

Methods

Subjects

A convenience sample of 178 adults of varying ages, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds participated in this the study from Nov. 25 to Dec. 7, 2003. The respondents represent a convenience sample, in that they were geographically located near the University of Oklahoma, or asked to participate in the study by an acquaintance of one of the authors. Ninety nine of the survey respondents are students taking an introductory communications course at the University of Oklahoma. This group of respondents completed the surveys in the classroom environment. The students voluntarily participated, receiving nominal extra credit from their professors for their participation. Forty eight respondents are employed by Coldwell Banker Sky Ridge Realty, Lake Arrowhead, Calif. These respondents voluntarily participated in the study and are directly acquainted with one of the study's authors. Eleven respondents are employed by Cedar American Rail Holdings, Inc., of Sioux Falls, S.D. This sampling was arranged through one of the author's parents, though the participants have no relationship to the researchers. The remaining study respondents were employees of Genzyme of Oklahoma City. These respondents are contemporaries of a University of Oklahoma alumni working in the area, and have no other relationship to the authors. All

respondents, regardless of sample population group, were surveyed in a like manner.

Procedures

Subjects received a packet including instructions, an experimental condition, and a survey. The subjects were asked to read a detailed account of an environmental event representing a possible public relations crisis for the U.S. Air Force or the U.S. Navy. A random ordering of nine survey treatments (See Appendix A) was applied to the sample. The nine treatments were based on two scenarios and included both a description of the incident and the military's response in light of the possible crisis. The treatment groups are represented by a control group and four conditions representing levels of disclosure, no disclosure, partial disclosure, full disclosure, and full disclosure with apology.

In all treatments the survey respondents were exposed to a scenario in which a pollutant was damaging the environment and appearances indicated the pollution was the result of military presence in the area. In the no disclosure treatments the military denied all knowledge of any connection between their presence and the pollution. Conversely, the partial disclosure treatments were typified by some additional disclosure of facts that acknowledged the possibility that the pollution was a result of the military's presence, described their initial

cleanup efforts, and stated they were beginning an investigation into the incident. The full disclosure treatments provided a significantly greater amount of disclosure, describing the details of how the pollution occurred and the status of the cleanup process. This treatment was detail oriented and acknowledged the military's responsibility, but only within the context of disclosing a factual account of the incident. The last and most open of the four experimental conditions were the full disclosure with an apology treatment. These treatments provided the same detailed information as the full disclosure scenario but were different in that the military specifically acknowledged responsibility for the incident and issued a public apology.

Control Variables

Five variables functioned as controls in analysis of the survey data: gender, age, education, income and connection to the military. The data for the control variables was collected by self report in the demographic section of the survey.

Gender was operationalized as either male or female; 54 percent of the respondents were female. For the control variable of age, participants categorized themselves into one of the following age brackets: 18-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, 56-64, and 65 and older. The Fifty eight percent of respondents were between the ages of 18-25. Survey participants rated their

education level as having some high school, having a high school diploma, some college, completing a bachelor's degree, completing some advanced degree work or earning an advanced degree. Of those who responded, 12.4 percent were high school graduates, 65.7 percent had some college, and the nearly all the rest had at least a bachelor's degree. Income categories were reported based on total household income and were grouped as follows: Under \$20,000; \$20,001 to \$35,000; \$35,001 to \$50,000; \$50,001 to \$75,000; \$75,001 to \$100,000; and over \$100,000 of income. Lastly, respondents gauged their connection to the military by classifying themselves as a veteran, having a family member in the military, knowing someone in the military or having no connection at all to the military. No option for multiple ties was available to respondents: thus, the survey only took into account the connection that would be traditionally considered most salient.

Dependent Variables

After reading the treatment, survey participants rated their feelings about their general attitude toward the military, the military's credibility, and the military's organizational trustworthiness. These dimensions were used to gauge the military's public image in light of a possible crisis situation.

The participants' general attitude toward the military was determined using six, seven-point interval scales developed by

McCroskey (1981). These feelings were operationalized in the semantic differentials of negative-positive, unfavorable-favorable, unacceptable-acceptable, foolish-wise, wrong-right, and uninformed-informed. A reliability analysis of this dimension yielded a Cronbach's (1951) alpha of .91.

The military spokesperson's credibility was measured using three components of McCroskey's (1966) source credibility scale. The survey measured the components of expertness, character and sociability. Each of these components was measured using three or four seven point semantic differentials (see Table 1). The first measured component of credibility, expertness, was exacted using the terms uninformed-informed, inexperienced-experienced, unintelligent-intelligent, and narrow-intellectual. A reliability coefficient of .87 was achieved using Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951). Character was measured with the with the semantics bad-good, dishonest-honest, and unsympathetic-sympathetic. Cronbach's alpha for character was computed as .85. And the last measured component of credibility, sociability, exhibited a Cronbach's alpha of .91 and was gauged using the semantic differentials of gloomy-cheerful, unfriendly-friendly, and irritable-good-natured.

Lastly, respondents indicated how they perceived the trustworthiness of the military, once again using a seven-point semantic differential scale. This scale was an adaptation of the

work done by Applebaum and Anatol (1973) in regards to the reproducibility of source credibility dimensions.

Organizational trust was measured using the differential scales of incompetent-competent, closed-open, unconcerned-concerned, and unreliable-reliable. The reliability analysis of this scaled yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .87.