

A CALL FOR REVIVAL: FROM DISCOURSE OF RENEWAL TO CRISIS REVIVAL, A  
CRISIS MANAGEMENT APPROACH FOR BRAND COMMUNITIES

A Dissertation

by

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation project sought to explore and better explicate the ways in which discourse of renewal functions as a crisis communication strategy. While previous research conducted on discourse of renewal has focused on the ways in which an organization in crisis attempts to serve as the framers of the crisis, this dissertation specifically sought to understand the ways in which the corporate framing aligned (or were inconsistent) with the media framing (newspapers) of the crisis, and if media framing reflected key tenants of discourse of renewal. Particularly, how power and brand communities, when linked together, can further current crisis literature in creating a more nuanced approach to organizational renewal. A framing analysis was conducted of two case studies: Odwalla's e. coli crisis and Blue Bell's listeria crisis. Ultimately, I argue, discourse of renewal is not a viable crisis management strategy and largely problematic when situated within the field of crisis communication. Through the utilization of brand community literature, I propose a new crisis management strategy, which I call crisis revival. Ultimately, crisis revival, seeks to serve as a tool in which crises emerging from within brand communities can be best managed for all parties involved, with consideration given to both the ethical implications and unique complexities that crises bring with them.

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## NOMENCLATURE

DoR	Discourse of Renewal
BCs	Brand Communities

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

#### MALDEN MILLS: USING RENEWAL TO RESPOND TO CRISIS

On December 11, 1995, in the town of Lawrence, Massachusetts, a fire broke out in a textile manufacturing plant (Ulmer, 2001). The fire at Malden mills, the textile manufacturing plant, injured 36 people and destroyed 3 significant buildings, bringing with it the potential threat of 3,000 lost jobs (Ulmer, 2001). During a crisis, one of the main concerns of an organization is to ensure that stakeholders feelings of loss or devastation are assuaged through strategic acts of image restoration, which can serve in “restoring and protecting one’s reputation” after a crisis (Benoit, 1995, p. 71). Malden Mills, faced with a dire situation that could potentially bankrupt the organization, needed to go above and beyond to successfully navigate past the crisis. Crises can be seen as devastating events, particularly ones that can evoke feelings of loss in the individuals impacted by a crisis (Seeger & Ulmer, 2002). The fire that erupted at Malden Mills two weeks before Christmas in 1995 has been described as a “devastating explosion” which was especially true for the small-town community members of Lawrence, Massachusetts, because Malden Mills was the largest employer in the area (Ulmer, 2001). The crisis, the fire itself, threatened the viability and future of the organization.

The CEO and owner of Malden Mills, Aaron Feuerstein, proactively responded to the crisis (Ulmer, 2001). Feuerstein did not even wait for the fire to dissipate before making his initial response. Ulmer (2001), quoting a *Boston Globe* article published on December 12 1995, explains:

With one of his buildings still burning behind him, the 69-year-old owner of Malden Mills . . . spoke the words everyone in the Merrimack Valley wanted to hear . . . We're going to continue to operate in Lawrence. . . . We had the opportunity to run to the south many years ago. We didn't do it then, and we're not going to do it now (p. 603).

Feuerstein's crisis response was seen by many as a shining example of how an organization should respond to a crisis.

Pivotal to Feuerstein's crisis response, was the "reservoir of good will" that he was able to build beforehand. Ulmer (2001) in his analysis of the Malden Mills crisis, argues, "Feuerstein's history suggests that he has been diligent in supporting the community over time through a wide range of activities. Along with the community, Feuerstein also invested in his relationships with his workers" (p. 598). From donating 2 million dollars to the rebuilding of a Jewish synagogue, sponsoring job-training programs, organizing English classes for immigrant workers, and many other community-focused acts, Feuerstein's commitment to the community pre-crisis helped him navigate through the crisis his own organization, Malden Mills, faced (Ulmer, 2001).

Feuerstein's proactive promise to rebuild was seen by shareholders and consumers alike as a responsible action, but Malden Mills took even further steps with their response: Feuerstein committed to keeping company operations in Lawrence, and to continue paying his employees. First, Feuerstein took steps to alleviate concern of the community of Lawrence, when he stated, "We're going to continue to operate in Lawrence. . . . We had the opportunity to run to the south many years ago. We didn't do it then, and we're not going to do it now" (Milne & Aucoin, 1995, p. Metro, 1). While the intent to keep the plants in Lawrence could be seen as relief to some, unsurprisingly others worried about Malden Mills viability as an organization that could be

rebuilt. A mere three days after the fire, on December 14<sup>th</sup>, 1995, Feuerstein gathered his employees in a high school gymnasium, for a meeting (Ulmer, 2001). Feuerstein announced in that meeting, “At least for the next 30 days—the time might be longer—all hourly employees will be paid their full salaries” (Milne, 1995, p. Metro, 50). And again, on January 11<sup>th</sup>, 1996, Feuerstein made the same vow to his employees, for another thirty days (Ulmer, 2001). Why? Why would a CEO of a textile company pay his employees, accruing even greater financial loss than that which the fire brought with it? Feuerstein addressed this question in his January 11<sup>th</sup> meeting with his employees, when he explained:

And why am I doing it? I consider the employees standing in front of me here the most valuable asset that Malden Mills has. I don't consider them as some companies do as an expense that can be cut. What I am doing today will come back 10 fold and it will make Malden Mills the best company in the industry (Calo, 1996).

Feuerstein's acts could be seen as responsible for those within the community, and perhaps irresponsible by those outside of the community, due to the larger financial implications of his crisis response. However, what Feuerstein's actions solidified was a strong reputation—even in the face of crisis.

Ulmer and Sellnow (2002) assert, “Crisis-related discourse is most often about an organization or industry absolving itself from guilt and repairing its image” (p. 362). This is in part because of the ways in which reputation, if it is seen as illegitimate, can financially impact the organization's bottom line. The brief summary of Malden Mill's crisis response serves as an example of the effective use of discourse of renewal, a narrow and highly specific crisis communication strategy. On the surface level, one might argue Malden Mills engaged in image restoration, but as Reirson, Sellnow and Ulmer (2009) argue, discourse of renewal, “extends

beyond image restoration by emphasizing the potential for organizations to innovate and adapt during the post crisis period” (p. 115). Simply put, discourse of renewal moves beyond the more traditional image repair strategies to focusing more narrowly to frame a crisis as more than a conflict to be handled, but an opportunity for an organization to effectively use their crisis management to turn a devastating moment into one of renewal for the community in which they operate, such as the city of Lawrence. As I will discuss later, renewal entails corrective action (changes in policies/procedures) but largely significant to the conceptualization of renewal is the careful selection of rhetorical strategies.

Malden Mill’s focus on the needs of community members and their individual financial stability as a top priority, even at a financial cost to the corporation, positioned them to be viewed as both a proactive organization, but also as a responsible community member. The fire itself, and what caused it, was never truly understood. This left Malden Mills in the rare position of being able to also be seen as a victim within the community as well—not specifically responsible for the loss of organizational property, and instability felt by members of the community.

Malden Mills crisis itself, as well as their crisis management plan, followed many of the tenets necessary for discourse of renewal to be a viable crisis response strategy. This allowed the corporation to successfully navigate out of what could have been a crisis that shut the doors of the organization forever, into an opportunity that allowed for renewal, or an organizational re-birth of sorts, to occur. Renewal discourse can be used to navigate through a severe crisis that might otherwise seriously impact an organization’s ability to operate—whether that is due to legitimacy issues or financial impact. Particularly for Malden Mills, the fire brought with it the incapacity for the organization to continue operations until the physical structures could be

rebuilt. As it is currently conceptualized, renewal discourse is a highly specific and narrow crisis response strategy, which will be expounded upon within my literature review.

As a CEO, Aaron Feuerstein's actions can be seen as a rarity, an exception—not the rule. He was a man who decided to do what he believed was right, even in the face of significant financial loss. Feuerstein's actions, his dedication to preserve a community and provide for its members, are laudable. However, while discourse of renewal in this case can be seen as responsible and effective, I argue that as a crisis management strategy, discourse of renewal begs for further analysis to better understand the ways in which power structures, ethical consideration and dominant narrative creation informs the utilization of discourse of renewal as a crisis communication strategy for organizations. This dissertation project seeks to extrapolate and re-conceptualize discourse of renewal, fleshing out issues surrounding crisis management including: tensions at play in constructing a dominant narrative, which is usually crafted by the privileged few (journalist, and/or those in power within the organization), the silencing of marginalized voices in the process, as well as bringing into question the ethicality of “memory-making” being conducted by an organization.

In addition, while a struggle for power will always exist, a current research gap on renewal discourse is that it does not properly address the ways in which organizational renewal discourse and media framing of a crisis inform and change one another. Furthermore, by taking a prospective approach, discourse of renewal seems to be in direct opposition to crisis literature that suggests emotions and community healing is necessary for effective crisis management to occur. Addressing the critiques listed above, this dissertation project will seek to extend and broaden the current ways in which discourse of renewal is conceptualized and applied within the realm of crisis management.

## PREVIEW

In the next section, I will provide a brief summary of organizational crisis, corporate and product harm crises, and then crisis communication, followed by an overview of the relevant literature surrounding discourse of renewal including a definition of what discourse of renewal is, criteria for discourse of renewal to be a viable crisis response choice, as well as rhetorical strategies that need to be used for discourse of renewal to be effective. Within my third section I will discuss various critiques or research gaps (exigencies) that exist within the current conceptualization of renewal discourse that my dissertation seeks to address, as well as argue how to extend and broaden discourse of renewal as a more clearly conceptualized and effective crisis discourse strategy. Lastly, I will provide a literature review on brand communities.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Organizational crisis*

An organizational crisis is considered, “a low-probability, high-impact event that threatens the viability of the organization and is characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect, and means of resolution” (Pearson & Clair, 1998, p. 60). Furthermore, a crisis event within an organization is one that elicits “unwanted visibility on the organization and is likely to endanger health or environment, or seriously impact reputation or ability to do business” (p. 9).

Organizational crises are caused by a sudden event, have the potential to gain unfavorable attention within society thus impacting the organization’s reputation, and have the ability to financially threaten the viability of the organization itself.

While crises and disasters can be viewed similarly, and in fact can be interrelated with one another, to equate a “disaster” as an “organizational crisis” is an over-simplification. Jaques (2014) explains, “Disasters are extreme events that result in the widespread social disruption,

trauma, damage and loss of life, not just organisational impacts. Or, put more simply for the purpose of clarity, organisations have crises while societies or communities have disasters” (p. 206). Thus, for the purposes of this study, it is important to distinguish that when exploring crises, I mean organizational crises specifically as opposed to community disasters more broadly.

Organizational crises have three identifiable characteristics: they are viewed as unpredictable, they are threatening to the organization in which they occur and there is a short response time. Coombs (2015) explains, “A crisis is unpredictable but not unexpected. Wise organizations know that crises will befall them; they just do not know when. Crises can be anticipated. Crises strike suddenly, giving them an element of surprise and unpredictability” (p. 3). Since crises are born out of “high impact events” or “unwanted visibility” they can also be seen as a serious development for an organization. Secondly, organizational crises have the potential to be viewed as “disruptive of normal business and potentially lethal to organizational reputation” (Jaques, 2014, p. 10). Thus, organizational crises are threatening not only to the organization’s ability to operate, and therefore have the potential to impact the organizations finances, but significant within the threat is a loss of organizational reputation. Lastly, within crises, there is a short response time in which organizational actors must “take control of the crisis and set the tone for the response and recovery efforts” (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2015, p. 8).

#### *Corporate and Product Harm Crises*

Crises can vary greatly within organizational contexts. Marcus and Goodman (1991) posit that organizational crises, or corporate crises, tend to fall into one of three categories: scandals, accidents and product safety. Scandals are occurrences that can be seen as disgraceful acts and compromise the reputations of the parties or persons involved (Marcus & Goodman,

1991). Scandals may harm the company's reputation, but generally do not end in large lawsuits. Accidents are "undesirable or unfortunate happenings that occur unexpectedly and without design" (Marcus & Goodman, 1991, p. 284). Accidents are further distinguished, Marcus and Goodman (1991) argue, in that they are discrete one-time events, create a concrete set of victims, generally include property damage that is greater than human damage and victims tend to be well represented by legal counsel. Product safety and health incidents are similar to accidents, but rather than one single-event, product safety crises are comprised of "repeated events or revelations" that create mass suffering (Marcus & Goodman, 1991, p. 288). Product harm accidents have the potential to: generate as many victims as accidents (in fact, there will always be a dispute about the number of the victims involved), legal counsel usually represents the victims, the root cause of the product safety and health incident is generally less complex than an accident and the victims are less predictable. Marcus and Goodman (1991) argue that product safety and health incidents "lie somewhere between accidents and scandals" (p. 284).

Product safety crises can also be viewed as product-harm crises. A product-harm crisis occurs when, "a firm's product fails to meet a mandatory safety standard, contains a defect that could cause substantial harm to consumers, creates an unreasonable risk of serious injury or death, or fails to comply with a voluntary standard adopted by the specific industry" (Chen, Ganesan & Liu, 2009, p. 214). Product-harm crisis can be costly, both in an organization's reputation being marred, as well as financial cost. Furthermore, product harm crisis can negatively impact consumers' perceptions of product quality and lead to organizational distrust (Chen, Ganesan, Liu, 2009).

Falling within product-harm crises, are recalls. A product recall can occur for many reasons, including: "foodborne illness outbreaks; products contaminated with foreign materials;

mislabeled; undeclared allergens; under processed or undercooked products” (Pozo & Schroeder, 2015, p. 1). For a product-harm crises, such as a food recall, several factors have the potential to influence the severity or impact the crisis has on the organization. First, the greater the human health risk associated with the recall, the greater the potential for shareholders losses (Pozo & Schroeder, 2015). Secondly, an organization’s past matters within product recalls. Specifically, prior experience managing recalls can influence the impact of the recall on the organization’s finances and stock prices (Pozo & Schroeder, 2015; Salin and Hooker, 2001; Wang et al., 2002). Organizations that have successfully managed product recalls in the past, are seen as more capable of doing so again and thus create less panic for consumers and shareholders alike. Lastly, the size of the organization is a factor. Pozo & Schroeder (2015) argue, “on average, larger firms experience lesser impacts after a recall” (p. 4).

While recalls themselves can be seen as costly events for organizations, human health risks associated with food recalls specifically is important to examine. Haugh (2012) argues, “The public is becoming more concerned about food safety because food is no longer produced locally, so food recalls are not isolated” (p. 62). As a preventive measure, food firms invest substantial resources to reduce the probability of food safety hazards. However, determining optimal investment in preventative measures is elusive because food contamination incidents are difficult to predict and even more, their probable economic impact is unknown (Pozo & Schroeder, 2015, p. 1). Furthermore, the amount of media coverage that a food recall generally receives has the potential to impact the severity of the recall itself. Gauthier (2010) posits, “recalls of contaminated food that receive extensive media coverage result in drastic and lasting declines in consumption which in some cases threaten the survival of the companies and sectors concerned” (p. 270). Chen, Ganesan & Liu (2009) argue that while food recalls themselves have

been researched in terms of financial and economical impacts, there is a need to further research and “examine the role of news media in a recall event” (Chen, Ganesan & Liu, 2009, p. 225).

Thus, this dissertation project seeks to not only explore the ways in which food recalls (product-harm crises) are effectively managed, but also how the media portray food recalls within an organizational crisis context.

### *Crisis Communication*

Crisis communication is concerned with “the processes whereby organizations create and exchange meanings among stakeholders regarding the risk of crisis, cause, blame, responsibility, precautionary norms, and crisis-induced changes in the organization and its relationship to stakeholders” (Seeger & Ulmer, 2002, p. 128). Coombs (2009) defines a crisis as an event that “threatens stakeholders expectations about an organization and can significantly affect an organization’s performance” (p. 238). Simply put, crisis communication is largely an attempt by organizational actors to: create a shared meaning/understanding of the crisis event itself (what happened, who was at fault, that the preventative measures the organization had in place were societal “norms” and how the crisis influenced changes within organizational procedures/protocols) to its stakeholders.

Coombs and Holladay (2015) argue that all organizational crisis managers must first begin with instructing and adjusting information. Park (2016) posits that, “Companies need to effectively communicate with the public about crises to protect themselves from reputational decline” (p. 190). Within this communication between organization and the society in which it operates during and after a crisis, crisis managers should give instructing information and adjust the information as needed. During the initial crisis response, there is a need to give the public *instructing information*, which includes: the known facts about the crisis event, the impact it

might have on the public and actions that the public should take (Coombs, 2007). As the crisis progresses and crisis managers decide on appropriate courses of action for the organization, *adjusting information* needs to be communicated to the public, such as: what the organization is doing and how they intend to prevent future crises (Coombs, 2007).

Crisis communication seeks to understand the relationship between an organization and its stakeholders before, during, and after a crisis. With the acknowledgment that communication from the organization will be altered as necessary for the public impacted and that there are varying crisis response strategies organizational actors can use within their crisis response efforts. Crisis communication then, is a broad field of research that encompasses many types of crises and focuses on creation of meaning about the particular crisis event(s) between the organization and the society in which it operates, with acknowledgement that crisis communication often is used to protect and repair the organization's image.

#### *Image Restoration and Reputation Repair*

Within crisis communication, William Benoit's image restoration theory focuses on message options within various crises contexts for organizations, specifically to effectively repair their image. After crisis events, one of the main concerns of an organization is to ensure that stakeholders feelings of loss or devastation are assuaged through strategic acts of image restoration, which can serve in "restoring and protecting one's reputation" after a crisis (Benoit, 1995, p. 71). Benoit's image restoration theory posits four aspects of a crisis that should be analyzed: believed responsibility, perception of reality, belief of organizational act to be offensive and prioritization of audience. Important here, are notions of believability and responsibility. If the public believes that a company committed a wrongdoing, then that tarnishes

the organizational image. Similarly, if an organization is perceived to be responsible for a heinous act, then organization's need to consider that in their response strategy.

Benoit's image restoration theory provides 5 broad image restoration strategies that can be used within crisis contexts: denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness of event, corrective action and mortification:

1. *Denial*: can be used to either simply deny that the offensive act occurred or shift blame to another individual or organization (Benoit, 1997).
2. *Evasion of responsibility*: might include provocation (the organization was provoked into action), defeasibility (there was a lack of information and thus the organization cannot be viewed as responsible), that the act was accidental or, that the offensive act was done but with good intentions.
3. *Reduce offensiveness*: an organization might use bolstering (highlight/stress the good traits of the organization), minimize the negative feelings about the act itself, differentiation (differentiate the act from similar acts to make it seem less serious), transcendence (of act by organization for a "greater good" or "higher cause"), attack the accuser (reducing the credibility of their accuser) and/or compensation (to appease the victim for the offensive act).
4. *Corrective action*: this strategy could include organizational plans to solve the problem, as well as plans to ensure that the problem does not occur again in the future.
5. *Mortification*: organization apologizes for wrongdoing and requests forgiveness, which is argued to be risky because of the potential legal risks of lawsuits, fines, etc.

Together, these five general strategies attempt to act as possible responses within organizational crisis context. Important within image restoration is the focus given to organizational reputation.

Particularly relevant to my dissertation project is the relationship between reputation and crisis. Coombs (2007) argues that an organization's reputation is widely recognized as a valuable asset, and with this crisis events can serve as a "reputational threat" to the organization. I am interested in the ways that crisis discourse serves as an attempt to create a salient dominant narrative of crisis events in order to better protect the organization's reputation and by implication the organization's future viability. By attempting to rhetorically construct a crisis narrative that will become solidified in society, with particular consideration given to stakeholders, the organization is attempting to: 1.) Protect the organization's bottom line and current image. 2.) Ensure that in its future operations the memory of that crisis event casts the organization in a positive light. 3.) That the organization can remain viable in the future and that the crisis itself does not halt business operations to the extent to which the organization cannot recover. Important then, is effective narrative construction in order to repair/restore an organization's image and protect its reputation—this is what is largely known as image restoration, as previously discussed. Due to the broadness of crisis communication research, I will focus the following section of my literature review on the research that has been conducted on renewal discourse specifically. Particularly I will explore the ways in which discourse of renewal functions as an overly narrow form of image restoration as it is currently conceptualized and the need for a better conceptualization of crisis renewal to be created.

### *Discourse of Renewal*

As suggested previously, there are many different types of crises and with this comes the need for crises response approaches to differ in nature as well (Coombs, 1995). Particularly, crises are often distinguished by the type of crisis itself (natural disasters, workplace violence, product tampering, human error, etc.) and the responsibility attributed to the organization for the

crisis event (crisis attribution) (Coombs, 2007). Regardless of the type of crisis or level of attributed responsibility to the organization, a goal of many crisis managers within a crisis context is to deploy effective image restoration strategies. Image restoration strategies can be broadly defined as, “rhetorical strategies designed to symbolically position the organization more favorably regarding questions of cause, blame, and harm” (Seeger & Ulmer, 2002, p. 129). Image restoration theory posits five strategies that have largely been adopted and used within crisis management, which include: (1) denial, (2) evading responsibility, (3) reducing offensiveness, (4) corrective action, and (5) mortification (Benoit, 1995). Building out of these broaden strategies of image restoration, is renewal discourse.

Renewal discourse is argued to focus on “the human side of enterprise” (Lippit, 1969, p. 5). Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger, the primary scholars whom developed notions of discourse of renewal within crisis communication explain, “crisis leadership and effective crisis communication involves creating a vision for moving beyond the crisis, learning, and creating meaning” (2015, p. 16). Renewal discourse in particular is unique in that it has the potential to be used to create a constructed narrative for multiple stakeholders, with careful consideration given to how the crisis is framed. I argue this has larger implications for the entire society in which organizational renewal discourse is constructed. Renewal is contingent on variables like: crisis type, organizational culpability, and other factors which I will explicate in the next section which are argued to be necessary for renewal discourse to be a viable crisis communication option. That is to say, discourse of renewal is both highly particularized and currently narrowly applied within crisis discourse.

Renewal discourse is a unique image restoration strategy in that the goal is first and foremost to create a provisional narrative (Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow, 2007). Ulmer, Seeger &

Sellnow (2007) explain, “Grounded in the larger framework of organizational rhetoric the renewal model focuses on the provisional responses of organizational leaders to devastating disasters, such as fires and floods, and the leaders’ natural impulse to rebuild and move beyond the crisis” (p. 131). Provisional discourse suggests instead of dwelling on the past (the crisis event(s), corporate apologia, who is to blame, etc.) as is the case with much of post-crisis discourse; renewal discourse focuses on the present and the future (Seeger & Ulmer, 2001; Cotton, Veil & Iannarino, 2015). Currently, DoR is not conceptualized or considered a strategy, or strategic in nature. The “impulse” of organizational leadership to rebuild should be further explored not only as “natural” but also as “strategic” in that, when coupling with notions of provisional discourse, organizational leadership is implicitly turning the focus away from conversations of liability, cause of the crisis, etc.

Apparent in this explanation of provisional discourse is that renewal rhetoric is future-oriented, guided by organizational leadership and used to change notions of “devastating moments” into moments of opportunity and community rebuilding. Furthermore, discourse of renewal works best when the organization itself can be seen as a victim of the crisis (Cotton, Veil & Iannarino, 2015). Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow (2007) argue that when using a renewal approach, organizations attempt to “rhetorically structure reality” in a way that stakeholders might view favorably (p. 131). While unsurprising, the primary goal of renewal discourse is to frame organizational actions in a favorable manner to stakeholders, and society at large—this carefully constructed rhetorical narrative is further particularized/specific in that there are narrow criteria and strategies necessary for renewal discourse to be seen as a viable and effective crisis response strategy.

## *Criteria and Strategies of Effective Discourse of Renewal*

For renewal discourse to be deployed and progress in a successful and effective way, Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow (2007) argue there are four criteria that should be considered and met within a specific crisis context: crisis type, stakeholder relationships, corrective action and change & public versus private organizations. For renewal, the following factors should be used to evaluate the viability of renewal discourse as a crisis management strategy within a particular crisis context:

Crisis type: Particularly where natural disasters and crises of destruction are concerned, discourse of renewal is a viable option when the organization is not cast as at fault for the crisis occurring. For instance, the Odawalla case presented in the introduction of this proposal suggested that Odawalla, while the carrier of E. Coli through their juice, was not at fault for the outbreak by any clear organizational wrongdoing. Essentially, when the organization can be cast as a victim of the crisis as well, not the perpetrator, they are in primed to use renewal discourse according to this tenet.

Stakeholder relationships: Stakeholder relationships are important when using renewal as a strategy because organizations who have a strong and positive relationship with stakeholders pre-crisis are more likely to be able to tap into a “reservoir of goodwill” in order to be able to gain support and financial backing to rebuild (Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow, 2007). However, DoR is unspecific/unclear on how to measure or judge if strong/positive relationships with stakeholders exist pre-crisis for an organization wishing to use renewal.

Corrective action and change: Similar to other image repair strategies, discourse of renewal posits corrective action must be made, and change is most easily measured within renewal discourse if it is: “followed it up with meaningful action and observable change”

(Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow, 2007, p. 133). Taking steps towards corrective action without raising issues or perceptions of organizational negligence is a particularly precarious criterion to balance. Corrective action is often viewed as acts, which might include: firing the employee(s) responsible for an incident, changing processes that led to a crisis, etc. Particularly within a renewal context, where an organization wishes to be viewed as a victim, corrective action must be followed up by meaningful change or action by relevant organizational actors, because without these, “public statements it is unlikely that employees and the community would have been supportive of these renewal responses” (Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow, 2007, p. 133).

Public vs. private organizations: Lastly, research thus far has demonstrated that private organizations tend to be better positioned to be more successful using renewal as a response to crises than public organizations, which Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow (2007) explain is most likely because, “there is often more of an entrepreneurial spirit and greater autonomy exercised by private owners of companies” (p. 133). This greater autonomy held by private organizations positions them to be more likely to act swiftly in accordance with the “corrective action and change” criteria. The entrepreneurial aspects of privately-owned organizations might allow for larger amounts of “goodwill” towards the organization be felt by stakeholder—potentially leading to garnering financial support needed to rebuild, which is consistent with the “stakeholder relationship” criteria. Thus, private organizations potentially are in a better position and primed to use renewal discourse. These four conditions currently serve as the basic tenets necessary for renewal discourse to be a viable crisis communication strategy. Put simply the above four conditions allow for crisis managers to know if the crisis they currently face has the opportunity to be handled through the use of renewal discourse.

Once renewal discourse is deemed a viable option for an organization's crisis communication, Seeger & Ulmer (2001) posit four aspects of renewal discourse that can serve as effective renewal strategies: provisional discourse, rebuilding, communicate optimism, ability of organizational leadership to frame crisis. The following act as specific principles used to guide rhetorical choices within the crisis communication process from a discourse of renewal perspective:

Provisional narrative: Renewal discourse is a unique image restoration strategy in that the goal is first and foremost to create a provisional narrative (Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow, 2007). Instead of dwelling on the past (the crisis event(s), corporate apologia, who is to blame, etc.) as is the case with much of post-crisis discourse; renewal discourse is focused on the present and the future (Seeger & Ulmer, 2001; Cotton, Veil & Iannarino, 2015).

Focus on rebuilding: Secondly, the focus of renewal discourse is on rebuilding (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002; Cotton, Veil & Iannarino, 2015). Rebuilding might include physical rebuilding, as was the case with Seeger & Ulmer's (2002) analysis of two organizations that both had fires that destroyed their respective organizational facilities—the textile firm, Malden Mills, and Cole Hardwoods. Both CEO'S successfully used renewal discourse to promise to rebuild the organizational facilities. However, more universal in post-crisis discourse is the need to rebuild confidence—to communicate growth and that the organization is working to move past deficiencies (Ulmer and Sellnow, 2002). Growth also signifies that as an organization rebuilds, it will also become better than it was before the crisis occurred (Cotton, Veil & Iannarino, 2015).

Communicate optimism: A third aspect of renewal discourse is communicating optimism, which means emphasizing the positive while downplaying the negative (Cotton, Veil & Iannarino, 2015). The consistent use of positive discourse is not always a viable option in post-

crisis, it only works when an organization can be seen as not at fault, or a victim themselves (Reirson, Sellnow & Ulmer, 2009). Effectively communication optimism has the potential to be “defeated” by various factors, perhaps the most prominent one being the inability of organizational leadership to “buy-in” to changes that an organization makes during the rebuilding phase of renewal (Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2007). When creating a discourse of renewal, a new dominant narrative is being carefully constructed, but with that construction comes the possibility for organizational leadership to disagree and not adhere to the narrative being created, potentially halting renewal for the organization. This ties directly into the four rhetorical principles of discourse renewal.

Ability of leadership to frame crisis: The last element of renewal is, “associated with the ability of an organization’s leader to enact and frame the meaning of a crisis” (Reirson, Sellnow & Ulmer, 2009). Individuals within organizational leadership are often viewed as the faces of the company—they are representatives and ones that stakeholders deem as most trustworthy (Cotton, Veil & Iannarino, 2015). As such, it is imperative that there is a shared vision of leadership values and a focus on progress in the future (Cotton, Veil & Iannarino, 2015). These four rhetorical principles are necessary if crisis managers wish to be successful in the use of renewal as a discourse strategy following an organizational crisis.

In summary, discourse of renewal is a very specific form of image restoration. The four factors necessary for discourse of renewal to be strategic choice to be used by crisis managers are highly specific, narrowing the breadth of crisis that discourse of renewal can effectively address. The four principles listed above serve to help guide rhetorical choices made within the actual management of the crisis itself. Together, they explain the current conceptualization of how

renewal discourse can (and cannot) be used to navigate crisis contexts that might otherwise “bankrupt” an organization—both in regards to both reputation and financial loss.

### *Exigencies of Renewal: Difficulties and Opportunities*

Reirson, Sellnow & Ulmer (2009) acknowledge, “crisis events are dualistic in that every crisis inherently embodies both difficulties and opportunities” (p. 126). This dissertation project seeks to explore the dual-nature of crisis events by explicating the ways in which discourse of renewal is both a form of crisis communication that can serve as an opportunity for an organization to be re-born, while also bringing with it difficulties and challenges as a crisis communication strategy. I argue that discourse of renewal is too narrowly applied as it is currently conceptualized and needs to be extrapolated in order to not only grow current crisis communication research, but also so that renewal discourse can be used to the betterment of society through its applicability. I seek to address the ways in which aspects of renewal and image restoration can be re-conceptualized to become a more pliable tool for crisis managers and scholars, through the creation of a new theory, which I call crisis revival. Particularly relevant within notions of renewal, is consumer brand commitment.

### *Discourse of Renewal and Consumer Brand Commitment*

Building off the literature review given in the previous section, one of the current difficulties for scholars interested in renewal discourse is that it has thus far been largely applied and viewed as a successful crisis management tool within private organizations specifically. As suggested in the previous section, this is partially because of the autonomous ways in which action and decision-making can occur for private organizations with less complex organizational management structures and harder for large public organizations to enact with more hierarchal structures, stockholders, etc. That have the potential to serve as constraints to timely statements

of promises to rebuild and/or make necessary changes which renewal discourse so fundamentally hinges upon. However, I argue that a more beneficial way to analyze the likelihood of renewal discourse being an effective crisis communication strategy is not by looking at if the organization is public vs. private, but rather looking at consumer's brand commitment to the organization.

Brand commitment within a crisis context, is complex. Brand commitment can potentially serve to provide a "reservoir of goodwill" for an organization, which then can be used as leverage within crisis contexts. However, in a study done on product recalls, Germann et al (2013) posits, "highly committed consumers may experience a feeling of betrayal and hence be especially disappointed when the products they feel close to get recalled" (p. 180). Within crisis situations more broadly, these feelings of disappointment and betrayal might ring true as well. By looking at brand commitment, linked with notions of consumers, a more clear understanding of the type of organization that is primed for renewal discourse can be conceptualized, which I will explore later in this chapter through the research that has been conducted on brand communities.

My speculation is that when consumers believe a part of their identity is attached to an organization (such as a university, a sports stadium, Apple products, etc.) they are especially primed for discourse of renewal, regardless of whether they are a public or private organization. Questions that arise when thinking about the relationship between consumer brand commitment and crises are: How does higher levels of brand commitment inform the applicability of discourse of renewal as a crisis strategy? What is the relationship between consumer identity (with the organization) and renewal discourse effectiveness? Does brand commitment necessarily provide a reservoir of goodwill and if so, to what extent? For those who experience

high levels of brand commitment, is renewal discourse more likely to calm/alleviate emotions or be seen as insincere rhetoric?

*Discourse of Renewal: Dominant Narrative Construction*

A second aspect of discourse of renewal, which needs further exploration and fleshing out, is the ways in which renewal seeks to function as a dominant narrative. The “vision creation” and “creating meaning” aspects of renewal discourse allows for organizational actors to become “memory-makers” for stakeholders and/or publics. This is currently largely under-acknowledged within renewal research, and more broadly within the field of crisis communication research entirely. This research gap is particularly problematic in that organizations such as Apple or Nike, are a part of the fabric of American culture. These organizations are apart of our history; they will most likely be remembered generations from now—for being ethical or unethical, for working through crisis effectively or ineffectively, as well as their role in the betterment of society. For instance, Enron and Exxon Valdez are examples of memories about a particular organization and impacted publics that will live on indefinitely.

Crisis communication is concerned with “the processes whereby organizations create and exchange meanings among stakeholders regarding the risk of crisis, cause, blame, responsibility, precautionary norms, and crisis-induced changes in the organization and its relationship to stakeholders” (Seeger & Ulmer, 2002, p. 128). Conrad (2011) asserts an organization’s reputation is located in the commonly held memories of individuals about the organization’s past. Furthermore, renewal discourse when situated as a specific form of crisis communication has the potential to serve as a narrative construction for an entire society, in that “crisis leadership and effective crisis communication involves creating a vision for moving beyond the

crisis, learning, and creating meaning” (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2015, p. 16). The notions of dominance, privilege and hegemonic narratives that can be found in collective/public memory studies are important theoretical contributions, which can be connected to discourse of renewal better understanding the relationship between power, memory construction, and a society grappling with a devastating crisis.

Memories of the past that are stored and interpreted within social structures (Halbwachs, 1992), social structures such as organizations. These notions of “stored” and “interpreted” prove useful when addressing issues of social and/or bureaucratic structures within a renewal context and their role in the memory and recall process. Dickinson, Blair and Ott (2010) argue public memory must contain traces of actual events (there must be some historicity), public memory is “constructed” and at times “invented.” This conceptualization of public memory fits perfectly when analyzing crisis rhetoric such as renewal. Public memory is created and invented by social structures in the public-sphere; it contains traces of real events, represents the dominant narrative and is adhered to by the majority of individuals within that society. Within this statement there are two specific elements of public memory research that can further develop and strengthen renewal discourse: 1.) The recognition that it is social structures, not one structure that guide and constrain dominant narratives. 2.) For discourse of renewal to become a salient public memory, it must be persuasive for a wide range of stakeholders.

Recently, research within crisis communication has sought to understand the relationship between media coverage of a crisis and its impact. While impact of media on organizational crisis is acknowledged it is still largely unclear how and to what effect the media plays a role in crises. This is consistent with Entman’s (1993) assertion that it is still unknown to what extent the media impacts audiences perceptions of an issue, that media framing does serve as a way of

organizing thoughts around an issue for audiences. This is true for crisis contexts as well. One of the most basic and long-standing complexities of effective crisis management is the recognition that media has, and always will, play a role in narrative construction. With two large dominant forces (crisis managers and journalist/media) both attempting to construct the dominant narrative, “memory-making” becomes a much more complex endeavor within renewal discourse.

Discourse of renewal currently acknowledges that leadership must have the ability to frame the crisis in a way that societal publics see as genuine. Under acknowledged is the tensions at play between organizational crisis managers and journalist in the struggle of who gets to “frame” the narrative that becomes accepted and salient within society. Casey (2004) asserts public memory is handed down but can be challenged or changed if one of two things occurs: 1.) There are fairly obvious problems with the narrative in regards to facts. Ex: organization says they were not aware of any wrongdoing, but later documents surface that suggest they knew exactly what they were doing. 2.) When the significance of an event or public memory is reassessed and no longer seems to fit ethical or historical needs of a society it can then be re-remembered/constructed. Particularly the latter way in which public memory can be “rejected” within society might prove to be an interesting way of exploring counter-narratives, or acts of resistance, within crisis contexts.

When exploring the relationship between discourse of renewal and public memory (narrative) construction, questions arise such as: What are the potential ramifications and considerations that should be taken when creating a dominant narrative? Whose voices might potentially serve to inform (or compete for) the memory of that event? What voices are silenced by the construction of dominant narratives? If marginalized voices are those of the people most impacted by the crisis event itself, what ethical implications exist?

### *Discourse of Renewal: Power Structures As Informing Ethics*

Implicit thus far in my dissertation are notions of power structures at play within renewal discourse and narrative construction. Ethics are largely informed by power structures, an underdeveloped analysis of the relationship between power and ethics leaves discourse of renewal with implications of being critiqued for: a.) Being focused solely on the good, there is a great chance of manipulation. b.) Promoting the silencing of voices that do not fit with renewal narratives becomes problematic when considering the role of emotion within crisis contexts. Thus, renewal discourse needs to be analyzed using a more critical approach in regards to power and ethics.

Renewal discourse is a powerful crisis strategy, and with power comes the potential for organizational actors to behave in ways that pacify the community in the moment, but do very little to actually ensure “re-birth” is happening within the organization for the benefit of the community. Cotton, Veil & Iannarino (2015) explain renewal is a complex and in-depth type of discourse in that it is, “more than a reputational Band-Aid; true renewal requires a cultural realignment of the organization following a crisis” (p. 28). Cultural re-alignments, significant “course-corrections” within an organizational context are largely enacted by those within an organization who have enough power to do so. Building off previously explored notions of narrative creation is the realization that to construct dominant narratives or salient public memories, there is a powerful component of crisis communication with the potential of little consideration given to questions of ethics, potentially silenced voices of community members.

Regardless of the type of crisis faced, crises within an organization are often framed as devastating events, which can evoke feelings of loss in those individuals impacted (Seeger & Ulmer, 2002). One of perhaps the most obvious critiques of current discourse of renewal

literature, is the tenant that renewal should be used to look to the future, not at the past, but rather focus on how rebuilding should occur—this is a very privileged and impersonal perspective.

Crises can serve as much needed “wake-up calls” in which mistakes, unethical decisions, or errors can have light cast on them. By only focusing on the future, voices of members within society, who need to work through and process the grief and shock crisis events tend to evoke, are silenced. Thinking about crisis cases that fit within the framework of DoR, such as Odwalla’s E. Coli outbreak, which will be explored in chapter 3, sixty small children were ill and one died. A prospective approach to crisis management, as renewal discourse is currently conceptualized, would mean that mourning that child would not be possible. Instead the community should be focused on the future—not on something that was lost in the past, even if that loss was human lives.

As crises are unexpected, they often bring with them varying levels of uncertainty and negative emotions for stakeholders. Kim and Cameron (2011) argue, “emotions are one of the anchors in the publics’ interpretation of crisis situation” (p. 829). Research has been conducted within the field of crisis communication on news framing of crisis events and how they elicit emotions (such as anger and sadness) with the general recognition that human perceptions are influenced by their emotions. There currently exists a gap with the research on emotions/crisis perception and renewal discourse. While focusing on rebuilding is necessary for a community impact, it is important that ethical decision-making and communication is considered within the narrative construction process. I argue crisis management should consider the betterment of society, which includes such considerations as: allowing individuals to heal following a tragedy within a community, as well as using renewal with ethical considerations in mind. Further research should be conducted with these guiding questions: How do power structures inform

what is considered “ethical” crisis management? What are the implications of provisional narratives for those whom need to grieve “devastating moments” in their own way as a part of the true healing process? Should renewal discourse be a crisis communication strategy when the crisis results in human death? In what ways should ethics be woven into the existing principles and rhetorical strategies of discourse of renewal?

Discourse of renewal as it is currently conceptualized is limited in the framework in which it can be operationalized. In summary of this section, I have proposed three ways in which I would like to conduct an exploration process to extend current notions of renewal discourse through my dissertation project, and provide a new crisis management strategy: 1.) By looking at the ways in which brand commitment and consumers seeing an organization as part of their own individual identity can inform the success of renewal as a crisis communication strategy. 2.) Viewing discourse of renewal as a dominant narrative construction allows for much-needed research to be conducted on the complex relationship between media narratives and organizational narratives to be further understood within a crisis context, as well as the relationship between crisis and public memory in a more broad sense. 3.) Implicit and in need of critical analysis, is the ways in which power structures inform ethics, the marginalizing of voices and emotions within crisis situations and how renewal discourse can more articulately account for deep power structures and ethical decision making.

#### *Brand Communities and Brand Fans*

Present within my framing analysis of both Odwalla and Blue Bell (chapters 3 and 4, respectively), is the significant and vital role that loyal consumers played in these respective organization’s ability to effectively move past the crisis. Essentially, Odwalla and Blue Bell had brand communities. Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) define a brand community as, “a specialized,

non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand” (p. 412). A brand community is specialized because the community is bound together by a specific good or service (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Brand communities have also been defined as a, “group of consumers who organize themselves around a lifestyle, shared activities and ethos of a brand” (Freitas & Almeida, 2017, p. 87). Muniz and O’Guinn explain that, communities that used to be geographically bound and often took root in rural places now are no longer geographically restrictive due to globalization.

Community, while it can be imagined and defined in many ways, has been argued to have three markers or commonalities that comprise it. Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) argue that a community is a pivotal construct of social thought. According to Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) the three markers, which solidify that a group is a community are: consciousness of kind, the presence of shared rituals and traditions, and sense of moral responsibility. In this next section, I explore the three commonalities that serve as markers for the existence of a community. Then, I explicate the notion of brand community and distinctions that can be made to set brand communities apart from other communities, groups of people, or subcultures. Lastly, I will analyze Blue Bell as a brand community.

The first core commonality amongst a community is consciousness of kind. Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) explain, “Consciousness of kind is shared consciousness, a way of thinking about things that is more than shared attitudes or perceived similarity” (p. 413). This shared consciousness is created by the, “intrinsic connection that members feel toward one another, and the collective sense of difference from others not in the community” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 413). Important within this marker of community is an awareness of its members that they are a part of a community and identify with the community and its members, which is largely

enacted through a shared appreciation to a specific brand. For example, those who use Apple products, such as myself, often find Apple products to be more “user friendly” or “higher quality” which then lends for identification of Apple consumers to create association with like-minded consumers.

Consciousness of kind through association and identification, also unsurprisingly leads to differentiation from other brands for those within a given brand community. This differentiation is also known as oppositional brand loyalty, and through opposition to other brands, “brand community members derive an important aspect of their community experience, as well as an important component of the meaning of the brand. This serves to delineate what the brand is not, and who the brand community members are not” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 420). Using the previous example of Apple products, larger conversations have been had in recent years over “Mac vs. PC.” Similarly, Muniz & O’Guinn (2001) explain consciousness of kind (through oppositional brand loyalty) is prevalent particularly within the competitive commercial markets, such as Coke vs. Pepsi.

Secondly, communities engage in rituals and traditions. Engagement can be used to distinguish a mere community from the more specific brand community. Freitas & Almeida (2017) acknowledge engagement is a psychological phenomenon, making it harder to observe directly, however, they argue as, “Individual’s engagement increases, so does their identification with the brand community” (p. 100). Engagement with a brand community can be observed through the presence, and enactment of rituals and traditions.

Rituals serve to create public, communal definitions and meaning within a specific community (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Traditions are sets of "social practices, which seek to celebrate and inculcate certain behavioral norms and values" (Marshall 1994, p. 537). Rituals and

traditions, together, serve to establish and maintain a community's shared history and culture (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). For example, in Swenson's (2016) article, which focused on the building of Betty Crocker's brand community, she analyzed the ways in which the organizational persona of Betty Crocker within a WWII context served to remind women of their traditional duties as homemakers, and this "duty" within war-time was to feed the nation, while at the same time bond the brand community of women together. The celebration of women fulfilling their duty was a narrative that Swenson tracked was from wartime to peacetime. Similarly, Swenson's article demonstrated the ways in which Betty Crocker mythic character celebrated traditional "homemaker" values and integrates newly married women to join in the rights and rituals Betty Crocker's brand community held.

Lastly, communities are marked by a sense of moral responsibility. Muniz & O'Guinn (2001) assert that moral responsibility "is a felt sense of duty or obligation to the community as a whole, and to its individual members. This sense of moral responsibility is what produces, in times of threat to the community, collective action" (p. 413). Muniz & O'Guinn's research demonstrates that brand community members show their moral obligation through loyalty and support. For instance, brand community members were found to coerce one another to stay within a brand community, and within the context of Saab, a member who switched vehicles was considered a "turncoat" by those within the Saab brand community (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 425). Thus, when membership is threatened, brand communities are at least partially maintained through the community member's attempts to retain membership themselves.

Moral responsibility within brand communities also includes members helping one another through the use of support with product use. Within the Macintosh brand community, Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) found community supporting included things such as community

members sharing information on: enhancing performance of the product, where products could be bought or services, as well to fix common performance issues associated with the product. This too, speaks to brand community members desire to maintain, and grow, community membership.

Research on brand communities has largely focused on the relationship between community members and the organization, the brand, and the product (Freitas & Almeida, 2017). Brand communities usually form, “around brands with strong images, threatened by competitors, with a rich and long history, involving products or services consumed more publicly than privately” (Freitas & Almeida, 2017, p. 89). Brand communities generally have strong organizational reputations and high levels of brand commitment. Brand commitment is present when consumers become attached to brands and form a close relationship with the product and brand (Germann, 2014). There is also a consumptive element that is usually attached to brand communities. Muniz & O’Guinn (2001) explain, “Things that are publically consumed may stand a better chance of producing (brand) communities than those consumed in private.” (p. 415). Brand communities are unique communities, and with that, important distinctions of what comprises a brand community can be made.

First, brand communities require engagement, not mere participation, from its members. Being a member of a brand community is both intentional and voluntary in nature (Freitas & Almeida, 2017). Freitas & Almeida (2017) explain, “engagement refers to the motivations to interact and cooperate with community members, that is, it assumes that the members are interested in helping others, participate in joint activities, act voluntarily to endorse and enhance its own value and others” (p. 91). The community itself usually forms when there is interest in a

brand, and the brand community comes into fruition when relationships are built amongst like-minded consumers (Freitas & Almeida, 2017).

Second, while brand communities are similar to a subculture, they are not one in the same. Muniz & O'Guinn (2001) explain the distinction between subcultures and brand communities in the following way:

Subcultures use the symbols that the larger culture defines in ways that are inconsistent with the meanings attached to these goods by the majority . . . the meanings that subcultures create stand in opposition or indifference to the accepted meanings of the majority. Brand communities do not typically reject aspects of the surrounding culture's ideology. They embrace them (p. 414).

Thus, while both subcultures have the potential to become a community, a brand community itself is distinct in that it is a community that celebrates a brand, identifies with the brand and forms a community that is consistent with the status quo of society. Brand communities then, are not communities of resistance, whereas subcultures have the potential to go against cultural norms and expectations.

Third, within a brand community there are several characteristics that must be present for a brand community to exist. Unsurprisingly, brand communities contain members that feel high levels of identification to the brand and brand products. In the context of brand community, Freitas & Almeida (2017) define identification as, “the extent to which the consumer sees their own image reflected in the image of the other party, that is, the identification with a brand is when the consumer sees their identity reflected in the brand's identity” (p. 92). By identifying with the brand and the organization itself, brand community members are then able to celebrate the history of the brand together; which I argue is the organizational identity. The history of an

organization that has become a brand community is generally celebrated and can be seen as “superior” in juxtaposition of other organizations that operationally function similarly. Brand communities must also possess all three of the markers that a community possesses: consciousness of kind, rituals and traditions, and sense of moral responsibility.

Consciousness of kind within brand communities is at least partially understood through notions of legitimacy. Muniz & O’Guinn (2001) explain, “Legitimacy is a process whereby members of the community differentiate between true members of the community and those who are not” (p. 419). Brand communities are not closed communities—they are generally open communities. However, while membership might be open to society, Muniz & O’Guinn explain that status hierarchies often exist and devotion is a common topic of conversation amongst legitimate brand community members. Community members really “knowing” a brand rather than simply liking a product usually demonstrate legitimacy—there is an element of devotion. However, an important concern for those within a brand community that is often voiced is, “Differentiating between those who are true believers in the brand, and those who are merely opportunistic” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 419). True believers are community members that are a part of the community for the right reasons, and these members really “know” the brand itself.

Opportunistic community members are viewed as being a part of the brand community for lesser or wrong reasons, which is generally demonstrated through a failure to truly appreciate the brand culture, the organizational history, rites, rituals, traditions and even the symbols of the community (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). In Muniz & O’Guinn’s (2001) research, they provide an example of an opportunistic member within the Saab community, which is the “yuppies” from the 1980’s. Their attraction to the car was because of its trendiness, which was expressed by

others in the brand community as troublesome. To be a part of the Saab brand community, there is a need to appreciate the car, with long-term intentions, not to become a member of the brand community for something as superficial as trendiness.

Consciousness of kind within brand communities is also seen through community member's oppositional brand loyalty. By opposing a competing brand, brand community members are able to derive meaning of their own brand community, which is an important aspect of the brand community experience (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). For instance, viewing Macintosh as a brand community allows for their brand community members to distinguish from other brand products, which then informs the "Apple family" as they are frequently called. Muniz & O'Guinn (2001) assert, "Through opposition to competing brands, brand community members derive an important aspect of their community experience, as well as an important component of the meaning of the brand" (p. 420). This line of thought is consistent with much of the literature done on identification and community building, which suggests that by creating identification and distinction, a greater understanding of what a community or group of people is, and is not, can be created. Interestingly, brand communities are commercialized and consumptive communities, adding a unique element to their shared consciousness. Muniz & O'Guinn (2001) highlight the self-awareness and sensitivity felt by community members in regards to the commercial nature of their community.

The rites and traditions found within communities are most clearly present within brand communities through their celebration of the history of the brand. Appreciation and celebration of the organizational history is often a distinguishing factor in deciding who is a "true believer" and who is an "opportunistic member." Muniz & O'Guinn (2001) explain, "The inculcation of history keeps communities vital and reproduces their culture" (p. 422). The history of the brand

is largely discussed amongst community members in terms of the ways in which the organization has maintained distinction over time (the organization's history). Muniz & O'Guinn assert that the history of a brand community is evident within organizational websites dedicated to celebrating an organizational history that the company is proud of. The organizational framing of their histories and the carefully selected elements of the past, which inform the present organizational culture and brand community, then, at least in part inform brand communities.

For instance, the Saab brand community is touted as being able to successfully deploy an organizational history that informs the current brand community, as Muniz & O'Guinn (2001) acknowledge:

The history of the brand centers on the distinctiveness of the brand over time, its legacy of technological innovation, and important events and personages . . . members are very aware of the fact that the company also manufactures airplanes and fighter jets. They are quick to point out that this association with airplanes has informed the design of the car" (p. 422).

This acknowledgement points to both the "buy in" and pride, which the Saab brand community have for the organizational history of Saab. Which then, in turn, informs their community beliefs about Saab's superiority over other motor vehicle manufacturers.

Rites and traditions are also activation through sharing brand stories. Story telling is a key aspect in all communities. Muniz & O'Guinn (2001) explain, "Sharing brand stories is an important process as it reinforces consciousness of kind between brand members and contributes to imagined community. It also points to and assists in learning communal values" (p. 423). However, Muniz & O'Guinn (2001) argue that brand communities are distinct from more traditional communities in that community members have larger levels of agency in the creation

and future of the community, which they argue is apparent in the, “active role brand community members have in the social construction of brand meaning, and thus the brand” (p. 424). This active role allows for brand community members to negotiate, reinterpret and even reject narratives or events that occur surrounding their brand or the organization itself—making it distinct from other communities in which members have a lesser degree of agency. Within crisis communication, this aspect of brand community members is interesting in that, for brand communities in crisis, the members of the community have a greater potential to aid in crisis management because of their co-created understanding of the brand and company itself.

The third marker of a community, moral responsibility, is, “what produces collective action and contributes to group cohesion” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 424). Responsibility is largely found through integrating and retaining members, as well as assisting in brand consumption. Particularly, the retaining of members is demonstrated within brand communities through group member’s public declarations of reasons to stay in the brand community. Personal stories about the brand, and even caution (or cautionary tales) against leaving the brand community, which, “Taken collectively, these examples demonstrate a community-based process of perpetuating loyalty to the community and the brand” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 425).

Moral responsibility also manifests itself within brand communities through members assisting fellow community members in their consumption of the brand. Muniz & O’Guinn explain the most common way of assisting in brand consumption comes from members helping one another fix or repair a product that has problems and is not working properly, which is particularly prevalent in brand communities that have products which require specialized knowledge (i.e. technology products, equipment, etc.). The moral responsibility to help others consumptive practices is described as actions community members “do ‘without thinking,’

simply acting out of a sense of responsibility that they felt toward other members of the community” and furthermore members, “feel compelled to help, particularly when they themselves "had been there before” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 425). Within the Macintosh brand community, for instance, Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) demonstrated that more than one community member within the community reported helping other users retrieve information off of a broken disc hard drive and that brand community members described their reasoning for aiding others within the community because it is “just something that we do” (p. 425). With this, moral responsibility through helping other brand members consume or use products is, at least in part, instinctual.

In summation, brand communities reflect all three markers of a community but are more specific and with a particularized group of membership that is unique from other types of communities. Group members are more aware of their unique commitment to an organizational product and brand. While membership is fairly open, brand community members spend time and have conversations about who is a “true believer” and who is an “opportunistic member,” which are things that matter greatly to those which fall in the true believers category. Brand communities are not the same as subcultures, as they generally tend to follow and even celebrate societal norms (not focus on acts of resistances and re-appropriating societal symbols). There is a larger emphasis on consumption of products. And brand community research thus far suggests that members of a brand community have larger levels of agency (and thus power) in the creation and maintenance of an organizations reputation and identity, because brand communities are places that possess high levels of social construction.

## CHAPTER II

### METHODOLOGY

When studying organizational crisis it is important to be aware of the media coverage surrounding it and how the crisis narrative is being framed (what elements are being highlighted and perhaps what elements are excluded). For this dissertation, project I will use framing as my methodological approach. Due to my dissertation seeking to address questions surrounding dominant narrative creation, both by journalists and organizational rhetors, this approach seems to be a logical methodological choice. Furthermore, due to my interest in exploring the ways that renewal discourse can become more applicable and thus broadened as a crisis communication strategy, my analysis requires a method that is flexible in nature—flexibility is both a strength of framing studies, as well as a weakness. Within my methodology chapter I will begin by exploring previous research done on media and health information. Second, I will define framing and what framing studies seek to explore. Next, I will define what a frame is. I will then provide information on my unit of analysis and my methodological process itself. Lastly, I will provide the research questions that guide my dissertation project.

#### MEDIA AND HEALTH INFORMATION

In a study conducted by Globe Scan in Canada, 10 industrialized countries were surveyed and 85% of the respondents stated they were worried about bacterial contamination of their food (Gauthier, 2010). Unsurprisingly, outbreaks associated with foodborne illness generally garner significant attention within print media (Gauthier, 2010). The media is an important platform used to communicate health information to the general public (Basynyat & Lee, 2014; Chang, 2012). Furthermore, scholars have found that mass media is a main source of public health

information (Carducci et al, 2011). Chang (2012) states, “Mass media provide the main source of health information, in that approximately 80% of the public rely on general media (television, magazines, newspapers) for information about health topics—greater than the percentage who rely on physicians” (p. 111). With mass media being the largest disseminator of health related information, it is important to further explore ways in which media coverage of foodborne illness has the potential to fuel or suppress the organizational crisis itself.

Wendorf and Yang (2017) argue, “Media holds a prominent role in defining and framing health issues for the public” (p. 190). There is a distinctly urgent need to communicate speedily within crisis communication, particularly crises surrounding foodborne illness, and “In a race against time, media frames play a critical role in shaping the public’s understanding of a highly contagious viral disease and attitudinal and behavioral reactions that impact prevention, containment, treatment, and recovery” (Lee & Basynet, p. 120). Thus, the ability of the media to effectively deliver health related information to the public is vital (“Covering Avian Flu”). The media is often the stage on which health issue discourses occur (Wendorf & Yang, 2017; Jones & Harwood, 2009). Furthermore, the way health is framed in the media “shapes our understanding of health issues, the salience of health issues, and perceptions of the cause and solution of health issues” (Basynet & Lee, 2014, p. 943-944). Therefore, when understanding the relationship between crisis communication and health-related issues such as foodborne illness, it is beneficial to look at the media framing of the crisis. Lee and Basynet (2014) argue, “The relationship between journalism, public relations, and health communication can be examined through framing” (p. 120). According to McCombs (2004), framing explains, “a significant part of what public relations is about” (p. 45).

## FRAMING STUDIES

Framing, according to Reese (2010) focuses on the “interaction between the incoming message structure and the psychological characteristics of the receiver” (p. 22). Entman (1993) states framing can conceptually serve to describe the power that a text can have on the flow of communication. While a consensus on a singular definition of framing has not been reached, scholars have instead explained the ways in which framing studies can be used to examine, “the selection and salience of certain aspects of an issue by exploring images, stereotypes, metaphors, actors, and messages” (Matthes, 2009, p. 349). Framing can be seen as unavoidable, strategic, used to inform/shape public opinion (when the narrative becomes salient in the public sphere), and ultimately, framing studies can be approached from various research perspectives.

Mathew Nisbet (2011) asserts, “Framing is an unavoidable reality of the public communication process. The choice as a journalist, expert, or advocate is not whether to employ framing, but rather how to effectively frame a message for your audience” (p. 44). Framers that highlight specific ways of viewing an issue within crisis context might include: organizational actors, professional experts, as well as journalist. From a crisis management standpoint, organizations want to be the one’s who gets to “frame” a crisis event, but often times it is at least partially the media who frames events such as these (Powell, 2011). This dissertation project particularly seeks to understand the ways in which journalist frame crisis events and if the frames align or are in contrast with organizational messages that use discourse of renewal. Schudson (2011) explains journalists serve as framers, “through the process of selecting, highlighting, framing, shading, and shaping what they report, they create an impression that real people—readers and viewers—take to be real to which they respond in their lives” (xiv). Schudson (2011) asserts that journalist “not only report reality but also create it” (p. xiv). Thus, news framers

unavoidably have the ability to inform perceptions of reality within society through strategic choices.

Framers that can be seen as possessing strategic intent are, “persons who are interested in influencing how their messages are received will . . . think ahead to the potential impact of their words” (Kuypers, 2010, p. 288). Crisis communication itself is inherently strategic, but largely under-developed is a better understanding of the ways journalist themselves deploy or disregard crisis communication strategies such as discourse of renewal. This is significant because the “publics’ perception of a given crisis will be influenced by how the media describe it” (Kim & Cameron, 2011, p. 827). Furthermore, effective crisis management is largely informed by “how publics perceive a crisis” (Kim and Cameron, 2011, p. 827). Thus, journalists often serve as the purveyors of public opinion through strategic narratives.

Many scholars argue that news framing can inform and organize public opinion (Reese, 2010, p. 19). Robert Entman (1993) asserts that “nowhere is there a general statement of framing theory that shows exactly how frames become embedded within and make themselves manifest in text, or how framing influences thinking” (p. 51). While the impact that news can have on public opinion is still largely unknown, what is known is that media coverage does in some way inform decision-making and opinion formation, as previously suggested. Kim and Cameron (2011) explored the ways in which the framing of crisis events within the news can induce emotions such as anger and sadness by the “repeated pairing of certain emotions with particular ideas” which then or “shapes the way in which one interprets and responds to those events” (p. 227).

According to Entman (1993), framing involves selection and salience—“to frame is to select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in

such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (p. 52). Furthermore, Powell (2011) explains, “Past studies have shown that media coverage affects how the public learns, understands or thinks about an issue” (p. 93). Public opinion on organization crisis events, unsurprisingly, is at least partially formed by journalistic framing of the event itself. Thus, framing studies as a methodology can seek to address issues surrounding crisis moments faced by an organization and how that crisis is perceived and negotiated within the public through media coverage.

Saliency and perception are important issues for both journalists and crisis managers alike. Media coverage informs public perception and thus the effectiveness of crisis management can be impacted significantly by media coverage, but this is still largely a new area of research, with no substantial findings as of yet. With the above considerations in mind, it is essential for crisis management research to be aware of media framing in crisis events to better understand how to respond to and frame crisis narratives accordingly. Discourse of renewal might prove to be a highly specific crisis-framing tool for practitioners, but my early prediction is that journalists will not frame crisis using the same basic tenets or rhetorical principles provided within renewal literature. Coupled with saliency of messages within framing studies, is the importance in understanding how framing studies themselves differ and vary depending on the approach taken by the methodologist.

To effectively conduct a framing study, consideration should be given to understanding the “how” and the “what” approaches to news framing analysis. The “what” perspective of framing analysis seeks to better understand the frame itself and its contents by close analysis of the language devices deployed within the frame such as: cultural metaphors, icons or

“catchphrases” which all essentially lead to a frame being deployed and inform the frame saliency within the public (Reese, 2010). The “what” perspective also “leads the research to examine latent aspects of the texts, such as reasoning devices (e.g., problem identification and moral evaluation) (p. 20). In contrast, the “how” approach to framing analysis seeks to position frames as, “strategic resources, constructed and wielded by an individual or group (including journalists) . . . frames are situated in a competitive social and political environments; frames are constructed and promoted to achieve some predetermined outcome” (p. 20).

Thus, while the “what” perspective can be seen as an approach that is frame-centric seeking to examine issues of language devices deployed, problem identification and moral evaluation, the “how” perspective allows for the acknowledgement that the framing process is strategic, and that frames are: political, competitive, carefully constructed and meant to achieve a specific desired outcome. The later approach to framing is particularly relevant when studying crisis events and crisis narratives within organizational contexts. This dissertation project seeks to see the ways in which both media and organizational crisis managers frame a crisis—looking for similarities and distinctions between the two framing entities.

## FRAMES

Frames can be defined, according to Hertog and McLeod (2001), as “structures of meaning made up of a number of concepts and the relations among concepts (p. 140). Frames can also be understood as “principles of organization” (Goffman, 1974, p. 10) and as principles used in “selection, emphasis and presentation” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 6). Frames then, can help audiences articulate a way of reasoning through a public issue (Reese, 2010). Kuypers (2010) posits frames “can be detected by looking for specific properties within news narratives: key words, metaphors, concepts, symbols, visual images, and names given to persons, ideas, and actions” (p. 301).

Frames can be used to elicit a particular way of thinking about an issue, cast judgment (or praise) on an issue, as well as emphasize or silence facts and people surrounding a phenomena. Thus, frames can be seen as political in nature.

There are also two types of frames: generic and issue-specific. Matthes (2009) defines generic frames as being transcending in nature, meaning that the same frame might be identified across multiple issues. Examples of frames that are generic include: conflict, human interest, economic consequences, morality, and responsibility (Matthes, 2009). An issue-specific frame are, “those which are pertinent to only specific contexts and issues, and they often vary according to researchers’ definitions and interpretations of their contexts” (Hong, 2013, p. 90). In the field of communication and media studies, issue-specific frames are more commonly present within scholarly work. Matthes (2009) conducted a content analysis of media framing studies within communication journals from 1990-2005 and found 561 issue specific frames, whereas a mere 29 generic frames were reported. Thus, the prevalence of issue-specific frames far outweighs the presence of generic frames.

For this study, I am interested to see what generic frames might exist which can then be used within other crisis context. A challenge that generic frames bring with it is the intrigue and “flashy” nature that it’s counter-part (issue-specific frames) possesses is missing. However, when issue-specific frames are recognized/developed, it’s important to ask questions such as: “Does the examination of the issue-specific frames help in methodological development of frame analysis? How does the unique set of frames associate with already developed generic frames in the literature” (Borah, 2011, p. 256)? Asking questions such as these can then lend the framing analysis to have more relativity outside of the very specific/particularized context which they are

analyzing frames, which is particularly important for my dissertation which seeks to better understand media framing of crisis contexts more broadly.

Frames are also cultural constructs and contextual in nature. Reese (2010) explains the contextual nature of frames as complex in that frames are “embedded in a web of culture, an image that naturally draws attention to the surrounding cultural context and the threads that connect them” (p. 18.) If framing can offer an audience a particular way of sense-making, then analyzing framing and frames produced by the a news outlet can give better insight into an organization’s crisis management team and ultimately inform the way in which the crisis itself is remembered within the society in which it occurred. Ultimately, a frame is a construction of a story, meant to help organize and orient an audience on the issues involved within a particular event or development.

#### FRAMING OF CRISIS, HEALTH ISSUES, AND PRODUCT RECALLS

Muhamad and Yang (2017) argue that the media serves as a “stage” for discourses surrounding important health-related issues. The media plays a large role in not only defining a health issue to the public, but also framing that issue as well (Muhamad & Yang, 2017; Kim et. al, 2010). Cases of foodborne illness are usually well covered within print media (Gauthier, 2011). Not only does health-related news account for a substantial portion of media coverage, but how health itself is framed in the media has been shown to shape the publics view on “health issues, the salience of health issues, and perceptions of the cause and solution of health issues” (Basynati & Lee, 2014, p. 942). Hong (2013) argues, “Recall is good material for news producers because of its mixture of high negativity and social importance, which journalists cannot ignore” (p. 88). Thus, from a crisis management perspective, the media’s role in framing

health-related issues such as food recalls is significant for better understanding of product harm crises.

Within the research that has been conducted surrounding media representations of health-related risks, “mass media are seen as playing a role in determining how people understand and react to particular threats” (Boyd, Jardine & Driedger, 2009, p. 1096). Carducci et al (2011) conducted a quantitative and qualitative study aimed at better understanding how mass media messages on health information can impact public perceptions and behaviors. While various health-related information was analyzed, the study found “people’s awareness of the food risk factors reported in the media storms appeared to be greater than that regarding many other issues” and that mass media messages had led to changes in food habits of consumers as a result of media information (Carducci et al, 2011, p. 477). Several framing studies have looked at foodborne illness outbreaks while seeking to understand if the information within the message itself was understood, focusing on the “what” of the story, and grappling with issues of attribution. For instance, when dealing with health-related problems such as diabetes or obesity, how much responsibility does the media attribute to genetics vs. individual responsibility? Cacciatore, Scheufele, & Iyengar (2016) acknowledge framing can function as “a means of understanding how people construct meaning and make sense of the everyday world” (Cacciatore, Scheufele, & Iyengar, 2016, p. 10; see also; Ferree et al., 2002). Thus, while various health-related studies have looked at the message-content itself, this dissertation project seeks to more clearly explicate the ways in which journalist report and construct the meaning of an organizational crisis to better inform the practical use of discourse of renewal within crisis contexts.

Within health communication, there have been several ways of framing health-related narratives. For health-related issues such as obesity, Chang (2012) argues that the issue itself is framed predominately as an individual problem, with high levels of responsibility placed on the individual. Health-related issues can also contain a societal problem frame, which highlights societal factors that attribute or account for the problem (Kim & Willis, 2007). Gauthier (2011) posits, “Few studies have examined the representation of foodborne pathogens in the media discourse from a qualitative standpoint” (p. 270). In Gauthier’s analysis of the framing of listeriosis in Canadian newspapers, she identified several frames. Particularly of interest within my analysis, is the war against microbes frame and collateral damage posited by Gauthier. The war against microbes frame was depicted as a way in which the elimination of listeria carried with it, “a connotation of aggressiveness and military rigor. Numerous war metaphors are used in this frame: contaminated products are *targeted*, grocery stores are *ordered* to discard them, the cleaning done at the MLF plant is referred to as a *seek and destroy* operation” (p. 277). Collateral damage frame depicts, “The outbreaks as they are experienced by the companies concerned. Quantitative and qualitative emphasis is therefore placed on these actors as ‘collateral victims’ of the outbreaks rather than on the consumers who have contracted listeriosis” (p. 279). This second frame is important, because it highlights the ways in which framing of health-related issues can focus on economical aspects of public health. Within my dissertation, it is possible not only that frames such as these might be present within the news coverage, but also that new frames might be discovered which can help further current understanding of food-borne illness outbreaks and news framing.

The guiding research questions for this project are: Do the framed deployed by media align with the corporate frames in crisis cases that utilize the discourse of renewal? Does brand

commitment seem to facilitate the discourse of renewal? Can a renewal narrative dominate media coverage when there is actual evidence to document organizational negligence helped to create the crisis? And ultimately, how can power and brand communities help to create a more complete and nuanced approach to organizational re-birth?

## METHOD AND DATA

### *Unit of analysis*

Framing methods differ greatly across the field. Because of the flexibility surrounding framing studies, primary concerns are: validity and the ability to be replicated. With this, it is essential for a framing process to be explicitly planned out and executed so that that the process can be repeatable and consistent in nature. For any framing analysis endeavor, a researcher must make coding decisions, and Reese (2010) these decisions should be “well-informed choices about the best point of entry to answer the question at hand. Many of these decisions are implicit or taken for granted” (p. 20). In this section I will begin by explaining what will “count” as a frame within my analysis, provide a roadmap of my method process, describe my data collection process, and lastly provide my codebooks, which I used to code the news stories.

A frame is a schema, or particular way of viewing a societal issue. Within According to Price et al. (1997), a frame can be viewed as “one in which salient attributes of a message (its organization, selection of content, or thematic structure) render particular thoughts applicable, resulting in their activation and use in evaluations” (p. 486). Within any news story, the media presents the events and issues through the deployment of multiple frames. Cacciatore, Scheufele, & Iyengar (2016) argue, “the frames used in news stories provide the context that shapes subsequent understanding of the news” (p. 16). For a project that seeks to better understand how media informs the use of certain crisis management tools (such as discourse of renewal) it is

essential to code news stories for multiple frames within the a story, which then inform how society contextualizes and understands a crisis event. Thus, for this project my unit of analysis will be individual frames, but I will code each unit (news story) for different frames that are present within the story. A frame, based on the above definitions, will be considered that which is: salient (consistently shows up in the news coverage), provides a particular way of viewing the issues/actors within the crisis through one clear focal point, and be comprised of distinct properties (key words, metaphors, concepts) that are exclusive to that frame.

Matthes (2009) argues that important to any framing study, is not only clear definitions of frames themselves, but also how the framing process itself is operationalized and is of prominent significance. Matthes argues, the method itself “describes *how* researchers extract these frames from the material. These "how" of frame extraction is important to the establishment of reliability” (p. 353). While quantitative methods can be used within framing studies, Reese (2010) posits that a qualitative approach “tends to give greater emphasis to the cultural and political content of news frames and how they draw upon a shared store of social meanings” (p. 18).

For this framing study, a qualitative text-based framing study was conducted on media coverage surrounding both Odwalla and Blue Bell’s product recalls. Thomas Lindlof (1995), argues, “fundamentally, qualitative researchers seek to preserve the form of content of human behavior and to analyze its qualities, rather than subject it to mathematical or other formal transformations” (p. 21). Furthermore, Lindlof (1995) argues qualitative inquiry seeks to answer questions such as: “What kinds of things are going on here? What are the forms of this phenomenon? What variations do we find in this phenomenon?” (p. 24). Thus, a qualitative approach was selected because of its ability as a methodological approach to best answer the

questions this study seeks to explore surrounding renewal discourse and media representations of crises.

For this study, a text-based framing study was conducted on media coverage surrounding both Odwalla and Blue Bell's product recalls. I sought to ascertain whether the various tenants of discourse of renewal were found in the media coverage of these two organizational crises and to what extent. Thus, for the research question related to the dominance of DoR tenants present within media coverage, dominance is demonstrated through the frequency of the frame within stories coded. I coded for individual frames present within news stories. I chose to use the scholarly database LexisNexis to retrieve news articles because of its ability to capture relevant news coverage for an event that happened during a time period in which the Internet was not yet widely used, which was the case for my Odwalla analysis in particular. The data sets included both US elite newspaper coverage, as well as regional newspaper coverage.

Also given consideration within my data collection process, was the relationship between media coverage and organizational crisis, particularly through the notion of a focusing event. A crisis becomes a focusing event when, "they are high on the media's agenda and the discussion moves from reporting on the cause and impact of the crisis to the reconsideration of existing policies or the consideration of new policies for preventing similar crisis in the future" (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, p. 24, 2015). Wood (2006) posits that focusing events, like crises themselves, have four attributes: they are sudden, rare, garner large-scale attention and lastly, both the public policy makers prioritize them. Thus, if a crisis falls out of news coverage, the focusing event is considered to be over.

Within the Odwalla case study, by using newspaper coverage as my data, I was able to identify two focusing events. For the Blue Bell case study, one focusing event was found and

analyzed. In the following sections I explain the data retrieval process of the two case studies explored within my dissertation, Odwalla's E. Coli outbreak and Blue Bell's listeria contamination, as they varied slightly in from one another.

### *Odwalla*

Within the case study of Odwalla's E. Coli-contaminated juice, the central aim is exploring the ways that media coverage framed Odwalla's E. Coli crisis through two distinct focusing events. Since my interest lies with analyzing coverage of Odwalla during their E. Coli crisis specifically, search terms "Odwalla" and "E. Coli" were used to identify articles. News stories were selected from the US elite newspapers, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, as well as regional news stories printed in British Columbia and California. Within my initial perusal of news articles, articles that were titled as "World in a Brief" that had less than 20 words written about the organization in reference (Odwalla) were excluded within the data retrieval. The regional news stories were selected based on areas impacted by the product recall. Canadian newspaper articles and California (Bay Area) articles were also including within the data collection. Colorado and Washington were also regions impacted by the product recall, but no newspaper covered could be retrieved from LexisNexis during the time frame selected for this framing study.

The first focusing event for Odwalla was October 1996-December 1996. During this three-month time frame, news coverage of Odwalla's E. Coli outbreak spanned from initial news of their voluntary juice recall due to contamination, the consumer/industry reactions and continues until the focusing event can be considered over (there is over a five month gap between news coverage of Odwalla within the pre-selected newspaper sources). Thus, the first time frame/focusing event captures the entire news cycle of the original crisis itself. With these

considerations in place: the *Washington Post* ran 4 articles and the *New York Times* ran 5 articles. For the regional news stories, 3 Canadian newspaper articles and 4 California (Bay Area) articles were also including within the data collection of this first focusing event. Ultimately, 16 articles were collected from the aforementioned time frame.

The second focusing event for Odwalla was also 3 months in length, which occurred during the summer of 1998 (May-August). Odwalla returned to the news in 1998 when they were formally charge (and later convicted of) distributing adulterated juice. For this second data set, the last article included signaled the ending of Odwalla's second crisis focusing event because another article using the chosen search terms does not appear again until 5 months later, highlighting that the case was no longer garnering large-scale attention. From the leading national newspapers, the *Washington Post* ran 6 articles and the *New York Times* ran 4 articles. For selected regional newspaper coverage, 4 Canadian newspaper articles ran during this time and 6 California (Bay Area) articles were also including within the data collection. No newspaper coverage of Colorado and Washington was obtained from LexisNexis for the second time frame selected. Ultimately 20 articles were collected from the aforementioned time frame. For the Odwalla framing study, 36 articles in total, from two separate focusing events, served as the data for coding.

### *Bluebell*

Newspaper coverage was included within this framing study. The newspaper coverage that was coded was drawn from both leading national newspapers and select regional newspapers. Through the use of the LexisNexis database, search terms "BlueBell" and "Listeria" were used to identify articles. Articles that were titled as "World in a Brief" with less than 20 words written about the organization in reference were not included within the data collected for

analysis. For Blue Bells' data set the time frame chosen ranged from February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015 (one month prior to product recall) to September 30<sup>th</sup> 2015 (one month after recalled Blue Bell ice cream products were back on shelves). From the leading national newspapers, the *Washington Post* ran 1 article and the *New York Times* ran 5 articles. The regions impacted by this product recall were: Texas, Oklahoma, Arizona and Kansas. No newspaper coverage from Arizona was retrievable from LexisNexis meaning only, Texas, Kansas and Oklahoma articles were represented. Thus, 32 articles from Texas, 1 article from Kansas and 4 articles from Oklahoma were collected during the aforementioned selected time frame. For the Bluebell framing study, 43 articles in total, served as the data for coding.

#### *Data retrieval and coding processes*

Framing is inherently processual in nature. My framing approach is systematic. Kuypers (2010) asserts it is important to realize themes do not always reflect that a frame presents (frames must be enduring in nature). Thus, I began my framing process with an analysis of a sampling of articles surrounding the specific crisis and found overarching themes to the crisis coverage. A theme can be thought of as a trend, or a reoccurring story line, but may not become a frame if it is infrequently used, or does not clearly highlight a story in a particular/strategic way. In order to discern what potential frames might exist, each article was read through two times. These themes were then used within my coding process to see if they were in fact salient frames, or if they are short-lived thematic elements to the crisis narrative. After my thematic analysis, I created a coding sheet using the themes I found and testing them for frame validity, including summaries of the potential frames I initially found with specific examples from the texts, which comprised my codebook.

I conducted separate framing analysis for both crises that my dissertation seeks to analyze, and with this, two separate codebooks were created to test the potential frames for validity in both case studies being analyzed. For this analyses, as one of the objectives was to better understand “how” narratives were being created and in what context and not merely “what” was being said, I chose to manually code the data.

For Odwalla, the frames I found and appeared within my codebook were: 1.) E. Coli as “Culprit”, 2.) Call for Regulation, 3.) Instructing Information 4.) Change as Detrimental 5.) Odwalla as Socially Responsible. These five frames where then used to test for frequency using the coding process explained below. A sixth frame, “other” was also present within the codebook, which can be described as an unanticipated frame with low frequency. Below is my frame summary sheet used within my coding process:

Table 1: Odwalla Frames

<p><b>E. Coli as “Culprit”:</b> This includes mentions of E. Coli being described as worrisome, a threat, a concern, responsible for death/illness, elusive, etc. Also includes mentions of E. Coli as not easily recognized by doctors, being found in new foods not previous known (such as raw produce, lettuce, etc.).</p>
<p><b>Call for regulation:</b> Narratives that focus on the “gaps” in food safety programs and processes. Including opinions that food safety inspection might be operating under processes which no longer work, the need for an “all out assault” on food-related health risks at a governmental level, monitoring processing of raw food being inadequate, fresh juice procedures as being unable to combat food borne illness such as E. Coli, etc. Narratives within this frame also include the “transcending” nature of the issue as bigger than an Odwalla problem, which include mentions of E. Coli, as a reoccurring issue and general need for regulation within raw food industries.</p>

Table 1: Continued

<p><b><u>Instructing Information:</u></b> This includes numbers of victims to fall ill to the Odwalla E. coli (not to include numbers of those to fall ill to Jack-in-the Box case, or similarly referenced past cases), health-risks related to e. Coli (signs/symptoms), the descriptions of Odwalla cases: places impacted, names and ages of children, updates on the victims health, etc. or mentions of DNA “fingerprints” as unique within the specific E. Coli outbreak.</p>
<p><b><u>Change as detrimental:</u></b> Narratives that look at regulatory changes as detrimental (such as new FDA labeling requirements), mentions of juice producers and health-conscious as resisting pasteurization because of factors such as: it takes away the natural flavor of the juice, takes away certain nutrients, etc.</p>
<p><b><u>Odwalla as socially responsible:</u></b> Odwalla described as “self-regulated” or as an “industry leader.” Any reference/mentions to Odwalla’s “responsible” acts: CEO offers to pay medical bills of those impacted, voluntary recall on thousands of bottles of their juice products, call for their competitors to be cautious and halt using raw apples, or Odwalla’s corporate values/foundations seen as sincere by consumers or families impacted by the E. Coli outbreak.</p>
<p><b><u>Other:</u></b> Unanticipated frames with low frequencies. (Document them on the code sheet like any other frame, noting their significance in the “Notes” column.)</p>

For Blue Bell, the frames I found and appeared within my codebook were: 1.) Consumers as “fans” 2.) Instructing Information 3.) Regulatory & Strident Measures 4.) The Heroic Rise and Fall 5.) The “Long Road” Ahead. These five frames where then used to test for frequency using the coding process explained below. A sixth frame, “other” was also present within the codebook, which can be described as an unanticipated frame with low frequency. Below is my frame summary sheet used within my coding process:

Table 2: Blue Bell Frames

<p><b><u>Consumers as “Fans”:</u></b> Any mentions of Blue Bell consumers being fans, Blue Bell being a part of Texas identity, or Blue Bell having a strong/loyal fan base. Any mentions of Blue Bell consumers ready for Blue Bell to be back on the shelves, and quotes of consumers unhesitatingly planning to buy Blue Bell when it returns. Any mentions of Blue Bell’s success being closely tied to Brenham’s viability. Any mentions of Sid Bass’ donation to Blue Bell to get it up and running again.</p>
<p><b><u>Instructing information:</u></b> Numbers of victims to fall ill to the Blue Bell listeria (not to include info on referenced past cases). Any mentions of listeria cases being confirmed to connection of Blue Bell. Health-risks related to Listeria (signs/symptoms), Instructing information on: products being recalled, items impacted that need to be discarded, organizations who have thrown Blue Bell products away, etc. The descriptions of ill cases: places impacted, names and ages of victims, updates on the victims health, etc. Explanations of technology advancements, scientific ways of finding specific listeria strains, etc.</p>
<p><b><u>Regulatory &amp; Strident Measures:</u></b> Any mentions of process/regulatory changes such as: changes in cleaning procedures, assembly lines being shut down, need for carefulness or diligence, mentions of industry standards needing to be reviewed/reformed, retraining employees, etc. Any mentions of focus on consumer safety/taking care of consumers, taking employees off furlough.</p>
<p><b><u>The Heroic Rise and Fall:</u></b> Any mentions of Blue Bell as being a: industry leader, never having issues prior to Listeria outbreak, being a “small town” creamery and beloved. Any mentions of Blue Bell statements that discuss not wanting to lose consumer trust. Any mentions of Blue Bell’s “fall”, which include: Blue Bell not meeting expectations, acting irresponsible, FDA findings that suggest inadequate process evaluations, etc.</p>

Table 2: Continued

<p><b>The “Long Road” Ahead:</b> Any expert opinion on Blue bell having to bridge the current expectation gap with consumers. Any mentions of Blue Bell’s “road back” or return as a viable organization, when ice cream will be back, future oriented. Blue Bell apologizing for actions and not meeting consumer’s expectations.</p>
<p><b>Other:</b> Unanticipated frames with low frequencies. (Document them on the code sheet like any other frame, noting their significance in the “Notes” column.)</p>

For each story in my data set, I coded for frame frequency, multiple frames within a single story, word count per story and story source. Things not coded include: visuals/graphics as visuals and words cannot be coded using the same process/codebook, articles that briefly mentioned the crisis and/or organization I am analyzing but were largely about something unrelated. When coding stories, I first read the entire article once before coding. I used a test—retest exercise when I took a break from coding articles, which means I coded the last article I finished coding before taking the break and my test-retest results were x percent consistent. To account for the fact that the coding was being done by a single coder, an intra-rater reliability measurement was put into place to evaluate the consistency of coding. Intra-rater reliability “evaluates the differences when the same abstractor recodes the same set of variables” (Vassar & Holzmann, 2013, p. 1). I organized the stories chronologically and re-coded every fifth article in sequence with an intra-rater reliability result of 87 percent.

## CHAPTER III

### ODWALLA CRISIS: E. COLI OUTBREAK

On October 30, 1996, Odwalla, the country's largest producer of fresh-squeezed juice, issued a recall for all of their juice products that contained apples as an ingredient (Carey, 1997). Odwalla had created a niche in the juice market with unpasteurized juices. This recall occurred after health officials in Washington linked a bacterial outbreak of E. Coli to Odwalla's drinks. Jack-in-the-Box, a fast-food restaurant, had a similar outbreak of E. Coli in the state of Washington in 1993, caused by under-cooked hamburger meat, which was a reference point used within much of Odwalla's E. Coli newspaper coverage. On November 2<sup>nd</sup> health officials, confirmed that "genetic 'fingerprints' of the bacteria afflicting patients who drank Odwalla were alike, suggesting the same thing made them all ill" and epidemiologist Dr. John Kobayashi further explained, "the pattern . . . differs substantially from those of other E. coli 0157:H7 cases from recent past. You can see a clear start in the current epidemic" (Woolfolk, 1996, par. 3-4). It was also on November 2<sup>nd</sup> 1996 that Odwalla announced that it would pay medical expenses of consumers made ill by their products (Woolfolk, 1996).

In the following weeks, reports of those whom had drunk contaminated juice from Odwalla grew to be upwards of 70 people within the Western U.S. states and Canada. Sixteen-month-old Anna Gimmestad became the first and sole fatality linked to Odwalla's unpasteurized juice, when she died in a Denver hospital on November 8<sup>th</sup>, 1996 (Carey, 1997). Following the death of Anna Gimmestad, health officials confirmed that the same strain of bacteria found in Odwalla juice was present in Gimmestad's system and responsible for her death (Carey, 1997). Several weeks after issuing their recall, Odwalla called on their competitors to also halt the

production of unpasteurized apple juices because of the health related risks associated with unpasteurized juice. On December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1996, Odwalla announced they would resume making apple juice but that they would begin using a “flash pasteurization” method (Carey, 1997). Regular pasteurization processes heat the juice for longer amounts of time, but Odwalla chose flash pasteurization because they hoped to be able to maintain the natural juice flavor, while also ensuring that the juice was not a viable place for bacteria such as E. Coli to live.

In July of 1997, Odwalla appeared to be in front of the situation yet again when they announced to the public that they were being investigated by a grand jury for the E. Coli bacteria found in Odwalla juices the previous year (Carey, 1997). By the end of August 1997, the FDA called for regulatory changes that include juice makers placing warning labels on their unpasteurized juices. According to the FDA, the label needed to serve as a warning to consumers that unpasteurized juice could contain a bacterium, which was particularly dangerous to children, the elderly and those with weakened immune systems (Carey, 1997). The day following the FDA’s announcement, August 27<sup>th</sup>, 1997, Odwalla announced that it had implemented more strident safety measures which aligned with the FDA’s proposed safety regulations for the entire fresh juice industry, and furthermore, that they would be pasteurizing their smoothie and nutritional products going forward (Carey, 1997).

In May 1998 Odwalla reached a settlement with 5 families whose children had been victims of the 1996 food-poisoning outbreak, paying between 12-15 million dollars (Carey, 1998). Chris Gallagher, an Odwalla official, stated, “We’re very pleased to be able to fully compensate these children and to move forward with the families and with the lawyers to address bigger issues of food-safety awareness” (Carey, 1998, par. 4). In July of 1998, Odwalla pleaded guilty to 16 misdemeanor charges for the selling of adulterated food products, which also came

with a five-year probation for the organization (Smith, 1998). The sentencing also included a \$1.5 million dollar fine for the corporation, which was the largest criminal fine in a food-related case in FDA history, as well as the first of its kind in criminal convictions of a corporation (Thomsen & Rawson, 1998).

The product-harm crisis that Odwalla faced in 1996 came at a time when U.S. consumers were becoming more health-conscious, as well as a time in which E. Coli bacteria was still largely unknown within the science community and food industry alike. These two factors stimulated larger conversations of regulation and the pasteurization processes. In 1996, apples and other fresh fruit/vegetable products were not known to be a hospitable living environment for E. Coli. Paul Cieslak, a communicable disease expert, explained “We don’t want to hyper-regulate everything, but we don’t know where the E. coli risk in juice is 1 in 1,000 or 1 in 1 million” (“Questions of Pasteurization,” 1996, par. 13). Thus, Odwalla’s crisis management, which will be discussed later in this chapter, was particularized to the very specific time in which the crisis itself happened.

In the next section of this chapter, I will explore the current literature and case studies that have been written about Odwalla’s use of “effective” crisis management. Scholars have argued Odwalla crisis response a “golden” case study of the successful use of discourse of renewal as a crisis management strategy. The section begins by highlighting the ways in which Odwalla fits the basic tenets of discourse of renewal. Next, I will review both health framing narratives and crisis narratives relevant to this particular case. Third, I will explain the findings within my framing analysis in the discussion section. Lastly, the implications of utilizing the discourse of renewal as a crisis management strategy will be discussed.

## ODWALLA'S EFFECTIVE CRISIS MANAGEMENT: A "GOLDEN" CASE STUDY

Organizational crises have the ability to threaten an organization's reputation. According to Coombs (2007), a reputation:

Develops through the information stakeholders receive about the organization (Fombrun and Van Riel, 2004). Stakeholders receive information through interactions with an organization, mediated reports about an organization (including the news media and advertising) and second-hand information from other people (e.g. word of mouth and weblogs). Most of the information stakeholders collect about organizations is derived from the news media (p. 164).

Thus, a reputation is largely derived from an organization's projected identity (how it communicates its identity to stakeholders), as well as media reports of organizational actions. In times of crises, an organization's reputation and financial standings can both be significantly impacted. An expectation gap, or a failure to meet expectations of stakeholders, is problematic and particularly precarious in times of crisis (Coombs, 2007; Reichart, 2003). A crisis, many scholars argue, can be viewed as a reputational threat.

Prior to Odwalla's 1996 product harm crisis, their reputation was that of a socially responsible organization, which catered to health and "nutrition conscious consumers" (Reirson, Sellnow & Ulmer, 2009, p. 114). The origins story of Odwalla has it founded in 1980 by three musicians and long-time friends, Greg Steltenpohl, Gerry Percy and Bonnie Bassett, "with the dream of a healthy world . . . started squeezing fresh orange juice in Santa Cruz, California. Their only business plan at the time was a vision: make great juice, do good things for the community and build a business with heart" (Evan, 1999, p. 15). By the early 1990's, Odwalla "capitalized on one of the most popular beverage trends sweeping the United States and

Canada—gourmet natural fresh fruit and vegetable-based juice” (Thomsen & Rawson, 1998, p. 35). However, the organization set itself apart from much of the juicing community in that it chose not to pasteurize their beverages, but rather, to “preserve the ‘naturalness’ of its drinks, Odwalla relied on a process that kept the juices cold during production through the entire distribution process . . . It was this distinction that became the company's identity and a theme that was continually played up in marketing and sales literature” (Thomsen & Rawson, 1998, p. 35). Thus, the reputation narrative that Odwalla crafted for itself and projected to others was one of three former jazz musicians whom had built a start-up company in which healthy and nutritious beverages were produced, with a focus on building a company with “heart.” This largely informed Odwalla’s pre-crisis identity, and was leveraged within their crisis management to repair their organizational reputation and move past the crisis effectively.

Within crisis communication, many scholars argue that an organization can best minimize the negative impacts (such as monetary loss or diminished reputation) by responding to stakeholders in a timely and appropriate manner (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2009). Odwalla’s crisis management has been lauded, particularly as a shining case study example of an organization that used image repair strategies and the discourse of renewal within their rhetoric and crisis response. These communicative actions then allowed the organization to navigate through a crisis that might otherwise have rendered the organization bankrupt.

Martinelli & Briggs (1998), explain that a crisis can serve as, “an opportunity to demonstrate the organization's commitment to responsible behavior and to outline the steps it is taking to eliminate the problem/issue” (p. 445). While most product-recall crises can be viewed as operational crises and do not create a debate of public policy, Odwalla’s product recall is distinct in that it became a crisis of public health and safety (Martinelli & Briggs, 1998).

Audiences are more attentive to organizational actions in crisis moments. In the case of Odwalla's contaminated juice, attention was successfully shifted from the organization-specific incident, to that of a larger policy debate surrounding regulation for the entire fresh fruit juice community (Thomsen & Rawson, 1998).

Thomsen & Rawson (1998) explored Odwalla's crisis response, particularly by looking at the ways in which the organization's pre-crisis reputation and identity (described previously in this chapter) could be seen as a public health threat to consumers' lives. Ultimately, they argued that Odwalla was able to use many of the image restoration strategies within their crisis response to effectively maneuver past the crisis. Specifically, Thomsen & Rawson (1998) argue that Odwalla "effectively employed a strategy that consisted of corrective action, compensation, defeasibility, bolstering, and, in the final stages of the crisis, transcendence" (p. 38).

Corrective action, comprised of repairing damages and/or preventing future occurrences, was achieved by Odwalla's decision to recall their products. Benoit (1995) argues that by showing willingness to correct or prevent a problem, the organization's reputation can potentially improve.

Odwalla offered compensation through volunteering to pay for the medical bills of those who became ill after drinking their contaminated juice. Defeasibility, a tactic that can be used to evade responsibility, is premised on the accused (the organization, in this case) being able to claim either lack of knowledge or lack of control over elements of the situation (Benoit, 1995; Thomsen & Rawson, 1998). One of Odwalla's spokesmen, Steltenpohl, used defeasibility when he made statements such as, "What we were advised through industry (experts) was that we had a safe level. We didn't test for E. coli. . . . Because we believed evidence showed it was not found at that (acid) level" (Thomsen & Rawson, 1998, p. 39). Bolstering is the act of seeking to "re-

identify” with values that are favorable with the offended audience (Thomsen, and Rawson, 1998). Transcendence can be seen as the act of moving the conversation or focus from the very specific event, to that of a more abstract or “big picture” issue for the audience. Odwalla used bolstering and transcendence tactics, Thomsen & Rawson (1998) argued, by shining a light on the previously “unknown” issue of E. coli being able to live in highly acidic fruit. The issue shifted from an Odwalla-specific problem to an “industry problem.”

While image restoration and other image repair strategies are generally reactive in nature, Odwalla’s public relations team and organizational leadership (top management) were largely viewed as proactive with their responses and ultimately argued to have effectively used discourse of renewal to navigate through a complex crisis. Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow (2007) explain, “The discourse of renewal extends beyond image restoration to a post-crisis innovation and adaptation of the organization” (p. 131). Reirson, Sellnow & Ulmer (2009) argue Odwalla was successfully able to deploy all four characteristics of renewal discourse within their crisis response: provisional response, prospective focus, communicating optimism and ability of leadership to create a shared vision.

Organizations utilizing renewal discourse within their crisis response should focus on provisional statements rather than strategic statements, that is, “Instead of developing responses designed to achieve some strategic outcome such as protecting the organization’s image or escaping blame, renewal discourse is a more natural and immediate response to an event” (Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow, 2007, p. 131). Important within “provisional” discourse then, is that actions taken by organizational actors seem natural or organic in nature, which then allows for the public to see the organization and its leadership as having strong character. Odwalla’s crisis response fits the provisional characteristic in that their initial response included: a voluntary

recall of their juices products containing apples (later to also include in their recall were carrot and vegetable juices), offer refunds for contaminated juice products, compensation for medical bills associated with those who became ill, creation of both a 1-800 phone line and Internet website in which instructing information was conveyed to the public, and full cooperation with the FDA and other relevant food safety officials (Reirson, Sellnow & Ulmer, 2009). These actions allowed for Odwalla to be viewed as proactive and accountable to the impacted public (predominately the western U.S. States).

As stated previous, Odwalla's reputation prior to the crisis was that of an organization focused on producing and distributing healthy and natural juice to consumers. The bacteria-contaminated juice then, served as a direct threat to the organization's core values and vision, thus their overall legitimacy. Odwalla chose to take a prospective focus, looking to the future of the organization rather than to the past by creating discourses which: focused on improving safety standards moving forward, altering their production processes to regain consumers trust of their ability to create healthy beverages, and ultimately "focused on how to improve in order to create a successful future" (Reirson, Sellnow & Ulmer, 2009, p. 120).

The third characteristic of renewal discourse is the need to capitalize on "opportunities embedded within the crisis" which can be further understood in that, "The renewal process is inherently optimistic. Stakeholders have no reason to be inspired by model behavior if they cannot see a positive outcome" (Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow, 2007, p. 132). This argument is consistent with many scholars, who suggest that crises can create opportunities (Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow, 2007; Hurst, 1995; Meyers & Holusha, 1986; Mitroff 2005; Ulmer et al., 2007; Witt & Morgan, 2002). Following the crisis, Odwalla worked on capitalizing on opportunities presented to reestablish brands and to introduce new products such as new beverages and energy bars

(Reirson, Sellnow & Ulmer, 2009). They also expanded their facilities, entered both the Midwest and East Coast markets, and included in their organizational restructuring was a personnel change—replacing two former board members with food and industry safety experts (Reirson, Sellnow & Ulmer, 2009). More broadly, Odwalla leveraged this crisis as an opportunity to create new industry standard for best practices in food and safety processes, which ultimately led to changed FDA and CDC regulations industry-wide (Reirson, Sellnow & Ulmer, 2009). Ultimately, a crisis that otherwise might have rendered Odwalla non-existent, was embraced and met with optimism and treated as an opportunity to be exploited.

Lastly, Odwalla’s crisis displays the fourth characteristic of discourse of renewal: the ability of leadership to create a shared vision through leader-based communication. The ability of leadership to create a genuine vision and move past crises, then, is a cornerstone necessary for renewal discourse to be a successful crisis response strategy. Organizational management, or leadership, as it is termed here, can often be viewed as the “mouth pieces” of an organization. In a crisis context specifically, Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger (2007) further argue, “The strength, vision, and reputation of a formal leader are necessary conditions for renewal. Leaders play a critic role in renewal because they embody the company and its values” (p. 132). In the specific case of Odwalla’s crisis, Reirson, Sellnow & Ulmer (2009) summarize:

Odwalla’s leadership initiated actions consistent with strong ethics and morals. The product recall, concern for consumer safety over company profits, production shut down, open and honest communication, and provision of self-efficacy indicated a foundation of strong ethics and morals . . . Renewal is achieved and complexities are ultimately overcome through a consistent focus on ethical behavior and optimistic leadership (p. 121-125).

Odwalla's crisis response was judged to include all four of the characteristics associated with discourse of renewal: provisional response, prospective focus, communicating optimism and ability of leadership to create a shared vision. As a case study, Odwalla is touted by multiple scholars as being a golden text-book example of how crisis management should be deployed, how an organization's leadership can respond ethically, frame itself as a responsible organization without actually taking responsibility for the crisis itself, and how public policy and crises sometimes inform one another (Martinelli & Briggs, 1998; Reirson, Sellnow & Ulmer, 2009; Thomsen & Rawson, 1998; Cheng & Seeger, 2012).

#### CRISIS NARRATIVES: FRAMERS OF THE STORY

While much has been written about the ways in which Odwalla was able to effectively utilize discourse of renewal to maneuver past the crisis, this chapter seeks to explore the consistencies and inconsistencies of the organization's narrative of the crisis in contrast to that of the media. As explained in the literature review, past research has suggest that perceptions of a crises are, at least in part, informed by the media, and this occurs to an even greater extent when the crisis is health-related (Carducci et al, 2011). Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger (2015) define narrative construction within a crisis communication context as: "creating a vision for moving beyond the crisis, learning, and creating meaning" (p. 16). This is consistent with the discourse of renewal, which is largely premised on the ability of organizational leadership to frame the crisis. However, this chapter seeks to use Odwalla as a case study in order to better understand the ways in which journalistic frames align or compete with organizational framing of a crisis within the context of discourse of renewal.

If the media framing of the Odwalla crisis is consistent with discourse renewal, there are three expectations I hold within my framing analysis (with both health communication and crisis

communication literature in mind): 1.) I expect that the focus of the media coverage will not be on Odwalla being responsible for the incident. 2.) Media coverage will largely include instructing and adjusting information, that is, information on preventative/protective measures the public should take to protect themselves physically as well as how to protect themselves psychologically. 3.) There will be a larger focus on the future (prospective) not retrospective/past actions. If the tenets of discourse of renewal emerge in the news coverage of Odwalla, this provides additional evidence of the successful use of the discourse of renewal in this case. If the media frame reflects the basic elements of the discourse of renewal, this suggests stakeholders are being exposed to the discourse of renewal created by Odwalla management.

Stakeholders often become aware of crises initially from the media and use the information they obtain to then make decisions about the organizations responsibility for the crisis itself (Coombs, 2007). Perception of responsibility is an important factor in the framing of both crisis communication and health communication. Within crisis communication, Coombs 2007 explains, “Crisis responsibility triggers affective reactions as well as being a reputational threat” (p. 169). In a framing study conducted on the use of emotional appeals within news frame of organizational crises, Kim and Cameron (2011) found that anger-inducing frames not only affect people’s emotional response to a crisis, but also influenced individuals’ perception of the crisis and created higher levels of negative feelings toward the organization. Coombs (2007) explains that when stakeholders attribute “greater crisis responsibility to the organization, their perceptions of the organizational reputation will decline” (p. 168). Therefore, the attribution of responsibility for a crisis event largely informs the ability of an organization to manage the crisis and negatively impact the organization’s reputation.

While framing of responsibility inherently informs crises management, responsibility is also a key factor in the framing of health-related communication. Hallahan (1999) identified the attribution of responsibility as one of the most important frames in regard to health issues. Health related issues are often framed as an issue of individual responsibility or responsibility of government/society. Individual responsibility within the news frames the cause of health issues, such as obesity, as fully the responsibility of the obese individual (Chang, 2012). In contrast, framing health issues as a governmental responsibility might include stories that highlight: the government has the ability to alleviate/stop the issue, is responsible for the health issue surfacing in the first place, or urgent calls for governmental action (Chang, 2012). Thus, the framing of responsibility attribution is an important consideration when analyzing health-related crises such as that of food-borne illness.

Crises bring with them a need to act quickly and ensure that the public has the pertinent information about the crisis itself. Similarly, health communication serves in, “making people aware of harmful diseases, urging them to get treatment, and promoting prevention” (Coleman & Major, 2014, p. 91). Food-borne illness is often found in fresh produce, a food option that is generally viewed as healthy by consumers (Vocht et al, 2013, p. 474). Furthermore, health crises are unique in that there is a need for instructing and adjusting information because societal members themselves are a part of the crisis management plan and need to know how to protect them both physically and psychologically from the crisis. Thus, within a food borne illness particularly, as is consistent both crisis and health management, there is a need for instructing information to ensure that the public health crisis can effectively be squelched.

Lee and Basynet (2013) conducted a content analysis study on news coverage of the H1N1 influenza outbreak. Their findings posited eight dominant themes found in the media framing of H1N1 (Lee & Basynet, 2013, p. 123):

1. *Basic information* (factual information or updates on H1N1 in terms of numbers of fatalities or confirmed cases, or WHO actions);
2. *Preventive information* (good behaviors that prevent H1N1 spread, such as hand washing, and temperature taking);
3. *Treatment information* (treatment options including what to do, and where to go);
4. *Medical research* (new medical findings, e.g., vaccine efficacy or virus mutations);
5. *Social context* (juxtaposition of H1N1 into a societal context, e.g., impact on social activities);
6. *Economic context* (juxtaposition of H1N1 into an economic context, e.g., tourism);
7. *Political context* (juxtaposition of H1N1 into a political context, e.g., diplomatic ties);
8. *Personal stories* (experiences of patients/families)

The first four frames posited by Lee and Basynet are consistent with the concept of instructing information within crisis management. Lee & Basynet further argue, “public health communicators must help people manage their emotions so that they can still function and not be hopeless or helpless (2013, p. 122). The managing of emotions is consistent with adjusting information. The latter four frames then, can potentially be viewed as consistent with adjusting information, as consumers psychologically process potential consequences and impact that a disease such as H1N1 has on society in a way that helps consumers move past the crisis.

Within discourse of renewal, the strategy of forward-focus is essential. Cotton, Veil & Iannarino (2015) explain, “Renewal discourse . . . as a prospective strategy, focuses on healing

the organization by looking to the future, avoiding blame, and realigning the culture of the organization or community with foundational values” (p. 28). For the discourse of renewal to function properly as a crisis response strategy, the assumption would be that past actions, organizational wrongdoings, etc., would fade into the background or not even be discussed at all. Following this line of reasoning, Cotton, Veil & Iannarino (2015) explain, “maintaining this (prospective) focus allows an organization to obtain greater sensemaking and meaning creation, which ultimately helps to realize their future” (p. 29, see also; Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002). Discourse of renewal then, is complex, because in times of crisis instead of dwelling on loss, an organization should focus on the future and rebuilding which can include the rebuilding of confidence/reputation or community.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There were five frames discovered within the coverage of Odwalla’s E. Coli outbreak. The frames were: 1.) E. Coli as Culprit, 2.) Call for regulation, 3) Instructing Information, 4.) Change as Detrimental, and 5.) Odwalla as socially responsible. Additionally, a sixth frame, “other” was used to test if any other themes that might potentially be frames existed aside from the five frames tested above. Within the thirty-six news stories that were coded, the average word count per story was 734 words. The average number of frames present within the news stories was 2.55 frames.

### *E. Coli as Culprit*

The first frame, which I named *E. Coli as Culprit*, found to be present in 39% of the coded articles; E. Coli itself is framed as the perpetrator. Most narratives within this frame focus on E. Coli itself as a bacterium, being worrisome, a threat, a concern, or even E. Coli as being responsible for illness/death. This frame was deployed particularly in conjunction with the Call

for Regulation frame, in that prior outbreaks were linked to the vicious characterization of E. Coli:

The culprit was the same: a rod-shaped bacterium known as *Escherichia coli* 0157:H7, or ECO157—the same microbe that sickened as many as 9,000 people and killed 10 last summer in Japan. Since scientists officially identified it in 1982, this strain of *E. coli* has emerged as the most worrisome food-related threat to public health, according to officials at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Boodman, 1996, par. 3-4).

Furthermore, this frame highlighted the source of *E. Coli* contamination as not being easily locatable, “the exact source of contamination never was determined. Contaminated juice was blamed for the death of Anna Gimmestad” (Smith, 1998, par. 11-12).

*E. Coli* also was itself framed as a growing threat in that what was once labeled a “burger-bacteria” now was known to have farer reaching capabilities, “The Odwalla outbreak had a nationwide impact because it showed that this strain of *E. Coli* could infiltrate fresh fruit and vegetables, which have soared in popularity as consumers become increasingly health conscious” (Belluck, 1998, par. 8). And even once it was known to be able to live in raw vegetables produce, environments not previously thought to be susceptible/hospitable for *E. Coli*, the probability of contamination was still largely unknown. Paul Cieslak, a communicable disease expert from the Oregon Health Division explained the unknown risk related with *E. Coli* when he argued, “We don’t know whether the *E. coli* risk in juice is 1 in 1,000 or 1 in a million” (“Questions of Pasteurization, 1996, par. 13). Jeff Farrar, an epidemiologist who supervised the California Department of Health Service’s investigation into the Odwalla outbreak, furthered the argument of *E. Coli* as threatening and unpredictable when he explained, “This organization is

very elusive . . . Literally we are looking for a needle in a haystack” (Boodman, 1996, par. 17-18).

*E. Coli as Culprit* is one media frame that is consistent with tenants of discourse of renewal. Within crisis management, discourse of renewal has been argued to be the most conducive as a crisis response strategy when the organization or the community can be seen as a victim of the crisis (Cotton et al., 2015). This frame, when deployed, allows for Odwalla to be the perpetrator, the one responsible for illness, and quite literally the “culprit.” As the responsibility of the outbreak is squarely positioned on the bacterium itself, not on Odwalla’s actions, Odwalla can indeed be argued to be a victim. And as *E. Coli* becomes a public menace, conversations of government oversight and future actions can be brought to the surface, yet again taking responsibility away from Odwalla’s for the product-harm crisis.

#### *Call for Regulation*

In the second frame, *Call for Regulation*, 50% of the articles coded discussed the Odwalla *E. Coli* outbreak as a reoccurring issue that needed regulation. This frame served to focus the conversation on the need for more strident measures to be taken at the government level for food-related health risk prevention. In a November 1996 *New York Times* article, journalist Marian Burros wrote, “Today, scientists are trying to decide if pasteurizing apple juice products would eliminate *E. coli* contamination and should therefore be required” and quoted Dr. Kessler, Commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, saying “This is the kind of issue we have to confront increasingly because we are eating more and more uncooked produce and because of an increasing global economy” (par. 16-17). This frame also solidified the growing issue of “gaps” in food safety programs and processes within the context of *E. coli* contamination. The safety gaps also included lack of testing by health physicians, “federal health

officials say that illness is vastly underreported because many doctors don't suspect it, and most medical laboratories don't test for the bacterium, which is detected through stool culture . . . too often public health officials say, ECO157 infection is undiagnosed or misdiagnosed" (Boodman, 1996, par. 7-10). E. Coli then, was framed as a growing issue that demanded further study and action.

Coupled with health physicians needing to adequately diagnose patients who were made ill by E. coli, it was acknowledged that food safety inspections were operating under processes that no longer seemed to work. The FDA released a report after spending 11 days at Odwalla's plant, which stated, "While no trace of ECO157 had been found at the plant, microbial monitoring of finished products and raw materials used in processing is inadequate" (Boodman, 1996, par. 19). Particularly, within the current fresh fruit procedures, a call for regulation was described as being necessary because current juicing procedures across the industry were unable to combat E. Coli and other food-borne illnesses. Odwalla's CEO, Stephen Williamson stated, "This isn't just an Odwalla problem . . . It's a problem for the entire fresh fruit industry" (Boodman, 1996, par. 30).

Furthermore, within the news coverage analyzed, this frame in particular had strong political undertones. At the same time Odwalla was battling through their E. Coli crisis, the Clinton Administration's food safety initiatives were discussed within the context of righting current food safety processes through policy changes. This is consistent with the first frame, *E. Coli as Culprit*. While new standards for processing needed to be adopted, warning labels were also an added measure for unpasteurized juice mandated by the FDA, "new warning labels ordered by the FDA advise consumers against consuming unpasteurized juice if they are very young, very old or have weak immune systems" (Smith, 1998, par. 21). This frame is consistent

with discourse of renewal tenants, in that *call for regulation* focused on current needs and future direction, which is prospective in nature, which then can lead to the need for corrective and appropriate action to be taken.

Corrective action is presented within crisis communication as a, “promise to fix the damage caused and to take steps to prevent action from occurring again; suitable for misdeeds and for accidents” (Lerbinger, 2012, p. 62). Xie & Yao (2016), further this definition by explaining that corrective action accomplishes two tasks: restore the “state of affairs” as well as take steps to prevent reoccurrences of the same problem. Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow (2007) posit, “Organizations must illustrate to their stakeholders that they are committed to rebuilding and correcting the problem that created the crisis in the first place” (p. 133). They argue this notion of corrective action is of “meaningful action and observable change” (p. 133). “Meaningful action” in the case of Odwalla might include their willingness to financially compensate the families of victims who became ill, as well their decision to enact a voluntary product recall. “Observable change” also can be found in Odwalla’s case, as they changed their processes and became advocates for regulatory changes. While “meaningful action” and “observable change” can be seen within the case of Odwalla, it is troubling how a future-focus serves to blur past organizational actions and allow for true “correcting” of actions to occur.

By the deploying the frame *call for regulation* in half of the print media surround Odwalla’s product harm crisis, the need for policy changes and regulatory conversations took center stage. Shifting the responsibility for the crisis effectively from E. Coli itself to a more transcendent issue of industry-wide and procedures needing to be reevaluated and changed—thus the corrective action needed to happen on a larger, societal level. This shift is worrisome because as the crisis was framed as an industry-wide issue, the responsibility of Odwalla to locate the

actual cause of the crisis itself seemed silenced. To truly engage in corrective action, at least some focus should be given to the past to ensure that the problem is identified and moving forward that problem does not reoccur. Thus, corrective action as understood within crisis communication, and corrective action as conceptualized within renewal discourse, seem to be virtually incompatible due to discourse of renewal's focus on the future and more transcending or macro understanding of corrective action.

Corrective action traditionally includes actions such as: terminating organizational actions responsible for the issue, finding the system break down and explaining not only the issue to the public, but steps taken by the organization to ensure that problem is resolved and does not happen again, and most significantly, corrective action is premised on the need for an investigation into the organization's past to better understand the root-cause of the issue to occur. This investigation into the cause of the E. Coli contamination was largely glossed over, both by Odwalla and the media coverage, allowing for the organization to focus on the future, but with troubling implications from a crisis communication standpoint of truly understanding the issue and ensuring it did not become a reoccurring one. Therefore, corrective action within the context of Odwalla shifted from organizational actions to the industry-wide processes associated with E. coli contamination. This is a distinct form of corrective action that once again shifts responsible actions from the organizational-level to the societal level, never holding Odwalla accountable to find their own processing "gaps" that resulted in a product harm crisis.

### *Instructing Information*

The third frame present, *Instructing Information*, was the most dominate frame used to narrate Odwalla's product harm crisis, as it was found present in 89% of the news stories. This is not surprising because crisis management literature suggests that in times of crisis, instructing

information must be given to subdue concerns and ensure consumers are taking necessary precautions to alleviate the effects the crisis can have on them. During the initial crisis response, there is a need to give the public *instructing information*, which includes: the known facts about the crisis event, the impact it might have on the public and actions that the public should take to protect themselves from the crisis (Coombs, 2007). Instructing information found in these news stories included updates on numbers of those to fall ill due to Odwalla's E. Coli outbreak, signs and symptoms and health-risks related to E. Coli, descriptions of ill cases (places impacted, names and/or ages of sick children, and updates on the victims health, etc.). The impact of E. coli on the body was described as:

The particular strain of E. coli in question can cause Hemolytic uremic syndrome, the leading cause of kidney failure in children, which can lead to death in the most extreme cases. Symptoms include bloody diarrhea, abdominal cramping and vomiting. Elderly people and children under 12 (especially those under 5) are particularly vulnerable. The bacteria are usually found in the manure of animals like cows. Apples may become contaminated when they fall from trees or when someone with the bacteria comes in contact with food. The pathogens can be eliminated by washing uncut apples thoroughly and boiling or pasteurizing apple juice (Burros, 1996, par. 11-12).

Furthermore, instructing information presented throughout the news coverage reminded people of the importance of routine sanitation procedures such as washing hands, or not mixing raw produce with raw meat for contamination purposes.

Instructing information as a frame also discussed the “knowable” facts about the E. Coli outbreak, which was demonstrated by mentions of E. Coli having a specific composition that makes each outbreak unique and linkable to one specific source (in this case, Odwalla). In a

November 1996 *New York Times* article, the clear link between E. Coli and Odwalla being the host-source was explained, “health officials use dietary histories taken on the victims, coupled with genetic ‘fingerprinting’ of the bacteria, to trace the outbreak to a batch of unpasteurized apple juice that Odwalla uses as an ingredient in many of its fresh mixed-fruit beverages” (“Bacteria Ailment Traced,” par. 4). The certainty of the linkage between Odwalla juice products containing apple as an ingredient and the E. Coli outbreak was further solidified in the news coverage, as epidemiologist Dr. John Kobayashi was quoted saying, “the tests identify a unique cluster of E. coli 0157:H7 associated with the Odwalla outbreak . . . The pattern . . . different substantially from those of other E. coli 0157:H7 cases from the recent past. You can see a clear start in the current epidemic” (Woofolk, 1996, par. 4).

Instructing information found within the news stories was expected from both a crisis and health communication perspective. By presenting the knowable facts about the case (that it was linked to Odwalla products, that it caused certain health issues, and explaining preventative measures that could be taken), this frame operated as an uncertainty reducer for the general public. However, while the narrative of those who had fallen ill, locations to be impacted, and other journalist “W’s” were fairly well covered in the news, the surprisingly down-played and minimally covered portion of the Odwalla case for this frame specifically was Odwalla being found guilty of criminal charges through the delivery of adulterated food products, with a 1.5 million dollar settlement to families impacted and a probation (Smith, 1998).

Other frames, such as *E. Coli as Culprit* and *Call for Regulation*, served to shift responsibility for the product harm crisis away from Odwalla (to the bacterium itself and then to the need for regulation industry-wide). However, by being found guilty of selling adulterated food products, the responsibility should in turn have shifted back to Odwalla. A guilty verdict

should have shifted Odwalla from “victim” to that of “responsible” but surprisingly, it did not. Within the minimal news stories that covered the court case and eventual verdict, Odwalla was not being framed as responsible for the crisis.

In a July 1998 article, written by Rebecca Smith, ran the *San Jose Mercury News* framing the verdict in the following way:

Juice maker Odwalla Inc. on Thursday pleaded guilty to the criminal charges and agreed to pay a 1.5 million fine in connection with an E. coli outbreak two years ago that killed a 16-month-old Colorado girl who drank the company’s contaminated juice. Federal prosecutors said it was the first criminal conviction and largest fine ever obtained in a food contamination case. Odwalla, based in Half Moon Bay, reiterated its responsibility Thursday and vowed to continue to do all it can to support initiatives to avoid food borne catastrophes (par. 1-3).

The court of law found Odwalla responsible for the product harm crisis. Furthermore, this article explained that Odwalla was the first-ever organization to be convicted of criminal charges and the fine they were expected to pay was the largest ever within food-contamination cases. These findings would suggest that Odwalla should not have been able to be legitimately viewed as a victim in the case, however, through the effective deployment of discourse of renewal by both organizational actors and journalists, the Odwalla’s crisis story has been touted as effective crisis management which should be aspired to by other organizations.

The dominant narrative presented by Odwalla and the media of Odwalla as victim does not fit with facts. By utilizing the discourse of renewal, Odwalla was praised for their crisis management while evading responsibility and completely stifling the negative implications of the court findings. The framing analysis suggests the media facilitated the acceptance of this

victim narrative. Odwalla, revered as a textbook example of an organization acting responsibly even when they were *never* found to be responsible for the crisis itself, is in fact a false narrative and inaccurate upon examination of the knowable facts, bringing with it deep implications for the ethicality of renewal discourse as a crisis communication strategy.

### *Change as Detrimental*

The fourth frame, *Change as Detrimental*, appeared the most infrequently, being found in only 22% of news articles. However, I argue, it is still important in the framing of Odwalla's crisis. This frame included mentions of juice producers and health-conscious consumers resisting pasteurization because it takes away the natural flavor of the juice and certain nutrients. Furthermore, regulation was framed as being in direct opposition to the juice-community, not only because of the desire to not pasteurize explained above, but also due to the potential adverse effects of the new warning labels required by the FDA.

This frame is unique in that it is a frame deployed to better explain the health community, pasteurization processes and consumer preferences. Gauthier (2011) argues, "Few studies have examined the representation of foodborne pathogens in the media discourse from a qualitative standpoint" (p. 271). Within the Odwalla case specifically, *change as detrimental* is a frame that when explored within a qualitative approach, can be seen as significant to the understanding of Odwalla's crisis management. While food-borne pathogens can certainly be viewed as negative and unwanted, the process by which food-borne pathogen contamination are eliminated, pasteurization, was also framed as undesirable by Odwalla, the health-conscious consumers, and eventually, the fresh-juice community.

First, *change as detrimental* was deployed to explain the reason that Odwalla did not pasteurize all of its juices, and initially argued this process change would be detrimental in that

“pasteurization would kill the bacteria, but Odwalla holds that the process also hurts the taste and the nutrients in their natural juice drinks” (“Juice Maker Completes,” 1996, par. 4). The change to pasteurized juices, was also framed as a reputational threat, by the presence of quotes such as: “the company’s (Odwalla) longstanding resistance to pasteurizing its juices, which reduces the risk of bacteria but which company officials believed would alter the taste of its juice and compromise its all-natural, nutritious reputation” (Carey, 1997, par. 20). Thus, *change as detrimental*, was a frame that explained the ways in which pasteurization processes, while more effective at eliminating bacterium such as E. coli, could lead to a compromised reputation for an organization built on producing nutritious drinks.

Secondly, the detrimental/unwanted aspects pasteurization as described by Odwalla, were solidified further through quotes from health-conscious consumers, such as Rachel Koch, a 29-year-old woman from Seattle, who explained, “Commercial juices taste like you’re drinking corn syrup and water . . . Odwalla makes me feel like I’m drinking a glass of vitamins” (“Questions of pasteurization,” 1996, par. 18).

Lastly, when the FDA announced mandatory labeling for unpasteurized juices in 1998, fresh-juice producers discontentedness was perhaps best captured in the followed snippet of a news story:

Fresh-juice producers are upset over warnings that will be required for unpasteurized apple juice starting in September, warnings that will be posted first at the stores and ultimately on every bottle. The cigarette-style warning that the juice in the container is not pasteurized could permanently cripple business by creating a false impression among consumers that the drinks are inherently hazardous, fresh-juice producers say. ‘You don’t see warning labels on hamburgers, and bad hamburgers kill more people than apple

juice,’ said Mitch Gizdich, a Watsonville producer of fresh-squeezed juice whose sales plummeted 18 months ago, following an E. coli outbreak from another company’s unpasteurized juice that sickened 70 people and killed a 16-month-old Colorado girl (Rodebaugh, 1998, par. 1-3).

Furthermore, the newly require labeling was framed as detrimental to fresh-juice producers in that it would constrain and ultimately bankrupt small businesses who could not afford the associated costs of either labeling or switching to pasteurization (Rodebaugh, 1998).

Inherent within this frame, is the conversation of pasteurization and the implication this change would have on the relationship between a healthful organization, health-conscious consumers and a fresh-juice community more broadly. This is important because largely under-examined within discourse of renewal is consumer identity in the context of an organizational brand. While renewal discourse posits that a “reservoir of goodwill” is important for an organization to effectively use renewal to maneuver through a crisis, this framing study has found that “reservoir of good will” is an over-simplified notion within the case of Odwalla. Journalist Walter Nicholls explained in his 1998 *Washington Post* article, that there was a “juice-generation” which had been formed, and two of the leading fresh-juice companies, Fresh Samantha and Odwalla, were companies that were, “part of a culture with values that go deep into the health-food movement. Many fresh citrus juice makers believe that heating the juice affects the flavor and nutrients. ‘That’s our whole reason for being,’ says Odwalla CEO Greg Steltenpohl” (par. 22).

This frame, *change as detrimental*, elicits the need to move beyond surface-level explanations of “reservoir of goodwill” which can be used as leverage to help an organization move past a crisis. To better examine and conduct much-needed research which addresses the

ways in which, during an organizational crisis, cultural values, consumer commitment, notions of identity and brand all inform one another and how together they can be used to inform better the success or failure of crisis communication.

### *Odwalla as Socially Responsible*

The fifth frame, *Odwalla as Socially Responsible*, was found present in 36% of news stories. In this frame, Odwalla is characterized as being an industry leader, a self-regulator, and doing responsible acts. As discussed previously, Odwalla's CEO offered to pay all medical bills for those impacted and Odwalla, as well as conduct a product recall on thousands of bottles of their juice products. Odwalla called for its competitors to be cautious and halt the use of raw apples within production (Akizuki, 1996). In 1996, Odwalla was also one of the first organizations to use the Internet for recall information. Odwalla's spokeswoman, Robin Joy, stated, "We really wanted to have a place for consumers to get the latest information, and that's a very good vehicle for it" (Tran, 1996, par. 6).

Secondly, this frame was deployed to characterize and describe Odwalla's origins as an organization and their corporate values as sincere and socially responsible. Odwalla is described as an organization, "known as much for its employee-centered, ecologically aware business practices as for its juice (Smith, 1996, par. 6). Furthermore, in an editorial section of a *San Jose Mercury* article written in 1998, Odwalla is depicted as, "an example to all of us how an ethical company can remain true to its mission through such adversity . . . what a refreshing experience" ("Odwalla Takes The," par. 3). And following the court verdict, spokesmen for Odwalla, Chris Gallagher, seemingly praised the verdict, when he was quoted saying that the fine, "finalizes and puts a dollar figure to an incident that we took responsibility for two years ago" (Belluck, 1998, par. 10).

*Odwalla as Socially Responsible* is a frame that was expected, but the way in which they used the verdict to state that they were happy to pay the price for lives lost and take responsibility was unusual, further complicating the current notions of Odwalla as a “golden case” study of discourse of renewal. Their social responsibility frame served as a replacement for the narrative of blame and guilt that would be expected after a guilty verdict.

#### *Other*

The sixth and final frame, *other*, was used to capture any other aspects or commentary within the news coverage of Odwalla that did not fit the frames aforementioned. The other frame was present in 19% of the news stories coded. The other frame was representative of a minute numbers of articles with mentions of a broader perspective that extended beyond the coverage of the Odwalla product harm crisis itself. First, larger discussions of FDA and regulatory process not specific to E. Coli or Odwalla appeared within the news coverage. Secondly, unpasteurized juice as being a favorite in the health-food industry appeared. An article also quoted a former Odwalla employee on the quality control at Odwalla’s plants. Due to the minimal appearance of the “other” frame, the larger conversations of E. Coli and regulatory changes, this was found to be an acceptable amount of appearances of an “other” frame without the need to create an additional Odwalla-specific frame.

#### IMPLICATIONS

This chapter sought to explore whether the media frames found within the Odwalla product harm crisis reflected, or did not reflect, the discourse of renewal tenets as a means of evaluating the success of failure of its use by an organization during crisis. This analysis demonstrated that that the organizational leadership’s framing of the crisis was consistent with the media framing of the crisis. Prior research published in the field of crisis communication and

public relations, which explored Odwalla as a case study of DoR, allowed for a comparison to be made between practitioner/expert opinion and media coverage. The ability of Odwalla's leadership to frame the crisis was successful within their product harm crisis response, which is consistent with major tenets of discourse of renewal.

Three expectations of what I would find within my analysis were posited before my analysis:

- 1.) Odwalla would not be framed as responsible for the product harm crisis.
- 2.) Media coverage would largely include instructing and adjusting information.
- 3.) There would be a large focus on the future.

The second expectation was informed by crisis management more broadly. Instructing and adjusting information is pivotal for an organization during and after a crisis, to alleviate both the unknown factors that can be known to the public, as well as to ease emotions of victims and victim's families, particularly when the crisis type is product harm. The first and third expectation both were informed by tenets of discourse of renewal. A crisis in which the organization itself can be seen as a victim is a more likely candidate for effective use of discourse of renewal. Similarly, discourse of renewal when operationalized focuses on the future, not the past.

Odwalla was able to evade responsibility of the product harm crisis by framing *E. coli* as the culprit. Furthermore, Odwalla focused on *E. Coli* as a largely unknown bacterium and a threat, casting the issue as an industry-wide problem, once again displacing blame from Odwalla itself. *E. Coli as culprit* was a frame found in almost 40 percent of news stories coded, which suggests Odwalla was successful in crafting a narrative in which they were not responsible for

the crisis. Rather, E. Coli was a perpetrator, and one that the science community was still in the midst of better understanding.

Timeliness was an important component of the E. Coli outbreak for Odwalla, because situated in the mid 90's there had been several recent cases of E. Coli outbreaks, which were used within the media coverage and served as a reminder that Odwalla was one of several organization's in the food industry to battle with E. Coli. Particularly, the larger Jack in the Box E. Coli case of 1993 was referenced in the media in conjunction with coverage of Odwalla's E. Coli case. Ultimately, Odwalla's crisis management was consistent with discourse of renewal characteristics in that they were not seen as responsible for the crisis event itself.

Crisis response generally includes varying degrees of instructing and adjusting information for the impacted publics. Within Odwalla's crisis, 90 percent of news stories contained instructing information. Largely, the instructing information included updates about the names and numbers of victims to fall ill. However, instructing information also included medical information on the signs and symptoms to watch for, as well as proper hygienic processes (such as hand washing) that should be taken before eating food, which are consistent with public health communication research. *Instructing information frame* has the potential to be a generic frame both in crisis and public health research.

Third, this study examined Odwalla's attempts to focus on the future and not look to the past. Particularly, Odwalla framed E. Coli as an issue that called for future regulatory changes. *Call for regulation* served as a future-focused frame in which Odwalla highlighted the need for more strident and regulatory measures to be taken within the food industry, so that going forward, current industry "gaps" could be fixed. There was a need for change, and Odwalla (and

media alike) framed themselves as industry leaders interested in becoming the first to try new industry practices and food processes.

This study found that Odwalla effectively used discourse of renewal within their crisis response, and that Odwalla's leadership did have the ability to frame the crisis, as media coverage was found to be consistent with Odwalla's framing of the product harm crisis. Due to the time period in which Odwalla's crisis happened, they had the advantage of being able to cast off responsibility for the crisis as E. Coli was a common threat and largely still under-researched and understood. Odwalla was able to leverage the timeliness of E. Coli research, which allowed for them (as an organization) to largely shape the way in which the crisis itself was remembered.

Using framing theory to better examine discourse of renewal allowed for a better understanding of how discourse of renewal, as a crisis response strategy, can be effectively used by an organization and seep into mass media coverage. However, within this study several insights and implications about discourse of renewal surfaced. In the last part of this section I briefly explore the implications of Odwalla as a case study of discourse of renewal in the context of emergent vs. deliberate strategies, dominate memory making, and brand communities.

While discourse of renewal is argued to be provisional as opposed to strategic in nature (Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow, 2007), strategy literature would classify discourse of renewal as a deliberate strategy. Within organizational literature, a distinction is made between deliberate and emergent strategies. A deliberate strategy is viewed as being an intentional strategy, or what an organization plans to do (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). Emergent strategies are, "patterns or consistencies realized despite, or in the absence of, intentions" (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985, p. 257). Emergent strategies often just happen, but they can often become repeated patterns. Discourse of renewal is a theory largely built on specific organizational examples, the most

famous being Odwalla. Within this particular case study (of Odwalla) there are also several potentially emergent strategies of the theory when operationalized. Discourse of renewal is a deliberate strategy in that it serves as an image restoration model to guide organizational/crisis managers through issues or crises in a very particularized way. Thus, while the authors of the theory might have intended discourse of renewal as provisional (emergent strategy) and not strategic, it has become inherently strategic in nature; with highly specific tenets and characteristics (deliberate strategy), and with this more research needs to be done on discourse of renewal as a strategy.

Second, when organizations themselves serve as public memory makers, larger questions arise about the ethicality of dominant memory making and the marginalization of other voices. Particularly in times of crisis, the potential to silence victims is problematic. Nora (1989) argues that the past (what really happened) and the public memory of it (the dominant narrative) are not one in the same. In the same line of argument, Halbwachs (1992) argues that memories of the past that are stored and interpreted within social structures. This is consistent with Odwalla's product harm crisis, in which Odwalla serves as a social structure that is remembered as being ethical, and erased from their public memory is the lawsuit and guilty plea. Public memory then, can be seen as a powerful resource and tool for organizational rhetoric and organizational communication. However, it is a power that should be carefully considered in regards to ethics, particularly within the use of discourse of renewal as a crisis communication strategy.

Lastly, within the current conceptualization of discourse of renewal, an organization needs to have a positive pre-crisis identity, which is largely consistent with crisis communication literature. However, terms such as "reservoir of goodwill" or "positive" pre-crisis identity are largely ambiguous and non-descript in nature. Some research has shown, particularly within the

field of management, that consumer's identification with the organization matters within crisis (Zavyalova et al, 2016). Brand community literature can potentially be used to better understand how identification informs the perception of an organizational crisis, and why identification between consumers and the organization matters.

Within my framing analysis, I found signs that Odwalla might have functioned as a brand community. While I cannot argue that Odwalla was a brand community at the time of the crisis over twenty years ago due to lack of evidence, I will briefly explain the aspects of brand community I found present within the media framing of the crisis. Odwalla functioned as a unique organization through its production of organic and unpasteurized juice in the 1990's. A brand community is defined as, "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand" (Freitas & Almeida, p. 87). Odwalla's specialization lends itself to potentially be considered a brand community.

Brand communities usually emerge when a group of people organize themselves around a specific lifestyle, which the brand in question helps them achieve (Freitas & Almeida). Particularly, within the *change as detrimental frame* of consumers who wanted Odwalla's juice to remain unpasteurized because it tasted better and had additional nutrients, suggesting that a "healthful" lifestyle was a common bond of Odwalla's consumers. In addition, brand community members often defend their brand, which is considered their moral responsibility (Muniz & O'Guinn). The framing of pasteurization as detrimental within my coding suggests the potential presence of brand community members trying to create a narrative of why other brand fans should stay within the community and why change was not needed. Story telling is also important within brand communities. Story telling is an important aspect of rites and rituals, which function to reproduce meaning within a brand community (Muniz & O'Guinn). Within the

*Odwalla as socially responsible frame*, storytelling of the organization's origins repeatedly showed up in media coverage.

## CONCLUSION

This analysis demonstrated that Odwalla's crisis response strategy was consistent with discourse of renewal tenants. I expected to find the framing of the product harm crisis to not frame Odwalla as responsible for the product harm crisis, that media coverage would largely include instructing and adjusting information, and that there would be a focus on the future of Odwalla rather than past events. All three of these expectations proved to be true within this framing analysis of Odwalla's E. Coli outbreak. Furthermore, by doing a qualitative framing study, I found three implications for discourse of renewal and crisis communication more broadly.

First, while discourse of renewal was intended to be an emergent strategy, it has become a deliberate strategy. As such, future research needs to address the ways in which strategy and crisis management inform one another, which is currently underdeveloped and unrecognized within the context of discourse of renewal. Secondly, the consistency of Odwalla's leadership in framing the crisis closely mirroring media framing of the crisis, which demonstrates Odwalla's ability to frame the crisis. However, what is largely missing within other analyses of Odwalla, is the court case where they were found guilty for selling unadulterated products, which brings implications of the ethicality of discourse of renewal when organizational actors attempt (and are successful) at becoming public memory makers through dominant narrative construction. Lastly, I argue, that Odwalla has the potential to serve as a brand community and with that, further research should be conducted on the relationship between brand communities and crisis response. Particularly, how brand community literature, dove-tailed with crisis communication

literature, can potentially clarify ambiguous language which currently exists surrounding notions of an organization's pre-crisis identity, such as "reservoir of goodwill" and "strong reputation" and how that can further the understanding of effective crisis management.

## CHAPTER IV

### BLUE BELL: 2015 LISTERIA OUTBREAK

On March 13<sup>th</sup> of 2015, federal officials announced that they had linked five Kansas cases of listeria, three of which had resulted in death, to Blue Bell Creameries (Grisales & Dinges, 2015). Blue Bell's response included a voluntary recall of single-serve ice cream products from its Brenham, Texas, production plant. On March 22<sup>nd</sup>, an update was given, where officials announced that a new link to listeria had been found in Blue Bell's Broken Arrow, Oklahoma plant (Grisales & Dinges, 2015). With this second announcement, Blue Bell began recalling more of their products and both a federal and state investigation began into the Broken Arrow facilities (Grisales & Dinges, 2015). Production lines were suspended on April 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Broken Arrow plant (Grisales & Dinges, 2015). On April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Blue Bell officially issued a complete recall of all of its products thereby triggering the return of over 8 million gallons of ice cream (Grisales & Dinges, 2015).

May of 2015 proved tough for Blue Bell for two reasons. First, inspection reports confirmed both the presence of listeria in their Broken Arrow plant, as well as unsanitary conditions (Grisales & Dinges, 2015). Secondly, in the middle of May after the inspection report had been made public, Blue Bell laid off almost 1,500 employees and furloughed 1,400 more (Grisales & Dinges, 2015). The early summer of 2015 can be viewed as a time in which concern over Blue Bell's future viability should have been plentiful. But in July, Texas billionaire Sid Bass, was reported as having made a "significant" investment in Blue Bell Creameries to ensure its return (Grisales & Dinges, 2015). In the end of July, Blue Bell's Sylacauga, Alabama, facility

resumed production (Grisales & Dinges, 2015). By the end of August 2015, Blue Bell announced the return of their products to the shelves in certain geographic areas (Grisales & Dinges, 2015).

Discourse of renewal posits four criteria for it to be an applicable and relevant crisis management strategy: crisis types, stakeholder relationships, corrective action and change and public versus private organizations. When the Blue Bell crisis first occurred, all four of the criteria for discourse of renewal were met. Crisis type refers to crises of destruction in which the organization is often not cast as responsible, or the attribution of responsibility cast on the organization for the crisis is seen as low. Blue Bell's listeria outbreak was touted as the organizations first in their 108-year history. Furthermore, as my previous chapter on Odwalla suggested, food borne illness in crisis contexts have become a growing problem which normally generate conversations around regulatory issues and industry-wide problems, allowing for organization's to be cast as less responsible for this particular type of crisis.

Stakeholder relationships prior to the crisis are recognized within discourse of renewal as being a necessary criterion as well. Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow (2007) argue that by having strong/positive relationships prior to a crisis event, crisis managers can tap into a "reservoir of goodwill" to successfully maneuver past a crisis. In the organizational history section of this chapter, I will explain the ways in which Blue Bell became the "little creamery in Brenham" and how they have successfully maintained that image with their consumers, or "fans" as Blue Bell's organizational actors call their consumers. With this, Blue Bell easily meets the second (and most vague) criteria of discourse of renewal.

Third, corrective action and change is a significant element of discourse of renewal. Corrective action particularly when situated within discourse of renewal, must include observable change (Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow, 2007). As this analysis will demonstrate, Blue

Bell not only issues a voluntary recall on all of its products, but also went through extensive corrections to “gaps” surrounding their processes and training programs. Coupled with apologies and promises to do better by their CEO, this allowed Blue Bell to meet the third criteria of discourse of renewal.

Lastly, Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow (2007) posit that organizations that are privately held are more likely to successfully use discourse of renewal within their crisis response than public organizations. Blue Bell is a privately owned organization and one of the industry’s top-selling ice cream company’s (Madan, 2010). Ultimately, Blue Bell meets all the required criteria for discourse of renewal to be a viable crisis management strategy. My analysis then, will in part look at the ways in which Blue Bell’s crisis response fit, or was inconsistent with discourse of renewal.

From the implications posited in my previous chapter, surrounding questions of dominant narratives, brand community and the ethicality of leadership and media framing crises consistently, this analyses seeks to better understand how, in times of crises, an organization can renew and restore in the face of bankruptcy and the potentiality of being rendered non-existent. This second case study seeks to serve as an analysis that will allow for a more comprehensive theory of organizational restoration to be posited. How did Blue Bell survive a near-bankruptcy event? What made a billionaire invest in a floundering company? How can Blue Bell serve as a case study to better understand the current “gaps” in discourse of renewal as a theory? To answer these questions, we will first explore the organization’s history. Second, I will provide relevant information on brand communities and explain how Blue Bell consumers function as a brand community. Third, I will explore the frames I found present within my media framing analysis of the Blue Bell crisis. Fourth, within my discussion section, I will explore Blue Bell’s product-

harm crisis through the lens of discourse of renewal. Finally, I will posit implications for discourse of renewal, as well as offer a new crisis communication model, which I call crisis restoration.

## ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY

In 1907, the Washington County dairy-farmers' cooperative opened the Brenham Creamery Company in Brenham, Texas (Madan, 2010). The dairy-farmers of Washington County took an abandoned cotton gin and converted it into a creamery (Madan, 2010). By 1911, the Brenham Creamery Company began producing ice cream (Madan, 2010). In 1930, the organizational name changed from the Brenham Creamery Company to Blue Bell Creameries, a name that came from a Texas wild flower (Madan, 2010). In the early years, Blue Bell Creameries (Blue Bell) produced ice cream at the rate of two gallons a day (Madan, 2010). In 1958, the organization shifted from producing both butter and ice cream and chose to focus solely on ice cream operation (Madan, 2010). In 1969, perhaps the company's most famous flavor, Homemade Vanilla, was introduced (Madan, 2010). In 1992, Blue Bell officially took its place as a leader in the ice cream industry when it became the nation's number-two ice cream company (behind Breyers, at the time) (Madan, 2010). By 1993, Blue Bell's 2-gallon a day production of ice cream had increased to 15,000 gallons an hour (Madan, 2010).

As consumers became more health-conscious and dietary restrictions become more prevalent in society, Blue Bell adapted to meet consumer and market demands. In 1986, Blue Bell became the first U.S. ice cream manufacturer to create "lite" or lower calorie ice cream options, by using NutraSweet as an alternative to sugar (Madan, 2010). Madan (2010) also explains Blue Bell's diversification of products as growing to include, "frozen dietary desserts,

nonfat frozen yogurt, and frozen snacks, including Blue Bell Ice Cream Sandwiches, Snickers, Nestlé's Crunch, and Eskimo Pie" (Madan, 2010, par. 3).

Blue Bell, started by Texas dairy farmers, kept their close ties with Texas producers over the years. Blue Bell's original facility in Brenham was the largest privately held employer in the area, creating many job opportunities for the people living in the Brenham area (Madan, 2010). Furthermore, as Blue Bell grew, its Texas locations grew as well. Between 1960 and 1980 plants were opened in more major cities including Houston, Austin, Beaumont and Dallas (Madan, 2010). Blue Bell also created tourism opportunities for the small-town of Brenham Texas when the original Brenham facilities were significantly updated in 1988. It is estimated that an average of 117,000 people make their way to the Brenham plant annually to tour the creamery (Madan, 2010). Blue Bell also kept the close association with local Texas farmers by continuing to purchase their product materials, such as milk and cream, from Texas cooperatives of dairy farmers (Madan, 2010).

Blue Bell also realized the importance of advertising and the attention given to advertising grew with its increase in size. In 1987, Blue Bell created "Blue Bell Advertising Associates" which served as the organizations own in-house advertising agency (Madan, 2010). Madan argues, "With well-placed media advertising, Blue Bell effectively reinforced its image as the 'little creamery in Brenham' that makes 'the best ice cream in the country'" (Madan, 2010, par. 5). Their advertising and attention to local (Texas) dairy cooperatives, allowed for their Brenham plant to become an officially registered "Historic Place" as an agricultural processing facility in 1990.

In 2007, Blue Bell celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> year anniversary. The centennial brought with it reflections on Blue Bell's 100-year evolution, including a newspaper article written by Brad Hem (2006), journalist for the *Houston Chronicle*, which explained:

In its nearly 100 years, the so-called "little creamery in Brenham" has evolved from a handful of dairy farmers making butter from their excess milk to the country's third-largest ice cream maker with 250 products and 45 flavors available across the South. The small-town farmers 70 miles northwest of Houston invested \$2,200 back on Aug. 3, 1907, to turn their milk into butter. Last year, Blue Bell Creamery sold \$305 million worth of ice cream products, according to Packaged Facts, a food industry analyst firm (par. 1-2).

And in a book that focuses on the 100 years of Blue Bell, the centennial was described as a celebration of the Blue Bell's "100 years of making people smile" (MacInerney, 2007, pg. 1). In sum, Blue Bell has carefully crafted a story of a small-town creamery, started by a group of local farmers, which has grown to serve more consumers than they ever imagined they would while keeping their self-exuded care for the consumer at the forefront of their organizational identity.

#### BLUE BELL AS A BRAND COMMUNITY

Strong brands create a following. Research on the relationship between community members and the organization, the brand and the product has become a recognized area of study under the heading of brand community. One of the tenets of brand communities is the presence of a rich and long organizational history (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Freitas & Almeida, 2017). Within the organizational history section of this chapter, I explained the birth and evolution of Blue Bell as a company. Particularly important within the context of a brand community is the way in which Blue Bell crafted their identity as a "little creamery in Brenham" and an

organization dedicated to “making people smile.” In this section I will expound on Blue Bell’s consumer commitment by looking at the ways in which Blue Bell consumers have become “fans” and members of Blue Bell’s strong brand community. First, I will look at the shared consciousness of members, who are connected through their love of Blue Bell ice cream. Second, I will look at the rites and rituals that exist within Blue Bell’s narrative. Third, I will explore the presence of moral responsibility. Ultimately, I argue that Blue Bell serves as an exemplar case study of an organization which functions as a brand community.

Before beginning my analysis of Blue Bell as a brand community, I would like to distinguish between consumers and brand fans. Consumers are individuals, which buy products from an organization, in this case, Blue Bell. However, just because they consume Blue Bell products does not mean that they do so with high-levels of intentionality or commitment, two necessary components for brand community members. With this, consumers cannot equate to what I call “brand fans” or brand community members. Brand fans are intentional members of the Blue Bell brand community. In a book covering the first 100 years of Blue Bell, Howard Kruse, president and CEO of Blue Bell explains, “This book is a celebration of the can-do spirit of our founders and our employees. It is also the story of a marketplace and a great many innovations. But ultimately it is a tale of people who love their Blue Bell ice cream” (“Blue Bell,” 2007, p. ix). The book then, is written for the brand fans, the loyal consumers and the people who sustain the brand community. Thus, when I say consumer, I mean those who consume or might potentially consume Blue Bell products while brand fans are the ones who do so with intentionality and commitment to Blue Bell as a brand.

Shared consciousness within a brand community is largely understood through legitimacy meaning a connection to other brand fans (community members) and differentiation from mere

consumers. Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) explain that the connection that brand fans feel towards one another can exist even if the members have never met one another. Furthermore, Blue Bell promotes a brand community in that their leadership often calls their loyal consumers “fans.” Following the product recall associated with Blue Bell’s product harm crisis, brand fans connected together to share in the loss of their beloved Blue Bell ice cream. In a July 2015 *Washington Post* article, journalist Thad Moore writes about the potential returning of Blue Bell products, and explains:

It was welcome news for the company’s loyal fans, who have asked for weeks when they might see tubs of Blue Bell ice cream in grocery stores again in streams of tweets dotted with crying emojis and the company’s telling Twitter handle, @ILoveBlueBell. U.S. Rep. Joe Barton (R), who represents a slice of Texas more than a hundred miles from Brenham, last week excitedly tweeted a news story about the coming tests, saying ‘There is nothing better on a hot #Texas summer day than @ILoveBlueBell! Can’t wait for it to be back! Others spoke of the company as though scoops of homemade vanilla and butter pecan were lovers who got away. ‘I miss you,’ one fan tweeted, as another held out hope for the ice cream like a forlorn lover: ‘If it’s over, just say so, and I’ll move on. I’ll be OK, really’ (par. 17-19).

@ILoveBlueBell served as a hashtag that could connect brand fans together in their mutually felt loss of Blue Bell products, and comments such as the ones provided above show the clear connection brand fans felt toward Blue Bell and its products.

Rites and rituals within a brand community is demonstrated predominately through celebration of the organization’s distinctness and continually reified through brand fans sharing their stories related to the organization. In celebration of Blue Bell’s centennial, a 66-city

celebration of Blue Bell took place (Miller, 2007). The one -hundred-year centennial was, in and of itself, a large-scale celebration, which Blue Bell called a “birthday party.” A Blue Bell fan, Byron Pruitt, was quoted saying, "Blue Bell is kind of like a family tradition with a lot of families . . . It becomes part of their family traditions, part of their picnics, part of their Sunday dinners . . . just part of their everyday life” (Miller, 2007, par. 17). Charlie Pyle, an owner of an ice-cream parlor in Brenham explains, “Here’s the thing – everybody has celebrated a birth or a wedding or a birthday with Blue Bell here . . . It’s just a part of life for us” (Moyer, par. 17 2015). The tradition of Blue Bell being present at both everyday events, larger life events, as well as celebrated during the centennial, speaks to the presence of rites and rituals of Blue Bell consumption.

A sense of moral responsibility within brand communities is the responsibility that brand fans feel to retain membership (perhaps through reminding members why they should stay in the community) as well as assisting other brand fans in consumptive practices. After the listeria outbreak that resulted in a product harm crisis, brand fans declarative in media stories a commitment to continue eating Blue Bell products once it was back on the store shelves. Thomas Schulte advocated for brand fans to maintain their membership by reminding the public that Blue Bell had done much for the community he grew up in (Brenham). He also explained the listeria outbreak in a friendly manner, “Things happen, and it looks like they’re addressing the issue, and they’re going to rectify everything, and everything will be good . . . this too will pass” (Herman, 2015, par. 14). Schulte is advocating that, while Blue Bell produced a tainted product, the issue is over and thus there was no need for brand fans to walk away from their community. He is one of many who advocated for member retention following the product harm crisis.

Ultimately, both the centennial and the Blue Bell product harm crisis served as events in which Blue Bell can be clearly seen as possessing the necessary markers of a brand community, with many loyal brand fans.

#### BLUE BELL: FRAMING ANALYSIS

While Blue Bell is a regional ice cream company, there was substantial media coverage of their listeria outbreak. Within the print media (news stories), Blue Bell's listeria outbreak contained five frames that were used to describe the product harm crisis: consumer's as "fans," instructing information, regulatory and strident measures, the heroic rise and fall, and the "long road" ahead. Particularly, instructing information, regulatory and strident measures, and the "long road" ahead were used with extremely high frequency. In this next section I will explain the ways that each of the five frames were deployed within the news story coverage, as well as provide an "other" frame that describes what was found within the coding process that did not fit into the purview of the frames listed above. I will begin with the three most dominant frames found within the media coverage, and then I will draw upon the notion of Blue Bell as a brand community to better interpret the final two frames, consumer's as "fans" and the heroic rise and fall.

##### *Instructing information*

The most frequently deployed frame within the Blue Bell crisis was instructing information, appearing in 95% of the news stories coded. This frame encompassed aspects of the news narrative including: confirmed cases of listeria illness linked to Blue Bell products/plants and products being recalled, the scientific ways of identifying and isolating specific listeria strains, and health-related risks associated with listeria.

The first way the instructing information frame was used by the media was to describe the outbreak/contamination at the plant facility and the products being recalled in association with the listeria findings. Products that were contaminated with listeria were initially connected to the Broken Arrow plant. However, after careful inspection by the FDA and health officials, both the Broken Arrow (Oklahoma) and the Brenham plant (Texas) tested positive for listeria (Jankowski, 2015). The product recall initially covered several items from the Broken Arrow plant, but after the aforementioned findings, a voluntary recall of all Blue Bell products took place. This voluntary recall included a staggering estimate of 8 million gallons of ice cream, sherbet, frozen yogurt and other frozen treats (Dinges & Grisales, 2015). The instructing information frame listed what products were being recalled (prior to the voluntary recall) and concern for the sanitizing freezers that might contain listeria due to a contaminated tub of ice cream (Abrams, 2015).

Secondly, the *instructing information* frame included the knowable facts of listeria from a science perspective. Listeria itself was described as “an infection that can be fatal for the very young and old and for those with weakened immune systems” (Herman, 2015, par. 5). Listeria also was described as a “bacteria that’s commonly present in the soil and the environment, especially in areas where there are animals like dairy cows” according to Kristy Bradley, an Oklahoma state epidemiologist (Cosgrove, 2015, par. 1). Furthermore, listeria is most commonly found in foods such as: unpasteurized milk, cheeses (particularly soft cheeses), deli meats and even produce such as kale or cabbage (Cosgrove, 2015). Listeria also is described as a “tricky” food borne bacterium in that: “it can lurk in many places, like raw milk and the soil on the bottom of a shoe. And it can linger in a factory for years, hiding in cool, moist areas” (Abrams, 2015, par. 11).

However, as complex as it is to find, a C.D.C. program created in 2013 allowed for the distinction of listeria strains to be made. The instructing information frame included quotes by scientific/medical experts, such as Dr. Neil Fishman, associate chief medical officer for the University of Pennsylvania health system, who explained, “This is sort of the magic of molecular fingerprinting” and further explained that until the C.D.C. programming, which is capable of capturing entire genomes and strains of listeria, “if there was listeria in South Carolina and listeria in Kansas, it would have been very difficult, if not impossible, to connect the two” (Abrams, 2015, par. 23). These mapping advancements of listeria strains allowed for particular strains to be viewed as distinct, which was an important part of the instruction information frame as it created certainty that the listeria outbreak was directly linked to Blue Bell facilities.

Third, instructing information was present in media coverage that framed listeria as being a serious food-borne illness, descriptions of symptoms and the number of victims in the Blue Bell product harm crisis that had fallen ill. The food-borne illness listeria was described as causing side effects like: “fever, muscle aches, headache, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, and convulsions. Symptoms may begin from three to 70 days after consuming the bacteria” (Foster, 2015, par. 9). Listeria was also described as being more rare than other food-borne illnesses, such as salmonella, but still considered as one of the most dangerous food-borne illnesses (Abrams, 2015). The dangerousness of listeria as a food-borne illness was further depicted by *New York Times* journalist Rachel Abrams (2015) as staggering when she used the numbers retrieved from the CDC to demonstrate that, “about 380 people die of salmonella every year, which translates to less than 1 percent of about one million annual cases. About 260 people, or about 16 percent of 1,600 cases, die of listeria every year” (par. 6). The instructing information frame also gave updates on consumers who become ill after eating Blue Bell. In all,

ten consumers took ill after eating Blue Bell products, three of which died (Herman, 2015). As earlier information suggests, listeria symptoms can present themselves anywhere from three to 70 days after entering the human body, and so while there were ten confirmed victims, the listeria cases linked to Blue Bell covered a five-year span (Dinges & Grisales, 2015).

### *Regulatory and strident measures*

The second frame present within the Blue Bell listeria outbreak was regulatory and strident measures. This frame was found present in 81 percent of the news stories coded. This frame included any mentions of process or regulatory changes such as changes in cleaning procedures, the closure of assembly lines, a need for a review of industry standards, etc. Particularly prevalent within the presence of this frame was the descriptions of Blue Bell's measures to review current processual practices and revise as need be. Grisales and Dinges (2015) explain the review of processual practices in their news story:

At each of its production facilities—what are at its Brenham headquarters, in Sylacauga, Ala., and in Broken Bow—Blue Bell has made repairs and conducted ‘thorough’ cleaning and sanitizing, including disassembling and steam cleaning equipment . . . Blue Bell has worked with a team of microbiologists to revise cleaning and sanitation procedures to eliminate possible contamination pathways, including redesigning workspaces and established protocols for environmental and product sample testing (par. 11-12).

Their cooperation to work with outside specialized teams, review procedures currently in place, and completely deep clean their facilities served as ways in which Blue Bell engaged in corrective action.

This frame also included strident measures that Blue Bell was taking to focus on consumer safety. Towards the end of April 2015, in response to Blue Bell's decisions to recall all

of their products, Blue Bell spokesmen Joe Robertson explained, “It was a tough decision, but it was the right decision . . . Every decision we’ve made throughout this, we’ve had the consumer in mind. We’re committed to doing whatever needs to be done, and in this case that was to take it all off the market” (Dinges & Grisales, 2015, par. 7). During the same time period, Blue Bell CEO Paul Kruse, explained Blue Bell’s care for consumer when he was quoted saying, “We’re coming to doing the 100 percent right thing, and the best way we can do that is to take all of our products off the market until we can be confident that they are all safe . . . our entire history has been about making the very best and highest quality ice cream and we intend to fix the problem” (Jankowski, 2015, par. 5-6). This frame cast Blue Bell as an organization dedicated to reviewing and correcting the issues because of the organization’s focus on consumer safety. Ultimately, the *regulatory and strident measures* frame served to craft a narrative that not only was Blue Bell engaging in corrective action, focused on consumer safety, they (Blue Bell) were confident that these strident measures would result in the company’s ability to once again make a product that was, “safe, wholesome and of the highest quality for you to enjoy” (Grisales & Dinges, 2015, par. 4).

### *The “long road” ahead*

The third frame present within this Blue Bell framing analysis was *the “long road” ahead*. This frame was found present in 67 percent of the news stories coded. This frame included any mentions of Blue Bell’s “road back” as a viable organization. This frame included Blue Bell making amends by apologizing for organizational actions and not meeting consumer expectations. In a message from Kruse, Blue Bell’s CEO:

We’re heart broken over the situation and apologize to all of our loyal Blue Bell fans and customers . . . our entire history has been dedicated to making the very best and the

highest quality ice cream we possibly could. And we are committed to fixing the problem. Ice cream is a joy and a pleasure to eat. It certainly is for me, and I do it every day. And it should never be a cause for concern. And for that we do apologize, and we're going to get it right (Herman, 2015, par. 4).

This apology is a unique crisis response strategy, especially for an organization engaging in discourse of renewal. However, quotes of Blue Bell leadership apologizing for past actions, such as the events that led up to the listeria outbreak, consistently ended with a focus on the future. In the above quote from Kruse, he explains the mistakes from the past with a promise to “get it right” in the future. Similarly, Kruse was quoted in a separate interview, explaining, “we have an obligation to do what is necessary to bring Blue Bell back and ensure its viability in the future” (Dinges & Grisales, 2015, par. 6). The “*long road*” *ahead* frame serves to focus on the future of Blue Bell. Larry Keener, CEO of Seattle-based International Product Safety Consultants, was quoted saying, “I think that they're leveraging the equity that remains in the brand . . . they are telling people the story that they are not focusing on the past, they are focusing on the future” (Grisales & Dinges, 2015, par. 22). And the road ahead for Blue Bell was not framed as an easy one. Larry Keener also noted, “They have a long road yet to travel . . . It will be a road of scrutiny like they have never seen before” (Grisales & Dinges, 2015, par. 5). The “*long road*” *ahead* frame captured both the more logistical road back for Blue Bell, such as their ability to return to producing ice cream, as well as their reputational road back.

The “*long road*” *ahead* frame described the vast amount of work, time, and money the organization would need to put in to return to production, the more logistical side of the road back. Dinges, a journalist for *Austin-American Statesmen*, explained, “Experts say the family-owned company will survive the current recall, but it will take lots of work—and lots of

money—to get past this ordeal” (2015, par. 4). Furthermore, the time frame that Blue Bell products were recalled and remained off the shelves was framed as detrimental to Blue Bell’s finances. Dwight Hill, a Dallas-based partner with retail consulting firm McMillan Doolittle, explained the financial impact that the product harm crisis on Blue Bell was significant in that, “they lost almost half the year, and it was the worst time of year . . . there will be a rebound, I fear it will be a slow one” (Grisales & Dinges, 2015, par. 33). While financial struggles served as a constraint for Blue Bell’s future, more worrisome was the concern that their reputation had been significantly impacted by the crisis.

The reputational aspects of “*long road*” *ahead* included the need to bridge the gap between consumer expectations and organizational actions. Grisales and Dinges (2015) speculated, “As Blue Bell prepares to return its products to store shelves at the end of the month, the company faces what some experts say could be the toughest part of its road back: trying to win back consumers’ trust and proving its products are safe” (par. 3). And event after production started, and the “road back” was in sight for Blue Bell’s ice cream, Rachel Abrams, a journalist for the *New York Times*, echoed the road back as including more than just a physical return to production, when she explained, “The company may still have an uphill battle to win over consumers, many of whom have already decided on their ice cream preferences deep into a hot humid August” (Abrams, 2015, par. 16). The “*long road*” *ahead* frame captured Blue Bell’s apology but unwavering focus on the future of the organization, the physical return of Blue Bell ice cream, as well as the acknowledgement that the toughest part of their return would be in regaining consumer trust which was predicted by many to be an uphill climb.

### *The heroic rise and fall*

The fourth frame present within the Blue Bell listeria outbreak was the heroic rise and fall. This frame was found present in 55 percent of the news stories coded. This frame highlighted Blue Bell's position as an industry leader and their "fall" from the position due to their product harm crisis. Milton Tate, then Mayor of Brenham, in a written statement expressed sadness for Blue Bell's product harm crisis, "Blue Bell has been an exemplary company and a key business in our community for more than 100 years. We wish them a speedy return to full operation" (Grisales & Dinges, 2015, par. 10). This "exemplary" company also was framed as having a virtuous organizational reputation, "due, in large part, to its great campaigns extolling happy cows and the simple pleasures of ice cream" (Herman, 2015, par. 3). And the heroic elements of this frame can be seen in the way in which Blue Bell's success story and rise within the industry was framed in the media, "For more than a century, Blue Bell ice cream has played off its roots as a favorite southern treat from tiny Brenham, Tex., to quietly become one of the nation's biggest brands" (Moore, 2015, par. 1). News stories also framed Blue Bell as never having issues prior to the Listeria outbreak, while acknowledging this outbreak was detrimental to Blue Bell's "heroic" organizational status. Early news stories within the crisis event began with lines such as, "Blue Bell Creameries is nursing a black eye after the first recall in its 108-year history" (Dinges, 2015, par. 1). However, the "first recall in its 108-year history" was a repetitive fact present within the newspaper coverage of the crisis.

While Blue Bell is framed as a heroic organization prior to the product harm crisis, this frame also functions to shed light on Blue Bell's fall from industry leader due to the listeria outbreak. Phil Lempert, food industry analyst, explained, "When there's a recall and somebody does something quickly and when they handle it properly, we forgive it . . . when it's the entire

product line or the entire company . . . people are very concerned” (Abrams & Tabuchi, 2015, par. 5). And this concern grew as more information became available to the public. In an open records request conducted by the *Austin-American Statesman*, the FDA report was said to contain the following information:

Inspectors listed seven observations at the plant, including construction that contributed to leaky condensation that could contaminate food, failure to conduct necessary testing, concerns over suitable outer garments worn by employees, and hygiene issues, such as a worker seen not washing his hands while handling a product (Grisales & Dinges, 2015, par. 7).

What seemed to be a “never before issue” now was being framed as a systemic issue.

The heroic rise and fall frame cast the crisis as both embarrassing (for Blue Bell) as well as Blue Bell being caught acting irresponsibly. Crisis guru Gene Grabowski explained, “This company cares more about the health and well-being of consumers than any company I’ve ever worked for . . . This is a company that’s always trying to do the right thing. This has been embarrassing for the family” (Dinges, 2015, par. 8). After the FDA report became public, Blue Bell’s irresponsibility was highlighted in the print media, “The recall also has exposed larger, more troubling managerial, sanitation and training issues at Blue Bell. A brand once so fiercely defended by Texas loyalists that one criticized it at one’s peril” (“Blue Bell Faces,” 2015, par. 6). Similarly, former FDA associate commissioner of foods and a food safety consultant David Acheson explained, “In light of these reports, it says the food safety culture was not there” and demonstrated “ignorance or worse” (Grisales & Dinges, 2015, par. 3). Thus, the *heroic rise and fall* functioned as a frame to tell the narrative of a small-town creamery, an industry leader, with

no issues prior to the recall, falling from their pedestal, embarrassed, accused of having a poor food safety culture, and acting irresponsibly.

### *Consumers as “fans”*

The fifth frame present within the Blue Bell listeria outbreak was a consumer as “fans” frame. This frame was found present in 37 percent of the news stories coded. While this frame appears the most infrequently within the media coverage, it speaks to the existence of a Blue Bell as a brand community. This frame includes depictions of Blue Bell consumers as being fans as well as Blue Bell being part of both Texas and fan identity. *Consumers as “fans”* frame also includes mentions of Blue Bell having a strong/loyal fan base.

Brand loyalty and brand fans are frequently depicted within the *consumer as “fans”* frame. Crisis guru Gene Grabowski explained, “Brand loyalty for this company is as great as I’ve ever seen . . . consumers trust Blue Bell, and they want to see the company succeed” (Dinges, 2015, par. 30). And similarly, print news coverage explained, “Despite its problems, Blue Bell has built up such a strong fan base over the years that many consumers—particularly in Texas—are going to return to its products as soon as they are available, industry experts say” (Dinges & Grisales, 2015, par. 17). Brand fans were also quoted, such as Michael Dennis, an Austin-based pastor, who explained, “They’ve done a great job capturing that kind of small-town feel in their product, I grew up on it. I love it” (Herman, 2015, par. 11).

*Consumers as “fans”* frame also served to depict the close ties Blue Bell had with both Brenham and Texas more largely. After the product recall, Terry Roberts, City Manager of Brenham, described Blue Bell as having, “a very large footprint in our community” (Grisales & Dinges, 2015, par. 10). Similarly, a news article covering the crisis, explained that while many corporations might be associated with corporate greed, Blue Bell was beloved, it was Texan, and

went on to explain, “That’s why you’re rooting for Blue Bell this week. Blue Bell and Brenham are synonymous, so much so that when you think of Brenham, you think of Blue Bell before you think of it as the birthplace of Texas” (Herman, 2015, par. 9). Nancy Martin, a Texas resident, said, “There is no other ice cream but Blue Bell . . . I am just a firm believer that they have cleaned up their act and taking it very seriously, and I think it’s going to be fine. I will be in line” (Dinges & Grisales, 2015, par. 24). The loyalty that brand “fans” showed towards Blue Bell was seemingly unfaltering.

Blue Bell and Texas were largely inseparable within the *consumers as brand “fans”* frame. Tiffany Chen, co-owner of Tiff’s Treats, said, “As a Texas brand, we have loved supporting another Texas brand in Blue Bell ice cream . . . We are so sorry for their troubles right now and look forward to working with them again, as soon as things are cleared up on their end” (Dinges & Grisales, 2015, par. 24). And in light of the product recall, news stories mourned the loss of Blue Bell ice cream for the Texas community. For instance, one article said, “For many Texans, this summer will be missing one favorite small pleasure: Blue Bell ice cream” (“Blue Bell Faces,” 2015, par. 1).

When Texas billionaire Sid Bass announced his investment in the company, he was not quoted as explaining this decision as a sound business move or ice cream as an industry he had been carefully planning to pursue, but rather, he stated his investment in Blue Bell was in order to “Ensure the successful return of our ice cream to the market . . . we are excited to be a part of the Blue Bell brand family” (“Billionaire Investment,” 2015, par. 1-4). “Our” ice cream, again, reflects the presence of a brand community. And when ice cream production dates were finally announced, news stories declared, “Happier days are almost here again for Texas ice cream lovers” (Webb, 2015, par. 1). Directly after Blue Bell was available for purchase again, Texas

Governor Greg Abbott posted a photo of himself with seven tubs of Blue Bell ice cream on Twitter and invited Blue Bell fans to “RT if you’re excited” (Herman, 2015, par 21). Brand fans also made cheeky t-shirts that said, “I survived the Blue Bell famine of 2015.” Ultimately, *consumers as brand fans* frame served to show the strong levels of brand commitment that brand fans had, as well as the deep connection between Texas identity and Blue Bell itself.

## DISCUSSION

### *Discourse of Renewal*

Within this section of the discussion I will highlight the ways in which Blue Bell’s product harm crisis reflects certain aspects of discourse of renewal. As noted earlier, Seeger and Ulmer (2001) argue that discourse of renewal contains four characteristics: Provisional-focus, prospective approach, communicating optimism & lastly, the ability of leadership to frame the crisis. Within the section focused on provisional communication, I will use an initial letter written by CEO and President of Blue Bell Creameries to explain the ways in which the organizational discourse utilized a forward-focus approach. While analyzing Blue Bell’s focus on rebuilding (the future) and communicating optimism, I will use quotes found in the coded news stories. And lastly, I will use the frames I found present within my analysis to explore Blue Bell’s ability to frame the crisis itself.

Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger (2015) acknowledge that crises can create physical, psychological and economical vulnerabilities for victims and those impacted by the crisis itself. The first tenet of discourse of renewal (DoR) is that crisis response should be provisional rather than strategic in nature. For Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger “provisional” is directly connected to an organization’s ability to respond to a crisis in “instinctive ways deriving from long-established patterns of doing business . . . based on the positive values and virtues of a leader rather than a

strategic response that emphasized escaping issues of responsibility or blame” (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2015, p. 231). A prospective focus is also future-oriented, focusing on the organization moving forward and past the crisis. Thus, provisional discourse is argued to be instinctive in nature, not strategic, and should be largely informed by the values and virtues of the organizational leadership.

Within the media coverage of Blue Bell’s listeria outbreak, the organization’s response can be viewed as provisional by the ways in which Blue focuses on their organizational history and values, taking care of the consumer, and diligently solving the problem so that their ice cream can return to the shelves. Paul Kruse, CFO of Blue Bell, in a letter sent to consumers towards the beginning of the crisis, explains:

We want to thank our consumers and the retail customers we have served for generations for their patience, understanding, and loyalty during this difficult period. Nothing is more important to us than maintaining your trust. All of us at Blue Bell hope you will give us the opportunity to continue to serve you” (“Blue Bell Creameries,” 2015, par. 5-6).

With a product recall as large as Blue Bell’s, the crisis itself could have rendered Blue Bell financially bankrupt by causing the organization to become no longer viable. However, even from the onset, Blue Bell used notions of consumer trust to explain that while the time might be “difficult” there would be a future for Blue Bell Creameries and their consumers.

Similarly, in the same letter, Kruse acknowledged that the consumer had been impacted by the food-borne illness, “I want to personally apologize for any anxiety or inconvenience caused by recent recalls of certain Blue Bell products . . . this type of event creates concern for our consumers and for our retail partners, who for more than a century, have come to trust us to provide quality ice cream products” (“Blue Bell Creameries,” 2015, par. 1). Blue Bell chose to

link their organizational value of “trust” to their loyal consumers, while also acknowledging the longevity of the organization itself and the quality product Blue Bell has produced over the years.

The third way Blue Bell’s provisional narrative functioned was to explain to consumers and retailers that they were diligently trying to solve the problem to move past the crisis:

We are working diligently with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to investigate this issue as its inspectors conduct their examination of our production facilities. After our work is completed, we will review the FDA’s findings and make necessary adjustments to our operations (“Blue Bell Creameries,” 2015, par. 3).

By using their history of being a responsible organization, and their desire to not lose consumer trust, while focusing on resolving the issue and moving forward, Blue Bell was able to create a provisional narrative within their crisis response.

The second characteristic of DoR is a focus on the future, which often intertwines with the aforementioned provisional characteristic. Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow (2007) explain, “While image restoration focuses on explaining and interpreting what has happened and who is at fault, renewal concerned with what will happen and how the organization will move forward” (p. 132). This characteristic often is enacted through physical and reputational “rebuilding” during and after a crisis event. With Blue Bell, before the crisis was even over Blue Bell’s CEO Kruse made Blue Bell’s intention of moving forward as a company very clear. Similarly, instead of depicting Blue Bell’s product harm crisis as an organization ending, print media highlighted Blue Bell’s unique and loyal consumer base. James Moody, a co-founder of an Austin-based advertising agency called Guerilla Suit, was quoted as saying, “I think they’re in a better spot than most . . .

They've got a pretty good reputation. It's a great Texas brand" which Moody explained would be beneficial for Blue Bell as they worked on rebuilding their image and moving forward.

Rebuilding after a crisis and maintaining a future focus must address reputational gaps that need to be amended and rebuilt along with process and operational issues that need to be addressed for the organization to truly move forward. Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow (2007) explain, that in the case studies previously examined and found to have successfully used DoR, a commonality was found in, "the leaders focused less on the actual damage and more on how the companies' planned to emerge from the crisis" (p. 132). Blue Bell's crisis plan to re-emerge as an industry leader was transparently given to the public. Blue Bell's plan was to regain the trust of consumers, to reevaluate their practices and to correct the issues that would allow Blue Bell to come back as a viable organization.

The third characteristic of DoR is the ability of the organization to communicate optimism through capitalizing on the opportunities that can be found embedded within a crisis. According to Reirson, Sellnow & Ulmer (2009) "every crisis inherently embodies both difficulties and opportunities" (p. 126). Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow (2007) argue, "Renewal emphasizes these inherent opportunities of crises rather than the constraints associated with issues of blame and fault" (p. 132). For DoR, focusing on the opportunities that a crisis brings can be viewed as, "inherently an optimistic form of communication and focuses on the ability of the organization to reconstitute itself by capitalizing on the opportunities imbedded in the crisis" (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2015, p. 232). Within this characteristic, the essential argument is that optimism and coming back "better than ever" is a more effective crisis communication strategy than focusing on blame and taking a pessimistic approach.

Blue Bell's approach within their crisis management can be seen as optimistic in that news stories described their commitment to, "deep-cleaning their facilities, as well as making a number of repairs" (Dinges, 2015, par. 9). Blue Bell also engaged in retraining and revision protocols before their production resumed (Dinges, 2015, par. 8). Blue Bell took the crisis event of listeria outbreak, and focused on the opportunity to reevaluate their processes and training programs. Blue Bell's Vice President of sales and marketing, Ricky Dickson, was quoted saying, "Over the past several months we have been working to make our facilities even better and to ensure that everything we produce is safe, wholesome and of the highest quality for you to enjoy . . . I have been humbled by the incredible support you all have shown the Blue Bell family" (Grisales & Dinges, 2015, par. 4). The way in which Blue Bell leveraged their need to retrain and update their production processes as a positive change, as well as their excitement over creating "even better" facilities and ice cream of "the highest quality" are examples of their organizational attempt to translate crisis opportunities into optimistic outcomes.

Lastly, the ability of organizational leadership to frame the crisis narrative is imperative for DoR. Within image restoration more broadly, there is a focus on careful narrative construction because rhetorical strategies are "designed to symbolically position the organization more favorably regarding questions of cause, blame, and harm" (Seeger & Ulmer, 2002, p. 129). DoR builds from that as Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow (2007) explain, "Leaders play a critical role in renewal because they embody the company and its values" (p. 132). At the heart of the model, discourse of renewal is a leader-based form of crisis communication. Leaders that do not have credibility prior to the crisis, or a connection to stakeholders, "are not likely to be trusted, believed, or followed" (Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow, 2007, p. 133). The ability of Blue Bell's leadership to frame the crisis can be analyzed through the media framing of the crisis itself.

Within Kruse's initial letter to consumers, I argue he created a provisional narrative which included the following points: a focus on their organizational history and values, a commitment to take care of the consumer, and Blue Bell's continued commitment to solve the problem and move forward as an organization. To test the ability of Kruse, and other Blue Bell leadership to effectively frame the crisis, I used the analysis of the letter above in juxtaposition with the news frames found present within the Blue Bell print coverage. I found that the same narrative created by Kruse was found within the coded news stories. Within the Heroic Rise and Fall of Blue Bell frame, Blue Bell's long-history of being successful and an industry leader was described. The Regulatory and Strident Measures frame focuses on honing in on Blue Bell's care for consumer safety and taking care of their consumers. Also within the Regulatory and Strident Measures frame, Blue Bell's carefulness, the need for diligence, retraining employees, reviews of industry standards, etc., served to frame Blue Bell as committed to solving the problem. And the "Long Road" Ahead frame, which is future-focused, served to orient consumers and the mass public on Blue Bell's reputational and operational return as a viable organization.

Ultimately, Blue Bell's crisis management can be seen as possessing all four characteristics of DoR. Furthermore, this section briefly described the ways in which Blue Bell's leadership, particularly their CEO, worked to frame the crisis which then permeated into the journalistic framing of the crisis as well. Within the next section of this chapter, I will explore all five frames I found present within my news framing analysis of Blue Bell's product harm crisis as well as their frequency within news stories.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Within the introductory case study given in chapter 1, Malden Mills served as an organization that chose to go above and beyond to return to operation and viability as an organization when faced with a dire and devastating crisis. This was in large part due to the CEO and owner Aaron Feuerstein's decision to ensure his organization protected its workers, and the community in which Malden Mills operated. The analysis of the Malden Mills case served as the foundation for DoR. From this early study, DoR has become one of the theoretical lenses employed in the analysis of crisis communication.

This dissertation project sought to better understand and unpack discourse of renewal as a crisis management response strategy, building off earlier case studies such as Malden Mills. The focus on one of two cases: (1) Odwalla, a recognized case of DoR and (2) Blue Bell, a case I argue fits with DoR. In the next section, I will revisit my research questions, originally posited in my introduction chapter. Second, I will explore the implications of this framing study on discourse of renewal. Third, I will posit a new crisis management strategy, which I call crisis revival.

Previous case studies using discourse of renewal have focused on the ways in which the organization in crisis, have attempted to frame a crisis. However, these studies rely upon rhetorical case studies and do not employ actual framing analysis. By conducting a framing analysis of Odwalla and Blue Bell's respective product harm crises, richer insight into the research practice of DoR was gleaned. Prior research on DoR has largely been that of rhetorical case studies, and interviews with organizational leaders. By conducting rhetorical analysis and

internal perceptions of crisis situations, the research misses the ways in which other stakeholders might perceive the crisis event(s) as a result of how the media frame the crisis. My framing analysis allowed for the exploration of how DoR strategies were used or reinforced within print media—furthering current understandings of DoR as a crisis management tool beyond rhetorical case studies. It is critical to understand if the DoR frames translate from the managers to the media. This transfer is important because most stakeholders experience crises through the media rather than direct interaction/experience with the crisis event itself. Hence there is a need to understand the relationship between corporate and media framing of organizational crises more broadly (Coombs, 2010).

#### OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

One of the aims of this dissertation project was to understand the ways in which the corporate framing aligned (or were inconsistent) with the media framing of the crisis. The point was to explore if media framing utilized the tenants of discourse of renewal. This point is reflected in my research question: Do the framed deployed by media align with the corporate frames in crisis cases that utilize the discourse of renewal? Within my framing analysis of both Odwalla and Blue Bell's product-harm crises, tenants of discourse of renewal were found to hold consistently between the corporate framing of the crisis and media framing of the crisis. The framing analysis provided a different set of data that could confirm the transfer of the DoR frame the organization to the media (newspapers).

This dissertation explored in crisis contexts the following question: Can a renewal narrative dominate media coverage when there is actual evidence to document organizational negligence helped to create the crisis? This is a critical point because evidence of organizational negligence could provide an alternative frame to DoR—a counter narrative. Within the case of

Odwalla, organizational wrongdoing was missing almost entirely from the media framing of the crisis itself. Instead, responsibility for the health-related crisis was shifted to the bacterium itself, E. Coli. Minimized within the print media coverage of Odwalla's crisis was their guilty-plea of selling adulterated food products, consequential probation, and five settlements with families whose children had been impacted by the 1996 E. Coli outbreak (Smith, 1998). Odwalla is touted, and largely remembered, as being socially responsible and ethical in their response (citations). However, being found guilty in a court of law suggests organizational wrongdoing, which is largely absent from the narrative of Odwalla's crisis both within print media and previous case studies analyses. Thus, their guilty plea served as evidence of wrongdoing, yet Odwalla was still able to effectively use discourse of renewal to maneuver past their crisis, suggesting that a renewal narrative, even when organizational wrongdoing exists, can dominate media coverage of the crisis.

Within my Blue Bell analyses, their organizational wrongdoing was more prominent in the media coverage. Particularly, within the *heroic rise and fall* frame, Blue Bell's crisis was narrated as a "fall" from industry leader through irresponsible acts. However, unique within the Blue Bell crisis was their acknowledgement of responsibility and multiple apologies made by the organizational leadership for not meeting consumer expectations. The presence of the *"long road" ahead* frame serves as a frame of renewal, with expert predictions of how Blue Bell could make a comeback after not meeting consumers' expectations. Thus, Blue Bell, an organization with evidence found of wrongdoing, still had the presence of a renewal narrative within their media coverage. Ultimately, my framing analyses of both Odwalla and Blue Bell found evidence of organizational wrong doing, while also exhibiting a renewal narrative within the media coverage of both crises. This confirms that even when an organization can be seen as responsible

(at least in part) for the crisis, renewal is still a viable crisis management strategy that can dominate crisis media coverage. Thus, DoR was utilized to create a dominant narrative of that shapes the memory of the crisis, which I will further elaborate on later in this chapter.

This dissertation project also sought to better understand the question: Does brand commitment seem to facilitate the discourse of renewal? Within my analysis, I used the brand community literature to illuminate brand commitment within the case studies. Brand communities are a “group of consumers who organize themselves around a lifestyle, shared activities and ethos of a brand” (Freitas & Almeida, 2017, p. 87). According to Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) the three markers, which solidify that a group is a community, are: consciousness of kind, the presence of shared rituals and traditions, and sense of moral responsibility. Within my analysis of Odwalla, the markers of a brand community were potentially present. Thus, Odwalla could arguably be considered a brand community. Furthermore, within the *change as detrimental* frame, Odwalla consumers were often quoted about the importance of unpasteurized juice, which Odwalla produced, due to the increase in nutrients and other healthful aspects. The consumers defending Odwalla’s products, which were arguably perceived as dangerous to the common public, is consistent with a brand community member’s moral obligation to a brand community. Ultimately, the quotes of consumers and victim’s families supporting Odwalla were consistent with basic concepts of brand communities.

Within the Blue Bell case study, I argued that a brand community was present within my analysis. Furthermore, Blue Bell consumers were called “fans” by organizational actors, industry experts, and journalist alike, which is seen in the Consumers as “Fans” frame. The acknowledgement of Blue Bell as a brand community was implicitly touted (in the media) as the best and worst aspect of Blue Bell’s crisis management. The acknowledgement of an expectation

gap between consumer expectations and Blue Bell's actions was displayed in the "*long road*" *ahead* frame. These expectation gaps are less meaningful/significant for members within a brand community, due to their moral obligation to support the organization and willingness to help the organization overcome these gaps. Since the Blue Bell crisis, organizational leadership has continued a narrative consistent with that of a brand community. In that as Blue Bell announced plans to expand their Brenham plant, they explained the need for expansion was to keep up with the needs of their Blue Bell fans. This is something that should be further researched in future studies surrounding Blue Bell as an exemplar of a brand community in the context of crisis management. Ultimately, brand communities were found to serve as a positive facilitator of renewal as a crisis management strategy.

Lastly, this dissertation sought to better understand how power and brand communities could help to create a more complete and nuanced approach to organizational re-birth? The Blue Bell case study, I argue, can serve as a case study in which current notions of benefits of pre-crisis reputation as a reservoir of goodwill can be interpreted more effectively through the brand community literature. Brand community is a more informed way to understand and explain the relationship between pre-crisis reputation and its equitable use within crisis management. Similarly, Odwalla's ability to capitalize on consumers and brand loyalty, suggested brand communities can in fact be a powerful resource within crisis management. What makes brand communities a power resource is that they facilitate an organization's ability to control the narrative and to suppress/hide negative information that could hurt the organization's reputation or bottom line. Due to the erasure of Odwalla's court procedure from the larger and known narrative of their crisis management, larger ethical implications arise when thinking of brand communities as power resources in times of crisis. Ultimately, I found that notions of power and

brand communities together can further current crisis literature. However, the discourse of renewal is not an effective way to capture and to explain that relationship. I will explicate those problems and offer an alternative theory that captures the role of brand communities in rebirth-oriented crisis responses.

## CRITIQUES OF DISCOURSE OF RENEWAL

Within my framing analysis, my research questions led to the discovery of several critiques of discourse of renewal as a crisis management theory. In this next section I will explore the ways in which DoR can become problematized and murky as a crisis management strategy. First, crisis communication as a field of study is inherently strategic in nature, but discourse of renewal posits itself as an “inherent response” as opposed to strategic. Secondly, discourse of renewals de-emphasis on past actions and reputation are inconsistent with the aims of the theory itself. Third, discourse of renewal’s focus on the ability of leadership to frame the crisis and frame the crisis narrative, brings larger implications of ethics, power and dominant narrative-making. Fourth, discourse of renewal is implicitly a crisis management strategy focused on brand communities particularly, which is not only unacknowledged, but also a seemingly large piece in the effective utilization of discourse of renewal as a crisis response strategy. Ultimately, I argue, a new crisis management strategy needs to be conceptualized, which focuses on renewal post-crisis, which I call crisis revival.

### *Discourse of Renewal As “Inherent” Crisis Response*

First, discourse of renewal was created as an inherent (as opposed to a strategic) response strategy. Of significance to the assessment of discourse of renewal as a crisis response strategy, is the fact that it was premised on image restoration theory. Image restoration, at its most basic level, acknowledges, “Image is essential to organizations” (Benoit, 1997, pg. 177). Reirson,

Sellnow and Ulmer (2009) argue, “A discourse of renewal extends beyond image restoration by emphasizing the potential for organizations to innovate and adapt during the post-crisis period” (p. 115). Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger (2007), explain the focus of discourse of renewal is distinct, in that, “Instead of developing responses designed to achieve some strategic outcome such as protecting the organization’s image or escaping blame, renewal discourse is a more natural and immediate response to an event” (p. 131). Both Odwalla and Blue Bell were able to make their crisis response proactively, and both received mostly favorable news coverage of their choice to “do the right thing,” particularly Odwalla, who was framed as socially responsible within the print media coverage. They further argue that ultimately, strategic responses will not stand the test of time (Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger, 2007). Thus, the first issue with discourse of renewal more broadly is that, as an extension of image restoration theory, it takes the foundation of its predecessor (IRT). IRT is predicated on the image and reputation while IRT states that image/reputation is lesser in significant than notions of naturalness and inherent actions. DoR seems to be of an alternative to image restoration theory rather than an extension of it.

While discourse of renewal was stated to be a theory premised on inherency, or organizational actors doing the right thing, to say that the crisis management theory is not strategic is largely problematic. Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger (2007) state, “In the case of renewal, an organization seeks to rhetorically structure reality so that its crisis response is portrayed in a manner stakeholders view favorably” (p. 131). The “structuring of reality” and ultimate attempt to frame the crisis to stakeholders in a favorable light, is in every way a strategic attempt to move past a crisis.

Furthermore, strategies have been argued previously to either be planned or emergent in nature. Mintzberg & Waters (1985) explain that the two can be distinguished in the following

way, “deliberate strategies-realized as intended-from emergent strategies- patterns or consistencies realized despite, or in the absence of, intention” (p. 257). While discourse of renewal may have originally been seen as an emergent strategy, gleaned from case studies of crises in which organizational actors acted out of instinct, with care for the community, and been descriptive in nature, it cannot be argued to be so now. Whether emergent, deliberate, and a combination of the two, DoR is strategic.

Through the creation and articulation of discourse of renewal, the argument was being made that its use allows organizations could maneuver past a crisis (assuming they fit the narrow focus of the theory). Discourse of renewal then, is a realized, intended and deliberate strategy, and through the careful explication of the characteristics and tenants an organization needs to possess and enact, it can no longer be viewed as natural or inherent to an organization. Furthermore, as it was not intended to be a strategy, a current gap exists within discourse of renewal, as issues of strategy are not addressed rendering it a seemingly ineffective or underdeveloped theory of crisis renewal within organizational contexts.

#### *Over-focus on the Future and Evasion of Responsibility*

Second, discourse of renewal, as a crisis management theory aims to focus on the future and the viability of the organization. What is missing from the renewal framework is an acknowledgement of the importance of reputational losses for an organization during crisis. Crises can be viewed as threats to an organization’s reputation (Coombs, 2007). Crises have long been viewed as reputational threats, with the ability to impact stakeholder behavior (Barton, 2001; Dowling, 2002). By solely acknowledging the importance of the non-descript “reservoir of goodwill” that must be obtained during the pre-crisis stage, renewal is a disconcerting theory when situated within crisis communication as a field. DoR indirectly recognize the importance or

reputation while trying to avoid the concept. Ultimately DoR's avoidance of reputation is more liability than asset because it strips the theory of the potential explanatory power of reputation.

Further, renewal is argued to be, "more than a reputational Band-Aid; true renewal requires a cultural realignment of the organization following a crisis" (Cotton, Veil & Iannarino, 2015, p. 28). By focusing on the prospective aspects of crisis management, and intentionally not addressing past organizational issues, how can true "realignment occur"? Discourse of renewal does not hold an organization to being ethical or committed to fixing the processes but rather it focuses on the future and being "better than ever." Particularly, within both case studies analyzed within this dissertation, the focus was less on finding the structural and processual breakdowns which led to the product harm crises and more of the focus was on both organizations returning to: industry leader (Blue Bell) and healthful juice maker (Odwalla). By focusing solely on the future, a true "realignment" is in fact not the focus of DoR. Realignment applies some past with which the future is aligned. However, DoR chooses to ignore the past making realignment problematic. While organizations must always be concerned about their future viability, without finding the system and process failures that caused the crisis in the first place, true renewal, I argue, cannot be reached.

Corrective action, while present in discourse of renewal, is a superficial attempt to frame the organization's actions as responsible. There is no depth to the issues that created the problem and the organizational cultural aspects that might have potentially led to the crisis itself. Corrective action without talking about what the organization is seeking to correct is masked corrective action and missing the transparency that stakeholders often call for in crisis contexts. Instructing and adjusting information serve to alleviate stakeholder concerns and help them deal with difficulties surrounding a crisis, but by masking the corrective action steps being taken, by

not looking to the past to better understand the organizational future, discourse of renewal fails to adequately inform its stakeholders and dissuade their concerns in a meaningful manner.

### *Alignment of Frames and Dominant Narrative-Making*

Thirdly, the alignment of media frames to corporate frames within crisis brings not only the acknowledgement of “ability to leadership” frame a crisis, which is consistent with discourse of renewal, but also larger implications of dominant narrative-making. The notions of dominance, privilege and hegemonic narratives that can be found in collective memory studies are important in better understanding the ways in which renewal discourse can also have a silencing aspect for those impacted by the crisis. Public memory can be viewed as a dominant narrative created by the few to guide the many (Casey, 2004). Similarly, crisis rhetors attempt to create a dominant narrative to guide conversations surrounding organizational crises. Blight (1989) explains the strategic aspects of memory construction when he argues, “as a culture, we choose which footprints from the past will best help us walk in the present” (p. 1169). The “footprints” of an important event, such as an organizational crisis, are chosen wisely, chosen carefully and chosen with future interests in mind—to help an organization move past a crisis most effectively. Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow (2007) argue that when using a renewal approach, organizations attempt to “rhetorically structure reality” in a way that stakeholders might view favorably (p. 131). This rhetorical construction is consistent with Casey’s (2004) notions of public memory as being created by the dominant (organizational rhetors) to guide the masses.

Discourse of renewal has a strong potential to serve as a dominant narrative within society, as seen through the alignment of organizational/corporate frames to the media framing of both Blue Bell and Odwalla. From a public memory perspective, dominant narratives are generally “handed-down” narratives, but they can be challenged. Particularly, dominant

narratives can be challenged if the crafted narrative has glaringly obvious falsities and can be proven to be an inaccurate representation of the events that transpired (Casey, 2004). Unless someone points out the dominant narrative as problematic, it will hold within society.

Particularly, as can be seen through the case of Odwalla, organizational management have the ability to successfully use discourse of renewal and not be remembered as being irresponsible, even when found to be irresponsible in a court of law.

Those in power inherently craft dominant narratives. But more problematic is the ways in which discourse of renewal seeks to create dominant narratives while seemingly evading past actions by focusing solely on the future—ultimately silencing victim’s voices. While renewal can be seen as a positive strategy that helps a community rebuild and create hope for the future and faith in the corporation involved, a critique of renewal discourse is much like public memory because it silences some voices. Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger (2015) argue, “Crises, by definition, have created some harm and have the potential to create even more. Often, a crisis creates victims who are physically, psychologically, and economically vulnerable” (p. 217). The inherent focus of renewal on the future through provisional discourse can potentially discredit and silence voices that want and need to mourn and remember the tragedy that occurred. Particularly, both case studies analyzed within this dissertation project focused on crises that involved human death.

By focusing on the dominant narrative construction of the future, lives of victims, such as 16 month-old Anna Gimmetstad who died during Odwalla’s E. coli crisis, are not mourned by society, but rather carefully forgotten. Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger (2015) acknowledge, “almost all crises, even if they were not caused by unethical conduct, have ethical implications” yet DoR ignores some important ethical concerns (p. 213). Dominant narratives are powerful. In the case

of Odwalla, the dominant narrative construction through the use of discourse of renewal allowed for the erasure of a problematic organizational history through aligning media framing and public relation case studies that only acknowledged the short-focused success of Odwalla's crisis management. The "footprints" that are remembered in the context of Odwalla, are those which are most favorable, most useful, in the viability and future of Odwalla as an organization. What is missing, is the footprints of the people who died tragically during the crisis, silently remembered by victims families. Ultimately, discourse of renewal, brings with it ethical implications, which are not clearly considered, particularly within the dominant-narrative construction and forward-focus aspects of the crisis management approach itself.

#### *Brand Communities and DoR*

Fourth, my analysis on Blue Bell demonstrated not only the organizational use of discourse of renewal but also that brand communities serve as a unique and useful audience within crisis management. Pre-crisis reputation and reservoir of goodwill are currently weak notions within crisis management literature, because of their ambiguity. In general, these terms are vague and lack substantive data to support them. Crises have widely been argued to damage reputation, and pre-crisis reputations being favorable in and of themselves cannot entirely protect organizational reputations from harm in times of crises. Instead, prior reputation can be viewed as equitable within crisis contexts for an organization, that is, having a prior strong reputation can be leveraged to help mitigate crisis. However, current conceptualizations of reservoir of goodwill and strong reputation pre-crisis are underdeveloped and lacking.

This analysis demonstrated how brand communities can serve to potentially operationalize current ambiguous notions of "reservoir of goodwill" and "strong pre-crisis reputation" within the field of crisis management. Odwalla was a unique organization in the

1990's, as one of a handful of organic juice producers within the United States. As the health boom took center stage, this lent Odwalla to become a brand community. Similarly, Blue Bell ice cream has been argued to serve as a brand community. Both organizations were able to effectively use DoR to move past a crisis, suggesting further research needs to be conducted on the ways in which brand communities impact crisis response strategies. This can allow for a better, more concretized understanding of “reservoir of good will” and “strong pre-crisis reputation.”

Identification is a key tenant of brand communities. Within crisis communication, previous research has been conducted on the relationship between identification and organizational stakeholders, within the context of crises and how stakeholders perceive and are affected by the crisis. Zavyalova et al (2016) examine the much-debated relationship between identification and stakeholders in terms of identification serving as a benefit or a burden, and ultimately their research yielded that those with high-levels of identification will show higher levels of support within negative organizational events (such as a crisis). On a superficial level, it makes sense that if one identifies with a brand or organization this will lend them to support the organization more fiercely, even in times of crisis. However, brand communities in particular allow for a richer understanding and conceptualization of identification amongst stakeholders.

Within brand communities, there are a particularized group of stakeholders, which are more *active* or intentional stakeholders. Recent crisis research has grappled with notions of active stakeholders, through work done by scholars such as Brown, Brown & Billings (2015), who examined the Penn State sex abuse scandal. Brown, Brown and Billings (2015) define an active stakeholder as, “people not only affected but willing to publicly comment about the crisis” (p. 304). Particularly within a sports context, their research found that stakeholders were

likely to possess and demonstrate high levels of identification and, in times of crisis, “rally together as a fan base in support of their team and one another” (p. 304-305, see also; Wann, 2006). Ultimately, Brown, Brown and Billings argued that further research on fan identification should be explored, I argue this further research can be done through the use of the brand community literature because it provides a richer explanation of notions of identification, active stakeholders (brand fans) and organization crisis management.

This dissertation uncovered multiple problematic issues with discourse of renewal as a theory within crisis management. First, discourse of renewal as an inherit/natural response to crisis is incompatible with the strategic way in which renewal was fleshed out as a crisis management strategy, and more broadly, inconsistent with the purpose of crisis management itself, which is to repair an organization’s reputation and minimize financial loss. Second, discourse of renewal, as an offshoot of image restoration, is problematic due to the de-emphasis/lack of consideration given to reputation preservation. Third, discourse of renewal, I argue, is a powerful dominant narrative-making strategy, which can silence marginalized voices, with little to no acknowledgement of the ethical implications this brings with it. Fourth, discourse of renewal seems to be better facilitated within brand communities, which is currently underdeveloped. Ultimately, while discourse of renewal has its merits, it is not a crisis response strategy that should be viewed as cogent, nor compatible with the larger aims of the field that is crisis management.

## CRISIS REVIVAL

Crisis managers can benefit from understanding how stakeholders can inform and impact an organization’s reputation during and after a crisis. Brand communities are a largely underexplored audience within crisis management. Particularly, brand communities who possess

organizational stakeholders with a moral obligation to support an organization and help retain other stakeholders within the community. Revival within communities can be conceptualized as improving or strengthening something, making something relevant again, or making something historical (old) new again. During an organizational crisis, there is a need for an organization to maintain and revive their reputation. Crisis revival, as a crisis response strategy, seeks to better understand the ways in which brand fans, or members within a particular brand community, can serve as an asset during an organizational crisis and post-crisis. Particularly, crisis revival is focused on strategically maintaining and reviving an organization's reputation within the context of crisis events.

Crisis revival offers a framework for understanding the dynamic between stakeholders, pre-crisis reputation and effective crisis response. Coombs (2007) asserts that the field of crisis communication is dominated by case studies that typically ignore how stakeholders react to crises and crisis response strategies. Because brand communities usually emerge within organization's that have strong images, and brand community members are aware of their identification with the community (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001), these specific stakeholders serve as an excellent way in which the relationship between crisis, stakeholders, reputation can be more richly explored. Crisis revival can be used to better understand how, within brand communities specifically, the framing of organizational narratives can inform stakeholder perceptions and responses to organizational crisis.

While many crisis response strategies focus on the crisis type, crisis revival instead focuses on the presence of a brand community within the organization in crisis. Crisis type is of lesser significance within crisis renewal because brand communities are comprised of brand fans whose identity, is at least in part, informed by the organizational brand, which brings higher

levels of brand commitment and desire for the organization to succeed. For crisis revival to be a useful crisis response strategy, the organization must have the markers of a brand community. That is, the organization must have: consciousness of kind, the presence of shared rituals and traditions, and sense of moral responsibility. Without these markers, which signify the presence of a brand community, crisis renewal is not a viable crisis response strategy.

Instead of creating a list of criterion for crisis renewal to be a viable crisis management strategy, I argue that the presence of brand community is the only necessary condition for crisis revival to be utilized. However, it is also likely that organizations that produce discretionary items are more likely to be primed for the effective use of crisis revival as a crisis management strategy. This in part, is because brand communities seem to be more clearly present within non-essential product brands (ie: Coca-Cola, Blue Bell, Ford, Saab, Macintosh, etc.).

*Origins story:* The first tenant of crisis revival is the use of the organization's origin story.

Revival is in every essence, the bringing back of something. Within brand communities, the storytelling and celebrations of an organization's origin story is often a defining factor for community members that are "true believers" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). A revival can occur first through organizational leadership reminding the public of their organizational history. This "origins" story is a reminder of the virtuous beginnings of the organizations, which serves as the foundation of the brand community. It is the celebrated history of the organization for the true believers. And true believers, in turn, can serve as brand ambassadors in times of crisis—they can be viewed as active stakeholders, with strong levels of identification and commitment to the organization. This can be seen within the Blue Bell case study, where media coverage and corporate messages alike celebrated the "Little Creamery in Brenham" focusing on the ways in which its organizational beginning was a humble small-town one, which had been a constant

over the years. This origins story was used within crisis management to remind true believers and the public at large about Blue Bell's origins story as one worth celebrating and one worth returning to through the successful navigation of revival rhetoric, a bringing back of an organization's history.

Transparency as strategy: Brand communities are a particularized group of stakeholders, in that they have higher levels of identification and subsequent brand commitment than general stakeholders. As such, organizations that function as brand communities have more brand equity, through consumer commitment, that affords for a more transparent approach to organizational crises than broader crisis management strategies allow. Within a brand community, there is a desire for revival, which can be ignited through transparent statements made by organizational actors. For instance, when Blue Bell's CEO chose to say, "we are sorry, you deserve better than this" their brand community chose to accept this apology. Often, within crisis literature, an apology is seen as acknowledgement of guilt, but within a brand community, a more intimate community, apologies can be viewed as genuine acts in the hopes to rectify and revive.

Furthermore, within crisis communication, account acceptance is a significant factor in mitigating organization crisis. Account acceptance, or the ways in which people honor (or dishonor) the account of the crisis can be determined by, how, "'satisfied' and 'accepting' the people affected by the crisis would be with the organization's response, as well as how 'negatively,' and 'favorably' the people affected by the crisis would react to the organization's response" (Fediuk, Pace, Botero, 2009, p. 14). Account acceptance is valuable, in that crisis response strategies cannot have the desired effect on stakeholders (and the crisis itself) if the stakeholders do not accept the crisis narrative or crisis response itself. Transparency as a crisis response strategy is viable within brand communities, because brand fans are perhaps the most

willing receivers of crisis response strategies (with high levels of account acceptance), thereby increasing the likelihood of the crisis responses having the desired effect. The brand community should willingly accept reasonable crisis response strategies including those focused on creating a better future.

Commitment to brand community: Within crisis revival, organizational leadership and crisis managers should maintain commitment to their brand fans throughout their crisis management. Commitment can be viewed as the acknowledgment not only of the existence of a brand community, but also the acknowledgment that without the brand community, the organization's viability could be jeopardized. By reminding brand fans of the significant role they play within their brand community, and that the organization is dedicated to repairing the issue, brand fans are likely to continue their commitment to the organization and potentially even play crucial roles in managing the crisis itself. Brand communities want to support the repair of the organizational reputation because those efforts also help to repair their own self-images that were damaged by the crisis. Ethical use of corrective action: Crisis revival should be ethical in nature. Ethics can be defined as "values, standards, principles, or guidelines we use" for making judgments (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2015, p. 213). Ethics then, are largely informed by societal norms, values, and expectations. Crisis situations in particular, have, "The potential to harm others is often quite large, and therefore, the ethical implications are very great" (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2015, p. 213, see also; Simola, 2003; Wilkins, 2010). Ethical judgments within crisis revival should take into account a variety of factors such as: brand loyalty, the crisis situation itself, victim needs, and other complexities that crisis situations bring with them.

Ultimately, ethics will never look the same to every person, as it is largely value-based, but ethics can be seen as a reflection of doing what is right not for the organization merely, but

also for the society in which it operates. Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow (2015) explain, “seeking to avoid or deny responsibility would be considered unethical conduct” (p. 218). When crises occur, there is a need to address crisis responsibility. Hiding a court case, and sweeping deaths under a rug, never to be remembered by a society—that is in every essence an example of unethical decision-making, and a masking of crisis responsibility. Through the analysis of Odwalla, DoR can be seen as a form of denial from crisis responsibility, due to its emphasis on avoiding discussions of responsibility entirely—whether that is through actual denial or omission of guilt/responsibility. Instead, organizations attempting to use crisis revival should remember their place, situated within the brand community their organization has evolved into, and take care to do what is right by that brand community and the larger society in which they operate.

Ultimately, crisis revival, seeks to serve as a tool in which crises emerging from within brand communities can be best managed for all parties involved, with consideration given to both the ethical implications and unique complexities that crises bring with them. Essential to effectively moving crises into the post-crises phase, is re-visiting and re-committing to the organization’s origin story, which has served as a story of identification for those within the brand community. As brand fans are a particular and highly specific audience within a crisis, with higher levels of brand commitment than other stakeholders possess, honesty, as a response strategy can be beneficial in the recovery process. Further, it is important to remind brand fans that they are a part of a brand community that the organization not only relies on for their viability, but that the organization is committed to preserving and reviving that brand community. Fixing the organization repairs the brand community as well. Lastly, crisis revival as a crisis management strategy, begs for crisis managers and organizational actors to review the

ethical implications that crises bring with them and to act in a manner that is responsible, for their brand community and the society in which the organization operates more broadly.

*Crisis Revival: Blue Bell's Crisis Management*

While Odwalla is the golden standard of DoR, Blue Bell's product harm crisis analyzed within this dissertation can serve to illustrate crisis revival. Blue Bell's leadership (and the media) reminded brand fans, and the general public, of their origins story—a small town creamery, a part of the fabric that is Texas identity. This is a coherent organizational identity Blue Bell has been able to maintain over the years, which in their time of crisis they were able to call for revival of through careful and strategic rhetorical decisions. President and CEO of Blue Bell, Paul Kruse, chose transparency as a strategy within his public responses. As he apologized for the product harm crisis, he took the risky move of accepting culpability for the crisis. However, due to the active nature of brand fans as stakeholders, I argue his account of the crisis event became more acceptable. Blue Bell is an organization that has long accepted (and acknowledged) the active and pivotal role their brand fans play within a larger Blue Bell brand community. This was not forgotten within their crisis management—both 'organizational actions and journalist' alike referred to loyal Blue Bell consumers as "fans." Lastly, through transparency, willingness to correct failed processes, and commitment to doing better, Blue Bell was able to successfully maneuver past a crisis through the use of ethical corrective action. Ultimately, crisis revival enriches the understanding of crisis response by recognizing brand fans play a more active role than mere stakeholders within current conceptualizations and that the value of prior reputation is ripe for research and can be further understood within the framework of crisis revival, which is premised on literature surrounding brand communities.

## *Summary*

In sum, this dissertation project: 1.) Posited and explored research questions that offered greater insight into DoR as a crisis management tool. 2.) Exposed weaknesses with DoR. 3.) Offered new crisis management strategy called crisis revival that can further both theory and practice in crisis communication.

While previous case studies using discourse of renewal have focused on the ways in which an organization in crisis attempts to serve as the framers of the crisis, this dissertation specifically sought to understand the ways in which the corporate framing aligned (or were inconsistent) with the media framing (newspapers) of the crisis, and if media framing reflected key tenants of discourse of renewal. Particularly within the Odwalla case study, which has already been accepted as an exemplar of DoR, my media framing study found practitioner's understandings of DoR tenants within corporate frames consistent with those of media frames surrounding the crisis coverage.

This dissertation explored when there is actual evidence of organizational wrongdoing or negligence in a crisis if a renewal narrative can still be found within media coverage. Both Odwalla and Blue Bell were found negligent. For Odwalla, this negligence was neatly suppressed and largely unremembered, but for Blue Bell their wrongdoing was embraced by organizational leadership and apologized for.

This dissertation project also sought to better understand if brand commitment served as a facilitator of discourse of renewal. Ultimately, the brand community literature allowed for a richer understanding of stakeholder support in both crises. Particularly, with the more recent the Blue Bell case study, the necessary markers of a brand community were found to exist. Brand

fans, or active stakeholders, lend themselves to be a valuable asset within the crisis management process, which was the case for both Odwalla and Blue Bell.

Lastly, this dissertation sought to better understand how power and brand communities, when linked together, can further current crisis literature in creating a more nuanced approach to organizational renewal. The battle of “who” gets to frame and construct the dominant narrative of a crisis is powerful, and with potentially large ethical ramifications. By shaping the crisis memory, those with the power to create a dominant narrative are forever shaping the organization’s identity.

Together, the four research questions that guided this dissertation project allowed for richer insight into DoR as a crisis response tool. These insights exposed flaws in the DoR and the need to improve upon the theory, ultimately leading to the creation of crisis revival. First, DoR is built upon notions of inherency of organizational actors to act organically or from within in moments of crisis, disregarding the larger acknowledgement within the field of crisis communication that crisis communication is, first and foremost, strategic and intentional in nature.

Secondly, because DoR is argued to be an extension of image restoration theory, it becomes problematized due to the lack of consideration and focus given to the reputation and the need to repair a reputation during and after a crisis. By focusing only on the future, and not focusing on understanding the breakdowns that led to the crisis itself, or properly atoning for past organizational actions, “restoration” cannot effectively be reached.

Third, discourse of renewal serves as a “how-to” guide to effectively constructing a dominant narrative. But missing within this instructional crisis management strategy is consideration given to both the power and ethical implications that exist around memory making.

Dominant narratives are constructed by the privileged and inform the ways in which events are remembered and articulated—to guide crisis response without regard to the powerful implications surrounding this, is unsound and disconcerting, to say the least.

Fourth, DoR is implicitly a tool most effective within brand communities. While DoR has successfully created prior characteristics necessary for DoR to be a viable crisis response option, with specific rhetorical tenants that should be utilized within organizational response a seemingly large (and missing piece) is the ways in which brand communities are best positioned to use DoR most successfully. Particularly, this is the case because of the active role brand fans play in supporting an organization in times of crisis, due to their need to be morally responsible as members of a brand community.

Due to my findings from the research questions and critiques uncovered of DoR, a new crisis response strategy has been offered within this dissertation, which I call crisis revival. Crisis revival, as explained previously, is a particularized crisis management strategy that can be utilized within brand communities specifically. Instead of focusing on the type of crisis an organization faces, more significant is the ways in which an organization is able to successfully, and responsibly, move past a crisis for the concerned brand fans. Particularly relevant to the theory is the organization's origins story, the use of transparency as strategy, reaffirmed commitment to brand community, and the ethical use of corrective action, which does not include the masking or submerging of organizational wrongdoing.

A limitation of this study was that while it focused on media coverage and dominant narrative making within crisis contexts, missing were the voices of consumers and potentially brand fans who were not convinced by the organizational responses within the two crises analyzed. Future research surrounding crisis revival should explore dissenting voices within

crisis moments. A potential way of meeting this current research gap is by analyzing social media coverage of crisis events, as well as comments made. By analyzing social media and users responses, an element of interactivity can be added to further understand the active role that stakeholders play, even dissenting voices, within crisis communication and crisis revival more specifically.

Crisis revival can contribute to the field of crisis communication because it can be utilized to better understand the active role of stakeholders within crisis response. Furthermore, crisis revival can be further developed to help explain the ways in which identification can serve as a more operational aspect of currently murky notions of pre-crisis “reputation” and “reservoir of goodwill.” Ultimately, for a brand community in crisis, true revival and returning to the organization’s origins is essential, which is currently a missing gap within crisis management.

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