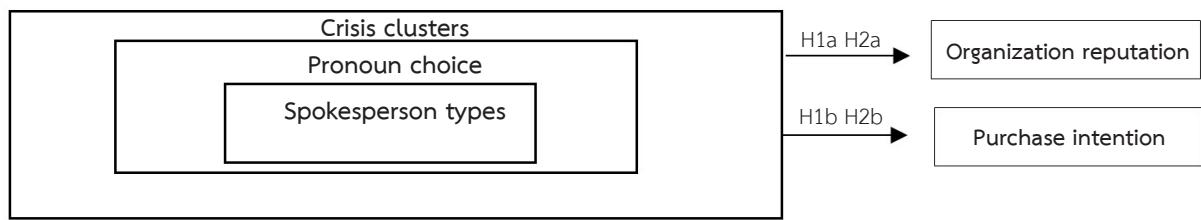
### **Effects of crisis communication on purchase intentions**

In a profit organization, purchase intention is behavioral intention to support the products/services of organizations. After and during crisis situations, purchase intention is the significant factor because negative perception of organization affects purchase intention (Hayes & Carr, 2015; Muralidharan & Xue, 2015). Thomas, Kannaley, Friedman, Tanner, Brandt, and Spencer (2016), and Tkaczyk (2017) found that different levels of crisis responsibilities such as types of disaster can affect purchase intentions. Heiser, Sierra, and Torres (2008) also explained that the respondents who have positive attitude towards organization will have more purchase intentions.

Based on crisis communication studies, spokesperson credibility and types of crisis situations can lead to purchase intentions (Thomas et al., 2016; Tkaczyk, 2017). That is, crisis types lead to high and low purchase intentions in crisis situations. Thus, in crisis communication studies, purchase intention is one of the significant outcomes to which organizations pay attention. The aforesaid literature leads to the following hypotheses:

H1b: In victim cluster, a cartoon, CEO, or non-spokesperson that uses “we” as the first person pronoun will generate a different level of purchase intention from using “I” as the first person pronoun.

H2b: In preventable cluster, a cartoon, CEO, or non-spokesperson that uses “we” as the first person pronoun will generate a different level of purchase intention from using “I” as the first person pronoun.



**Figure 1** Conceptual model

## Methods

### Participants

A total of 238 people consented to participate in this study, but only 208 completed the questionnaires. Participants were communication students covering from first to third year of studies recruited from a state university in Bangkok. Using G\*Power, a minimum of 168 subjects (or 14 participants in each group is required to achieve a large effect size ( $F = 40$ ). Thus, this study had an adequate number of 208 subjects, who were categorized into 12 groups. Most participants were females (80.30%) and identified their age between 19-21 years old (91.90%).

### Procedure

This study used the experimental research design, a  $2 \times 3 \times 2$  factorial design with 12 experimental groups. Three independent variables include two crisis clusters (victim vs. preventable clusters), three spokesperson types (CEO vs. the cartoon vs. non-spokesperson), and two first person pronouns ("I" vs. "we"). To test the effectiveness of crisis response strategies by using different spokespersons and different first person pronouns, 12 different options were created.

### Research instruments

Fifteen non-sample students were asked to select the food types, the cartoon types, and CEO types to be used in two formulated scenarios of victim and preventable crisis clusters. Later, seven

experts in public relations/ cartoon character design business and graphic design instructors, marketing communication, business owners, and mascot business owner, who have over 10-year experiences in their specific area of expertise, were asked to assess the validity of the said scenarios. Other instruments used to measure the independent and dependent variables of this study are as follows:

### Independent variables

**Crisis cluster:** Conceptualized as victim and preventable situations which are presented as high and low organization responsibility as defined by Kim and Choi (2014) and Kim and Sung (2014). A 7-point Likert scale was used to find out the different levels of blame and responsibility (Lovins, 2017), ranging from 1 = Not at all to be blamed to 7 = Absolutely to be blamed, and 1 = Not at all responsible to 7 = Totally responsible.

**Spokesperson Types:** Three spokesperson types were used in this study (CEO, cartoon, and non-spokesperson). Trustworthiness and goodwill were used to operationalize the source credibility of spokesperson (Gorn, Jiang, & Johar, 2008; Hong & Len-Rios, 2015; Lee, Kim, & Wertz, 2014). The scale was reliable for this study ( $\alpha = 0.732$ ).

**The first person pronoun:** Two first person pronoun choices, "I" and "we," were used in the experimental study. McCroskey and McCain's (n.d.) social attraction scale was used to explain the relationship between senders and receivers and to understand the perception of using different first

person pronoun choices in communication (Yilmaz, 2011). The items were ranged on Likert-type scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The social attraction scale's reliability was acceptable ( $\alpha = 0.741$ ).

### Dependent variables

Organizational reputation: This measurement was developed by Coombs and Holladay (1996) and used by Kiambi and Shafer (2016), Lovins (2017), and Wang and Wanjek (2018) to measure the crisis organization. This measurement uses the responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree to 7 strongly agree). The scale was reliable for this study ( $\alpha = 0.775$ ).

Purchase intention: The purchase intention scale was created and used by Hayes and Carr (2015) and Yoo and Donthu (2001). This measurement uses three 7-point Likert-type items and its reliability for this study was acceptable ( $\alpha = 0.944$ ).

### Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted in February 2019 with 84 communication students who were not the participants of the study. The researcher observed the overall research procedure, noted the students' reactions, and asked for their comments and suggestions on the clarity and appropriateness of questions to fulfill the purpose of the study. The researcher later adapted the questionnaires as advised by the subjects, and prepared to facilitate more the research procedures.

### Data collection and analysis

After securing the permission to collect data from 208 students who were the undergraduate students in Communication studies, the researcher informed them about the research objectives and procedures, and then randomly assigned them into 12 groups. Each group received either the victim or preventable crisis scenario that used different spokesperson types and first-person pronoun

choices. Related questionnaires were also attached so that they could generate their perception on organizational reputations and purchase intentions after reading the scenario. The whole process of data collection lasted for one month.

After data collection, the next step in the research process is data verification and coding. The researcher further carried out a 3-way Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) to test the formulated hypotheses with a set of the significant level of 0.05 or 95% reliability, aiming to see whether the participants' perception of organization reputation and purchase intention was different, given the situation in which the organization had been facing two different crisis situations (victim and preventable), and using three different types of spokespersons (CEO, cartoon, non-spokesperson) with two different first person pronoun types (I and we).

### Results

The MANOVA revealed no significant main effect of first person pronouns (Hotelling's Trace = 0.003,  $p > 0.05$ ), nor 2-way interaction effects of crisis and spokesperson (Wilks' Lambda = 0.749,  $p > 0.05$ ), crisis and first person pronouns (Wilks' Lambda = 1.134,  $p > 0.05$ ), and spokespersons and pronouns (Wilks' Lambda = 1.045,  $p > 0.05$ ), but revealed a significant 3-way interaction effects on the dependent variables (Wilks' Lambda = 2.580,  $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 1). When the multivariate analysis revealed the significant effects of crisis situation, clusters spokesperson types, and first person pronoun types on both dependent variables, a univariate analysis would be conducted to identify the said effects on each dependent variable. The univariate analysis, however, indicated the said significant effect on purchase intention only ( $F = 4.939, p < 0.05$ ), but not on organization reputation ( $F = 1.021, p > 0.05$ ) (Table 2). Therefore, only hypotheses H1b and H2b were supported, whereas hypotheses H1a and H2a were not supported.

**Table 1** Multivariate effects of crisis situation clusters, spokesperson types, and first person pronoun types on organization reputations and purchase intentions

Effect		Value	F	P-value
Intercept	Wilks' Lambda	0.044	2135.949 b	0.000
Crisis	Hotelling's Trace	0.291	28.348 b	0.000
Spokes	Wilks' Lambda	0.949	2.580 b	0.037
Pronoun	Hotelling's Trace	0.003	0.301 b	0.740
Crisis *	Wilks' Lambda	0.949	2.580 b	0.037
Spokes *	pronoun			

a. Design: Intercept + Crisis + Spokes + Pronoun + Crisis \* Spokes + Crisis \* Pronoun + Spokes \* Pronoun + Crisis \* Spokes \* Pronoun  
b. Exact statistic  
c. The statistic is an upper bound on F that yields a lower bound on the significance level.

**Table 2** Univariate effects of crisis situation clusters, spokesperson types, and first person pronoun types on organization reputations and purchase intentions

Source	Dependent Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P-value
Corrected Model	ORG	22.537 <sup>a</sup>	11	2.049	2.023	0.028
	PI	121.172 <sup>b</sup>	11	11.016	7.465	0.000
Intercept	ORG	4322.734	1	4322.734	4268.195	0.000
	PI	2512.025	1	2512.025	1702.431	0.000
Crisis * Spokes * Pronoun	ORG	2.068	2	1.034	1.021	0.362
	PI	14.576	2	7.288	4.939	0.008
Error	ORG	198.504	196	1.013		
	PI	289.208	196	1.476		
Total	ORG	4559.070	208			
	PI	2932.778	208			
Corrected Total	ORG	221.041	207			
	PI	410.380	207			

a. R Squared = 0.102 (Adjusted R Squared = 0.052)

b. R Squared = 0.295 (Adjusted R Squared = 0.256)

ORG = Organization reputation

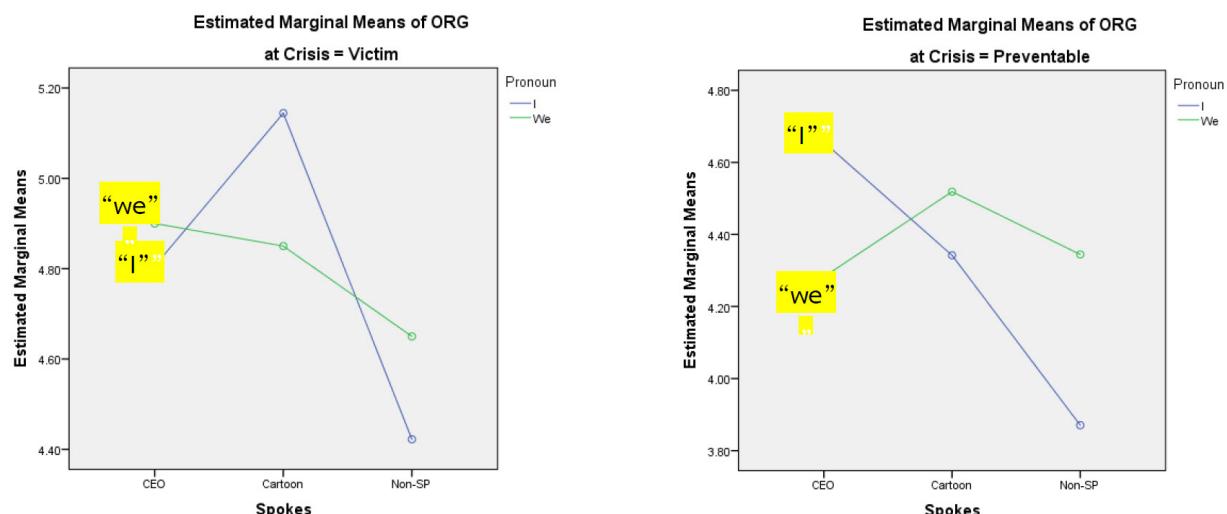
PI = Purchase intention

The descriptive statistics in Table 3 revealed that as for the organization in both crisis clusters (victim and preventable) which use any spokesperson (CEO, cartoon, non-spokesperson) and any first

person pronoun type (I and we), the participants perceived its organization as having neutral ( $\bar{X} = 3.87$ , S.D. = 0.974) to somewhat positive reputation ( $\bar{X} = 5.14$ , S.D. = 0.757).

**Table 3** Means of organization reputation categorized by crises, spokespersons, and first person pronouns

Crisis	Spokes		Mean	S.D.	N
Pronoun					
Organization Victim	CEO	I	4.80	1.012	17
Reputation		We	4.90	1.083	18
	Cartoon	I	5.14	0.758	18
		We	4.85	0.788	18
	Non-SP	I	4.42	1.266	16
		We	4.65	1.278	17
Preventable	CEO	I	4.65	1.054	16
		We	4.28	0.989	17
	Cartoon	I	4.34	0.926	19
		We	4.51	0.976	16
	Non-SP	I	3.87	0.974	17
		We	4.34	0.870	18



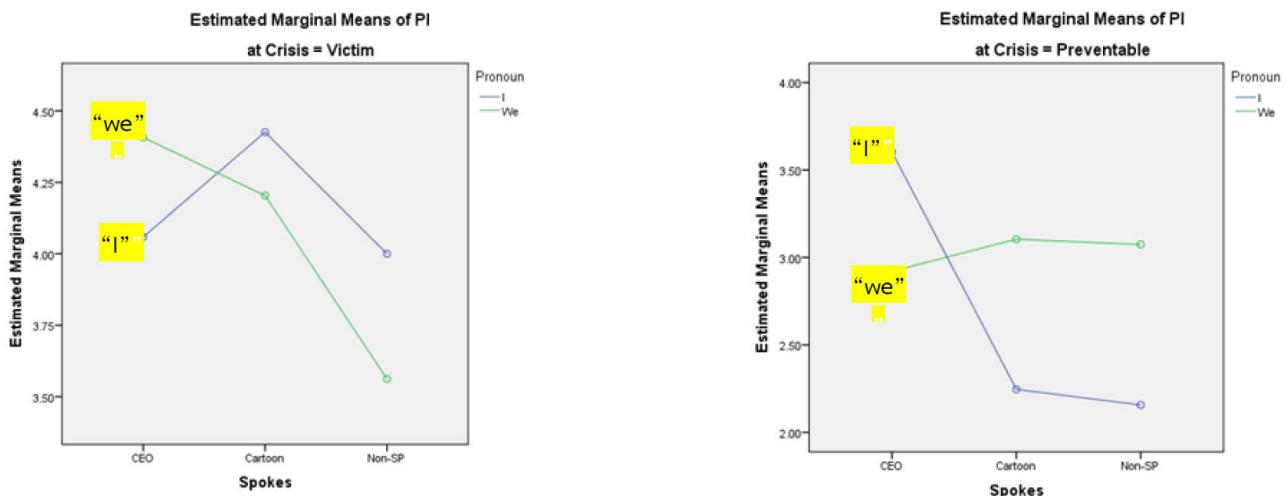
**Figure 2** Hypothesis H1a and H2a

The purchase intention, however, was found to be highest in the medium level in the situation where the organization is facing the victim crisis when the organization used cartoon and “I” first person pronoun ( $\bar{X} = 4.42$ , S.D. = 4.203), CEO and “we” first person pronoun ( $\bar{X} = 4.40$ , S.D. = 1.006), cartoon and “we” first person pronoun ( $\bar{X} = 4.20$ , S.D. = 1.309), CEO and “I” first person pronoun ( $\bar{X} = 4.05$ , S.D. = 0.568), and non-spokesperson and “I” first person pronoun ( $\bar{X} = 4.00$ , S.D. = 1.477). However, when the organization used non-spokesperson and “we” first person pronoun, the purchase intention was in the somewhat low level ( $\bar{X} = 3.56$ , S.D. = 1.386) (Table 4).

In the preventable crisis clusters, only using CEO and “I” first person pronoun would generate the highest purchase intention ( $\bar{X} = 3.60$ , S.D. = 1.476) which is in the medium level. The customers’ purchase intention was in the low to somewhat low level with the use of cartoon and “we” first person pronoun ( $\bar{X} = 3.10$ , S.D. = 1.359), non-spokesperson and “we” first person pronoun ( $\bar{X} = 3.07$ , S.D. = 1.586), CEO and “we” first person pronoun ( $\bar{X} = 2.92$ , S.D. = 1.044), cartoon and “I” first person pronoun ( $\bar{X} = 2.24$ , S.D. = 1.029), and non-spokesperson and “I” first person pronoun ( $\bar{X} = 2.15$ , S.D. = 1.112) (Table 4).

**Table 4** Means of purchase intention categorized by crises, spokespersons, and first person pronouns

Crisis Pronoun	Spokes		Mean	S.D.	N
Purchase Victim Intention	CEO	I	4.05	0.568	17
		We	4.40	1.007	18
	Cartoon	I	4.42	0.846	18
		We	4.20	1.309	18
	Non-SP	I	4.00	1.478	18
		We	3.56	1.386	16
	Preventable	CEO	I	3.60	1.477
		We	2.92	1.044	17
	Cartoon	I	2.24	1.029	19
		We	3.10	1.359	16
	Non-SP	I	2.15	1.112	17
		We	3.07	1.587	18



**Figure 3** Hypothesis H1b and H2b

## Conclusion and discussion

The finding indicated that, in the preventable crisis cluster, the participants perceived no different effects on organizational reputation when the organization used any spokesperson types or first person pronouns. Moreover, the participants perceived a lower blame and responsibility level when the organization is facing the victim crisis situation than in the preventable crisis.

The use of different spokespersons had no effects on organization reputations but affected the purchase intentions in both victim and preventable crisis situation clusters. This incident might be caused by the participants' perceptions that the selected spokesperson directly represented the organization. Therefore, the more spokesperson credibility in crisis situation, the more positive reputation of organizations (Coombs & Holladay, 2002), no matter what type of first person pronoun used in communicating with the company's stakeholders. That is, they might perceive all message strategies from the organization in different crisis situation clusters as company announcements, focusing only on blame and responsibility held by the company rather than on the spokesperson types and pronoun choices.

The participants, however, perceived the different effects of using spokesperson types and first-pronoun choices in victim and preventable crisis situations on purchase intention. In the victim crisis situation when the organization is not to be blamed and holds low responsibility for the occurring crisis, the participants might judge the organization's products based on the use of different spokesperson types and first person pronoun choices. Hence, the findings revealed that using cartoon and "I" first person pronoun can generate highest purchase intention level. They also confirmed that, rather than using CEO and non-spokespersons in any first person pronoun, using cartoon spokespersons was perceived as more honorable, honest, and more attentive.

Moreover, when the cartoon spokesperson used "I" to communicate with the audiences, they might perceive a closer relationship because the cartoon referred to itself in the company message (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991). Using CEO and "we" first person pronoun also generated a higher purchase intention than using CEO and "I" in victim crisis cluster. It might be because the stakeholders did not put the blame on CEO, and understood that CEO was not the one who takes responsibility

for crisis situations (Lee, Kim, & Wertz, 2014; Lee & Lariscy, 2008). So, the CEO that used “we” first person pronoun is perceived as acceptable by the stakeholders. The same effect could also occur when the organization used non-spokespersons in the victim crisis situation, no matter what type of pronoun choice. This might be because the stakeholders preferred a visible spokesperson from the organization which leads to high company credibility (Claeys, Cauberg, & Leysen, 2013).

On the other hand, in the preventable crisis situation, when the organization committed a mistake that leads to crisis, the stakeholders might be concerned about their health and illness (Avery, Graham, & Park, 2016; Greenberg & Elliott, 2009). Hence, they might prefer that the organization used CEO as a spokesperson while addressing to the stakeholders in a friendly manner, thus the “I” first person pronoun being the better choice. To conclude, in the preventable crisis situation, CEO seemed to generate the highest credibility (Hong & Len-Rios, 2015; Turk, Jin, Stewart, Kim, & Hipple, 2012).

However, in the situation where CEO is not available, the company may consider using cartoon and non-spokesperson instead but with “we” first person pronoun. The stakeholders might perceive that using cartoon and non-spokespersons in the communication message would represent anyhow the organization, but the use of “we” will push away direct blames from the organization. In this aspect, Moberg and Eriksson (2013) explained using “we” can avoid responsibility when the company is in difficult situations, especially as a political communication strategy.

### **Implication and recommendation**

The results confirmed the use of proper spokesperson and first-person pronoun when the organization wanted to communicate with its stakeholders in a food crisis situation. That is, a

cartoon is a good spokesperson to be used in food crisis communication when the organization is in the victim situation, and can generate higher purchase intention among the organization’s stakeholders. Hence, a cartoon should be created to be used as a spokesperson as a part of integrated marketing communication in the victim situations. The cartoon is even a better choice than using non-spokesperson, since, in any crisis situation, a visible spokesperson can lead to a more positive effect than an invisible one. However, using a credible CEO may be a better choice only in the preventable crisis situation, since he/she could generate higher credibility leading to higher purchase intention. For example, Bar B Q Plaza and Koh Kae, Thai food organizations, used their cartoon spokespersons to apologize and explain about food crisis situations to their customers. As a result, customers might understand the situation more clearly and friendly than using CEO because they commented and replied to cartoon spokespersons in a friendly manner. Thus, using CEO in any food crisis situation might not be appropriate, but only when the organization committed a wrongdoing to the public. The “we” first person pronoun may also be a better strategy since it would shun away direct responsibility from both the CEO and the organization.

In a victim crisis situation, the organization’s strategy to launch a message without a spokesperson may not be a good choice. If necessary, however, that kind of message should be used with a “we” pronoun to represent the organization’s apology to its audiences. It is because the stakeholders basically asked for the organization’s responsibility, so non-spokespersons and “we” first person pronoun might be suitable for the preventable food crisis situation when the organization needs not carry a direct blame and responsibility.

An ample room for future research is still available. For example, future researches may explore the crisis situations of different kinds of

products, services, or even ideologies, across various types of organizations, be it public, private, or non-profit ones. This is because nowadays, crisis is a common phenomenon in various fields. It may occur to tourism, politics, agriculture, etc., while deteriorating the credibility of related parties

if handled improperly. Hence, strategic crisis communication with proper spokespersons and messages is required to alleviate potential damages that might inflict on those parties. Further research of this issue will eventually shed a better light on the effectiveness of crisis communication. ♦

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