Applying the Anger Activism Model (AAM) to CSR Crises: From the Perspective of the 2022 Russian Invasion of Ukraine

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ABSTRACT

CSR crises occur when organizations fail to live up to publics' expectation of their social responsibilities. The anger activism model (AAM) uses two variables, efficacy and anger, to explain people's participation in social movements. Since CSR crises are often value-based and lead to consumer boycotts, AAM sheds light on explaining people's behaviors in CSR crises. In applying AAM, this study aims to explore effective crisis response strategies and if conditional factors influence the effectiveness of these strategies, using a 2 (strategy: reform vs. refutation) × 2 (proxy efficacy: high vs. low) online experiment in the context of a company's decision on whether to withdraw its business from Russia in response to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. The results revealed that reform was a more effective strategy than refutation. In addition, anger moderated the influence of crisis responses on account acceptance, attitude, trust, and boycott intention. As anger increases, refutation becomes less effective.

KEYWORDS: CSR crisis, anger activism model, crisis response, anger, proxy efficacy

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, shocked the world (Chappell et al., 2022). The invasion created tremendous turbulence in food, energy, and financial markets (O'Donnell, 2022). From the corporate communication perspective, the conflict challenged corporations in making critical decisions: How should corporations that run businesses in Russia and Ukraine

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position themselves? How should corporations communicate their stance on this issue? While some corporations decided to suspend their ties with Russia such as PepsiCo and McDonald's, others chose to remain active such as Nestle and Koch Industries (Yale School of Management, 2022). It is important for public relations practitioners to understand how these decisions and responses to the crisis will affect corporations' reputations and relationships with stakeholders.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been a popular research topic across disciplines for decades (Lee, 2017; Peloza & Shang, 2011). Researchers mostly see CSR investment as a corporate asset that brings positive business outcomes (Fombrun, 2005; Lee et al., 2013; Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006). However, when corporations fail to shoulder social responsibilities and violate stakeholders' expectations, a special crisis risk factor emerges. From Nestle's palm oil causing deforestation to Nike's use of child labor, CSR-based crises seriously challenge corporations' reputations and legitimacy. Companies' decisions on their operations in Russia exposed themselves to a CSR risk as the majority of the American public support the economic sanctions on Russia (Pew Research Center, 2022) and expect corporations to take a stance.

Coombs and Holladay (2015) argued that a CSR crisis is a special type of paracrises, so corporations must manage the risk through proactive communication. They further provided a series of risk control strategies, including refusal, refutation, repression, recognition, revision, and reform. Unfortunately, limited studies have tested these crisis response strategies in empirical research of a CSR-based challenge. As social issues like climate change, racial injustice, abortion, and gun control consistently challenge corporations, it is critical to understand how to respond to the challenges and resolve the risk factor.

Besides understanding the direct effect of crisis response strategies, researchers must investigate the conditional factors that influence people's acceptance of crisis response strategies. The anger activism model (AAM) proposes that anger and efficacy are two factors that drive people's participation in social activism (Turner, 2007). While anger represents how angry a person is

toward a social issue, efficacy indicates the person's belief in solving the issue (Turner, 2007). CSR crises are mostly value-based and generate activism-like behaviors such as boycotts. Thus, publics' attitudes toward a company's response to a CSR crisis might also be affected by these two factors. As today's publics increasingly expect corporations to get involved in social activism efforts (Page Society, 2019), we anticipate that angry publics who believe that a corporation can influence a societal issue would expect that corporation to fulfill its social responsibility, hence, will be more likely to develop negative perceptions of the corporation if no action is taken.

Using an online experiment, this study intends to explore the effectiveness of two common crisis response strategies, refutation and reform, in the context of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. In addition, by applying the AAM, the researchers also hope to investigate how anger and proxy efficacy affect the strategies' effectiveness. Theoretically, the study could enrich the CSR crisis discussion and provide a framework for further investigation. Practically, the researchers hope to inform crisis managers on how to evaluate the situation and respond to a CSR challenge.

Literature Review

CSR crisis

CSR represents a new way of understanding business after World War II (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). Carroll (1991) postulated that corporations should meet the economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic expectations of society. In other words, besides making profits, corporations have the responsibility for wider societal good (Matten & Moon, 2008). From a corporation's perspective, an investment in CSR brings benefits to reputation (Fombrun, 2005), employee recruitment and retention (Lee et al., 2013), investor relations (Hockerts & Moir, 2004), and customer satisfaction (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006). CSR could also shape people's perceptions of a corporation during a crisis (Zhou & Ki, 2018a). However, though long believed to be an asset, CSR could also be a special crisis risk factor when corporations fail to shoulder social responsibilities

(Coombs & Holladay, 2015). People constantly compare their own ethical norms with corporate behaviors and will become outraged when they find that corporate behaviors deviate from their ethical norms (Lindenmeier et al., 2012). If businesses fail to assume these social responsibilities, it is regarded as a violation of people's expectations, which is the defining characteristic of a crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2015). Sohn and Lariscy (2014) defined a CSR crisis as "a major event that poses a threat to reputation associated with norms and values cherished by society, and socially expected obligations" (p. 25). Chen and Tao (2020) integrated a CSR crisis with stakeholders' perceptions in defining it as "the perceived violation of stakeholders' expectations toward an organization's commitment to societal obligations, which can create negative outcomes for the organization and its stakeholders" (p. 180).

A CSR crisis can be regarded as a special type of challenge. Lerbinger (2012) coined it as "crises of human climate," which originated from the conflict between human beings and entities. The author further argued that conflicts are normal because some people will feel dissatisfied with an entity, and such a conflict is sometimes based on entities failing to live up to their social responsibilities. Coombs and Holladay (2012) regarded dealing with challenges as a step toward crisis prevention. A challenge has the potential to become a full-blown crisis when it is highly visible to stakeholders, thus, the paracrisis is defined as "a publicly visible crisis threat that charges an organization with irresponsible or unethical behavior" (Coombs, 2012, p. 409). Coombs (2019) further categorized paracrisis into faux pas, rumor, challenge, and collateral damage. Faux pas indicates the situation when companies believe their actions are positive, but stakeholders think otherwise. Rumors are misleading information that intend to harm an organization. Challenges happen when stakeholders confront an organization because they believe it is operating in an unethical manner. Collateral damage denotes a situation in which an organization is associated with a negatively viewed actor. The CSR crisis can be categorized as a special type of challenge. Since a paracrisis, especially a CSR crisis, has the potential to harm an organization's reputation, communication efforts are required to maintain it.

Three weeks after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a study suggested that Americans were predominantly united in their support for economic sanctions on Russia (85%) and supported working closely with allies in responding to the Russian invasion (79%) (Pew Research Center, 2022). According to a Yahoo News/YouGov poll, only 6% of U.S. adults saw the Russian invasion as justified (Romano, 2022). Moreover, some of the world's biggest companies, for example, Ford, Boeing, Amazon, and Apple, abandoned or scaled back their business in Russia (CNN Business Staff, 2022). In this situation, public opinion in the US is putting mounting pressure on companies that have yet to respond. In other words, a company's decision not to respond to or take advantage of Russia's invasion of Ukraine is likely to violate American consumers' expectations and would be challenged, hence, presenting a CSR crisis.

Strategies to respond to CSR crises

As a primary theory for explaining the effectiveness of crisis communication strategies, situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) considers the attribution of responsibility as a grounding factor when choosing crisis response strategies. The stronger the potential reputational damage, the more accommodative strategies are required to mitigate it (Coombs, 2007). On a continuum, from defensive strategies to accommodative strategies, Coombs (2007) ranged crisis response strategies from "attack the accuser" to "full apology." Unlike a traditional operational crisis, a CSR crisis presents a challenge that could evolve into a crisis, but an actual crisis is not yet seen (Coombs & Holladay, 2015). Based on the rhetoric of agitation and how authorities respond to protestors, Coombs and Holladay (2015) proposed six strategies for crisis managers to respond to a CSR crisis: refusal, refutation, repression, recognition, revision, and reform. Refusal stands for strategic silence. Crisis managers completely ignore the crisis and offer no response. Refutation seeks to maintain the current situation and counter-persuade the challenge. Repression indicates an attempt to stop the challenger from further communication, such as filing a lawsuit. Recognition means the organization recognizes the challenger's concerns but takes no action. Revision builds on

the recognition strategy and further makes minor modifications according to the challenge. Reform is the most accommodative strategy. Crisis managers believe there is a problem and will work with the challenger to resolve the problem (Coombs & Holladay, 2015). In responding to a paracrisis, Coombs and Holladay (2012) provided a similar but simpler categorization: refute, reform, and refuse. Refutation indicates that managers defend the organization against the challenger and maintain the current practice. Reform involves acknowledging the challenge and changing organizational behaviors to incorporate the stakeholders' demands. Refusal means no response to the petition.

Despite categorizing the strategies, there is a dearth of empirical research on each strategy's effect. Existing studies have tested crisis response strategies within the context of paracrises; however, the findings are contradictory and unsystematic. For example, through a content analysis, Kim et al. (2016) demonstrated that the self-mocking strategy was more powerful than traditional crisis communication strategies (excuse, compensation, etc.) in reducing blame, increasing satisfaction, and improving public attitude. Honisch and Más Manchón (2020) confirmed no significant difference among reform, refusal, and refutation regarding reputation protection. However, reform was significantly more effective than humor. Roh (2017) found that denial was more effective in protecting reputation and reducing negative emotions than excuses.

Further, existing studies tested the crisis response strategies to all kinds of paracrises, which are not necessarily CSR related. For example, Honisch and Más Manchón (2020) discussed Sony's worker exploitation case in India. Since the findings were based on paracrises in general, not CSR crises, the conclusions might not be applicable to the CSR crisis context specifically. Since CSR crises violate stakeholders' expectations of an organization's ethical practice, they are likely to elicit different perceptions of severity and emotional involvement among stakeholders compared with traditional operational crises. Researchers suggest that the two factors affect how stakeholders evaluate a crisis situation (Lee & Atkinson, 2019; Zhou & Ki, 2018b). Therefore, more empirical studies are

warranted to examine the effectiveness of crisis response strategies in managing CSR crises and to identify the conditions for these strategies to work.

The current research adopted Coombs and Holladay's (2012) categorization of paracrisis response strategies and specifically examined refutation and reform. Four variables commonly used to measure the outcomes of crisis communication were examined, including account acceptance, attitude toward the organization, trust, and boycott intention (Zhou et al., 2022). While account acceptance measures the likelihood of accepting an organization's account of a crisis (Park & Cameron, 2014), the other three variables captured people's attitudes and behaviors toward the company. As mentioned above, existing empirical studies have yet to generate consistent results on this topic (e.g., Honisch & Más Manchón, 2020; Kim et al., 2016; Roh 2017); therefore, we proposed the following research question:

> **RQ1:** Does a reform strategy outperform a refutation strategy in terms of its impact on (a) account acceptance, (b) attitude toward the organization, (c) trust in the organization, and (d) boycott intention in response to a CSR crisis?

Applying the anger activism model (AAM) to crisis communication

This study draws on the AAM (Turner, 2007) to investigate the moderators of crisis response strategies. Originally, AAM was proposed to predict people's intention to participate in social activism activities and segments publics into four categories based on anger and efficacy beliefs. To explain AAM's application, this study examined the role of anger and efficacy respectively in predicting publics' reactions toward a company's response.

Emotion plays an important role in publics' perceptions of a crisis (Jin, 2014). Discrete emotions are intense, short-lived, and internal psychological constructs. Functional theories of emotion indicate that human emotions occur because of environment appraisals for their relevance to personal well-being (Izard, 1977; Lerner & Keltner, 2001). Smith and Ellsworth (1985) proposed that emotions can be differentiated by the appraisals of "pleasantness,

anticipated effort, certainty, attentional activity, self-other respon-
sibility/control, and situational control" (p. 183). Based on these
dimensions, anger is unpleasant, associated with high anticipated
effort, a strong sense of other-responsibility, strong views of human
agency, high attentiveness, somewhat high certainty, and very low
situational control (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985).

Scholars have argued that emotions can guide cognitions and
motivate behaviors in a goal-directed way (Izard, 1977; Lazarus,
1991; Nabi, 2003). As anger is experienced with an appraisal of
fairness, it encourages cognitions of retributive actions (Izard,
1977) and motivates goals to hurt the responsible agent (Roseman,
1984). An angry person tends to evaluate the situation with more
certainty when it involves a responsible party (Lerner & Keltner,
2001). Because anger is associated with appraisals of high other-
responsibility and motivates retaliatory behaviors, it has been
examined as a predictor of the intention to engage in activism
activities. For example, Cho and Walton (2011) found that anger
adds the explanatory power of the theory of planned behavior
(TPB) in predicting consumer intentions to participate in online
activism to protest the product failure of Samsung cellphones, and
that anger itself provides sufficient impetus for online activism
intention.

Efficacy beliefs refer to an individual's perceived control, influ-
ence, and effectiveness to solve a problem or achieve a goal (see
social cognitive theory [SCT], Bandura, 2011). SCT posits that if
people do not believe their actions can produce expected outcomes,
rational human beings are less likely to engage in actions. Based on
the level of anger and self-efficacy, AAM categorized publics into
four groups to predict their intentions to participate in activism
(Turner, 2007). The activist group is comprised of individuals with
intense anger and high efficacy and is most likely to participate in
activism activities for a drive they support. The empowered group
refers to those with a low level of anger but a high level of efficacy:
Although they feel that they could contribute to changing the sit-
uation and have a positive attitude toward the activism, they may
not be driven enough to act because of a lack of anger. The angry
group is individuals who have a high level of anger but a low level
of efficacy, whereas the disinterested group has people with low

anger and low efficacy. Neither of the two low efficacy groups is motivated to participate in activism activities.

Turner (2007) tested AAM with two studies examining participants' responses to a riot's anger-eliciting message after a sports event. The results supported AAM's predictions related to the activist groups' segmentation. Activists perceive the message to be the most persuasive, have the most positive attitudes, and report the highest behavioral intentions. Since the initial study, a series of research applied the AAM to explain participation in activism in different communication contexts. For example, using an experiment, Skurka (2019) found that anger manipulation in the message of sugary drink marketing significantly influenced the support for punitive policies; however, it did not have a significant main effect on activism intentions. Instead, anger and efficacy appeal indirectly promoted activism intentions by evoking anger and perceived efficacy. Austin et al. (2020) surveyed participants' anger and efficacy beliefs toward political issues during the 2016 presidential election. They found that efficacy appeared to be a stronger predictor of attitudes and activism compared with anger. Although anger significantly predicted communication behaviors regarding the issue, it failed to predict financial behaviors that require more involvement. Based on cross-sectional survey data, Jang et al. (2021) found that the activist group was more likely to engage in information seeking (considered a pre-activism activity) and to engage in both low and high commitment activities to change vaccine policy.

Current studies have mostly supported AAM's propositions in explaining publics' intentions to participate in activism activities. However, these studies examined individuals as participatory units. As corporations impose increasing influence on societal issues, consumers expect companies to articulate values that align with their own and engage in social activism efforts (Page Society, 2019). It is possible that when a CSR crisis happens, angry publics anticipate that organizations will voice their concerns and take action to promote a collective interest. In a corporate setting, how publics perceive an organization's efficacy in fulfilling the task should be a critical factor in predicting publics' attitudes.

Besides self-efficacy beliefs, group efficacy beliefs and proxy efficacy beliefs are also an integral part of efficacy beliefs that influence social movement participation (Bandura, 1986). Proxy efficacy denotes individuals' perceptions of a third-party or proxy agent's competence to act on their behalf or facilitate the realization of their own desired outcomes (Bray & Shields, 2007). Scholars have noticed that proxy efficacy belief is often ignored when examining the participation of social movements (e.g., Yau, 2014; Liu et al., 2018). Liu et al. (2018) examined all three efficacy beliefs in motivating residents' participation in social movements against locally unwanted land uses and found that residents' participation was increased if they believed that environmental groups could amplify their calls for change.

Based on the previous discussion, this study proposes that publics who are angry about a CSR issue would be provoked to take action. Meanwhile, they would place such an expectation on corporations and hope they can step up to fulfill the call, especially when they perceive that the corporations have the power to resolve the issue. In the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the publics' expectations of companies would be shaped by the perceived proxy efficacy of the company in protest against the Russian invasion on their behalf. It is reasonable to anticipate that corporations with the power to pressure Russia out of the war will be expected to use the power to help Ukraine. Therefore, this study proposed the following research questions.

> **RQ2:** Does anger moderate the effect of crisis response strategies on (a) account acceptance, (b) positive attitude toward the organization, (c) trust in the organization, and increase (d) boycott intention?
>
> **RQ3:** Does proxy efficacy moderate the effect of crisis response strategies on (a) account acceptance, (b) positive attitude toward the organization, (c) trust in the organization, and increase (d) boycott intention?
>
> **RQ4:** Is there a three-way interaction among anger, proxy efficacy, and response strategies on (a) account acceptance, (b) positive attitude toward the organization, (c) trust in the organization, and increase (d) boycott intention?

Method

To investigate which crisis response strategy is more effective and if AAM could explain people's responses to the strategies during a CSR crisis, a 2 (crisis response: refutation vs. reform) × 2 (proxy efficacy: high vs. low) between-subject design was adopted. Anger represents people's subjective feelings. In the current study, anger is measured rather than manipulated.

Stimuli development

The researchers selected the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine as the context for the experiment. As explained in the literature review, most of the U.S. public expected oil companies to respond to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, hence presenting a CSR-based crisis risk for oil companies. In reality, a big oil company, Shell, was reported to have taken advantage of the situation by buying Russian oil at a bargain price (Wallace & Hirtenstein, 2022), generating wide criticism from stakeholders and creating a CSR crisis. Later, Shell apologized and decided to stop buying Russian oil. The stimuli design followed this real case. The stimuli were created with a fictitious oil company, Crescent, to exclude the potential influence of participants' prior knowledge about the company. Proxy efficacy is conceptualized in the current study as the extent to which the oil company is capable of influencing Russia's war decision. To manipulate proxy efficacy, participants were asked to read a news article. In the high efficacy condition, participants were informed that Russia exported 4% of its total crude oil to Crescent, and Crescent's decision could greatly help the Russian economy. In the low efficacy condition, participants were told that Russia only exported 0.4% of its crude oil to Crescent, and the decision would not make a huge difference. Appendix 1 provides the two news articles.

To manipulate crisis response strategies, participants were asked to read two corporate statements. In the refute condition, Crescent justified its decision by arguing that continuing to buy Russian oil could help assure the provision of essential products and stabilize gas prices in the U.S. In the reform condition, Crescent apologized to the public and vowed to immediately stop buying Russian oil. Appendix 2 provides the two Crescent statements.

Sample

Participants were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Two filters were used: (1) participants are located in the United States and (2) participants are master workers. Master workers are those who completed a large number of HITs and had a good level of accuracy. Although debate continues over whether master workers provide better data (Cheung et al., 2017), studies have shown that master workers tend to be more attentive and less likely to be fraudulent (Loepp & Kelly, 2020). The data collection process started on April 11, 2022, and ended on April 25, 2022, which was a time frame during the war. A total of 262 participants were recruited, and each participant was rewarded with $1. After deleting participants who did not finish the study and who failed attention checks, 206 remained in the sample. The age ranged from 28 to 78 ($M = 45.13$). One hundred and thirteen reported as male (54.9%) and 92 reported as female (44.7%). One participant reported as non-binary/third gender. Most participants were White ($n = 169$, 82%), followed by Black ($n = 15$, 7.3%), Asian ($n = 15$, 7.3%), Hispanic/Latino ($n = 13$, 6.3%) and Native American ($n = 2$, 1%).

Procedure

After giving consent, participants were first asked to report their value involvement in the Russia-Ukraine conflict and anger at the situation. Then, all participants were randomly assigned to one of the two proxy efficacy conditions and read a news article about Crescent's decision. Manipulation check questions of proxy efficacy appeared after the article. Next, participants were further randomly assigned to one of the two crisis statements. Manipulation check questions were asked after they read the statement. All dependent variables were measured after participants read the stimuli. In the end, participants reported their demographics, including age, gender, and ethnicity. Two attention check questions were inserted in the process.

Covariates

Value involvement. Former research has indicated that crisis involvement influences people's cognitive and affective evaluation

of a crisis (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2014). Since CSR crises mostly violate stakeholders' expectations based on their value, value involvement was specifically controlled in this experiment. The measurement was adapted from Cho and Boster's (2005) scale. Participants rated their agreement on a seven-point Likert scale. The scale was reliable ($\alpha = .95$).

Moderator

Anger. Turner (2007) argued that "anger is defined by certain physiological arousals, the cognition of resentment, and feelings that range from annoyance to rage" (p. 115). The measurement was adapted from Austin et al.'s (2020) scale. Participants were asked about their feelings on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (a great deal). The scale reached ideal reliability ($\alpha = .98$).

Dependent variables

Account acceptance. Account acceptance denotes the "perceived degree of accepting a given crisis response" (Yang et al., 2010, p. 478). Participants were asked how they feel about Crescent's response to its decision. The variable was measured on a seven-point semantic differential scale. The scale was reliable ($\alpha = .95$).

Attitude toward the organization. Post-crisis attitude toward the organization evaluates people's overall impression after a crisis. The scale was adapted from Claeys and Cauberghe's (2014) study. Participants were asked to rate their impression of Crescent on a seven-point semantic differential scale. The scale was reliable ($\alpha = .99$).

Trust. Many scholars have demonstrated that trust is the most important aspect of organization-public relationships (Yang, 2007). The measurement was adapted from Hon and Grunig's (1999) seven-point Likert scale. The scale was reliable ($\alpha = .94$).

Boycott intention. Boycott is a common consumer revenge behavior (Zourrig et al., 2009). Boycott intention measurement was adapted from Lim and Shim's (2019) scale. All items were evaluated on a seven-point Likert scale. The scale was reliable ($\alpha = .92$). Table 1 provides the variables' measurement scales.

TABLE 1   Measurement Scales of Key Variables

Variables	Items	M (*SD*)	Cronbach's α
Value Involvement	The values that are most important to me are what determine my stand on the Russian invasion of Ukraine.	5.20 (.21)	.95
	Knowing my position on the war is central to understanding the kind of person I am.		
	My position on the war has little to do with my beliefs about how life should be lived.		
	My position on the war is based on the values with which I try to conduct my life.		
	The arguments for or against the war are relevant to the core principles that guide my life.		
	My beliefs about how I should live my life determine my position in the war.		
	My position on the issue of the war reflects who I am.		
Anger	How much do you experience the following feelings? • Angry • Irritated • Annoyed	4.24 (.22)	.98
Account Acceptance	How do you feel about Crescent's response to its decision? • Unfavorable – Favorable • Unacceptable – Acceptable • Inadequate – Adequate • Unbelievable – Believable • Insincere – Sincere	4.39 (.25)	.95
Attitude toward the Organization	What is your overall impression of Crescent? • Bad – Good • Unfavorable – Favorable • Unpleasant – Pleasant • Negative - Positive	3.52 (.08)	.99
Trust	Crescent treats customers fairly and justly.	4.01 (.18)	.94
	Whenever Crescent makes an important decision, customers know it will consider the decision's impact on customers.		
	Crescent can be relied on to keep its promises to customers.		
	Crescent takes the opinions of customers into account when making decisions.		
	Customers feel very confident about Crescent's ability.		
	Sound principles guide Crescent's behavior.		
	Crescent misleads members.		

TABLE 1   (Continued)

Variables	Items	M (SD)	Cronbach's α
Boycott Intention	I would recommend others to avoid Crescent's products. I would discourage friends and family from buying a product from Crescent. I would distribute negative articles or reports about Crescent to my friends/people I know. I would subscribe to a boycott website against Crescent's products across the globe. I would sign a petition to stop sales of Crescent's products in our country.	3.30 (.54)	.92

Pretest

A pretest was conducted to test the stimuli's effectiveness. A total of 46 participants attended the pretest. The manipulation of proxy efficacy was successful ($F_{(1, 43)} = 4.79, p = .03$). The high efficacy stimuli ($M = 3.57, SD = 1.87$) generated a higher level of proxy efficacy than the low efficacy condition ($M = 2.49, SD = 1.45$). The manipulation of crisis response strategies was also successful ($F_{(1, 43)} = 273.14, p < .001$). The reform stimuli ($M = 6.29, SD = .64$) created a stronger sense of accommodation than the refutation stimuli ($M = 1.67, SD = 1.13$).
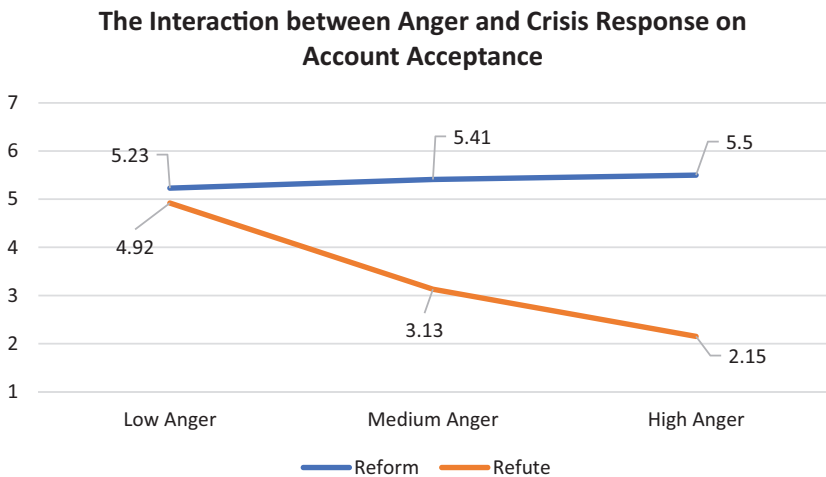
Results

RQ1a to RQ1d inquired if refutation and reform strategies generate different consumer outcomes in a CSR crisis. A series of one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) were applied after controlling value involvement, anger, and efficacy. Reform ($M = 5.39, SD = 1.26$) led to higher account acceptance than refutation ($M = 3.34, SD = 1.67$) ($F_{(1, 201)} = 103.17, p < .001$). Reform ($M = 4.20, SD = 1.43$) led to better attitudes toward the organization than refutation ($M = 2.80, SD = 1.61$) ($F_{(1, 201)} = 47.72, p < .001$). Reform ($M = 4.35, SD = 1.16$) led to higher trust than refutation ($M = 3.66, SD = 1.29$) ($F_{(1, 201)} = 18.95, p < .001$). Reform ($M = 2.84, SD = 1.32$) also led to less boycott intention than refutation ($M = 3.77, SD = 1.77$) ($F_{(1, 201)} = 26.97, p < .001$).

RQ2a to RQ2d investigated if anger moderates the influence of crisis response strategies on the dependent variables. The research questions were tested using SPSS Process Macro Model 1.
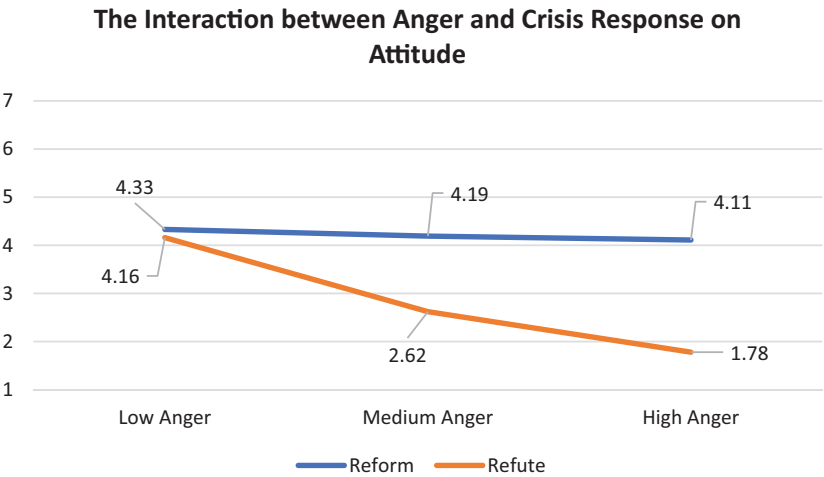
Regarding account acceptance, the overall model was significant ($F(4, 201) = 43.52$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .68$). Increased anger significantly decreased account acceptance when the corporation used refutation ($b = -.53$, $t(201) = -5.99$, $p < .001$, CI[-.71, -.36]. However, anger did not influence the effectiveness of reform. Regarding the attitude toward the corporation, the overall model was also significant ($F(4, 201) = 20.98$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .29$). Increased anger lowered the positive attitude toward the corporation when the corporation used refutation ($b = -.38$, $t(201) = -3.97$, $p < .001$, CI[-.57, -.19]). Anger did not affect the reform strategy. Regarding trust, the overall model was significant ($F(4, 201) = 12.79$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .20$). Increased anger lowered trust in the corporation when the corporation used refutation ($b = -.16$, $t(201) = -2.08$, $p = .04$, CI[-.31, -.01]), but it did not affect the reform strategy. Regarding boycott intention, the overall model was significant ($F(4, 201) = 42.59$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .47$). Increased anger raised boycott intention when the corporation used refutation ($b = .44$, $t(201) = 5.39$, $p < .001$, CI[.28, .60]), while no such effect was observed regarding reform. figures 1, 2, 3, and 4 illustrate the four interactions.
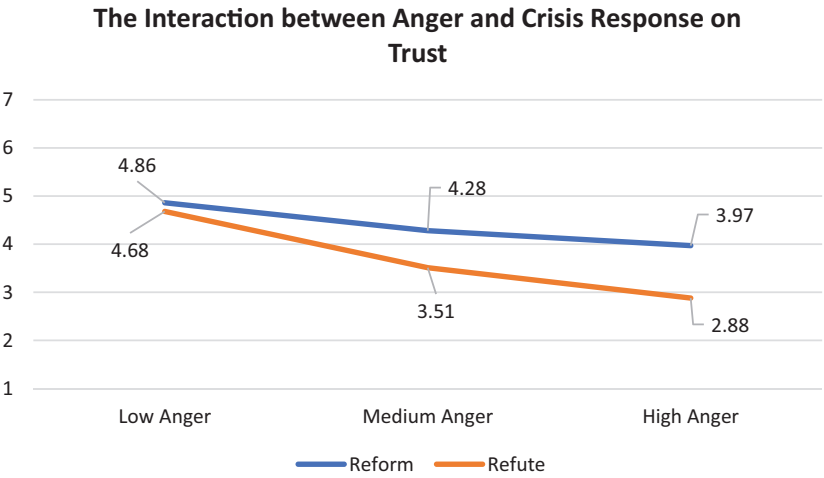
RQ3a to RQ3d asked if proxy efficacy moderates the influence of crisis response strategies on the dependent variables. They

The Interaction between Anger and Crisis Response on Account Acceptance

Reform: 5.23, 5.41, 5.5
Refute: 4.92, 3.13, 2.15

Low Anger — Medium Anger — High Anger

Reform   Refute

FIGURE 1   **The Effect of Responses and Anger on Boycott Intention**

The Interaction between Anger and Crisis Response on Attitude

4.33 4.19 4.11

4.16

2.62 1.78

Low Anger Medium Anger High Anger

——Reform ——Refute

FIGURE 2 The Effect of Responses and Anger on the Attitude toward the Company

The Interaction between Anger and Crisis Response on Trust

4.86 4.28 3.97

4.68

3.51 2.88

Low Anger Medium Anger High Anger

——Reform ——Refute

FIGURE 3 The Effect of Responses and Anger on Trust

were tested via two-way ANCOVA after controlling value involvement and anger. There was no interaction between efficacy and crisis response strategies on account acceptance ($F_{(1, 200)} = .95$, $p = .33$), attitude toward the organization ($F_{(1, 200)} = .02$, $p = .90$), and trust ($F_{(1, 200)} = .98$, $p = .32$). However, the interaction on boycott intention was significant ($F_{(1, 201)} = 5.33$, $p = .02$).

The Interaction between Anger and Crisis Response on Boycott
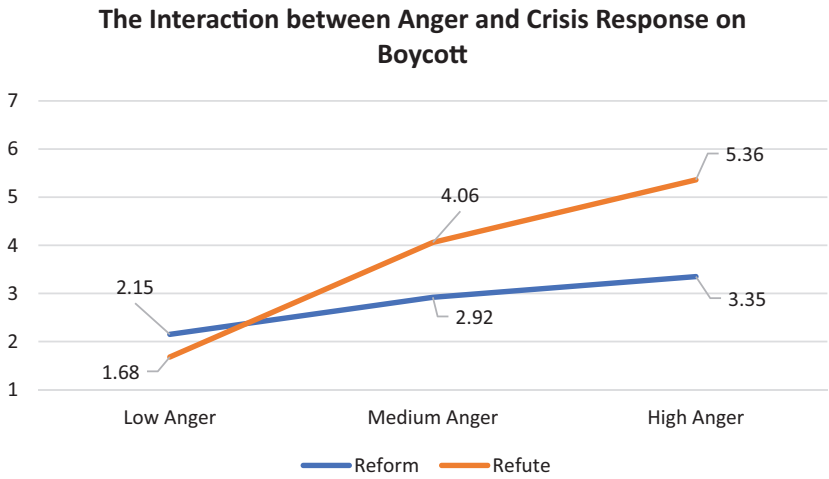
FIGURE 4   The Effect of Responses and Anger on Boycott Intention

The Interaction between Efficacy and Crisis Response on Boycott
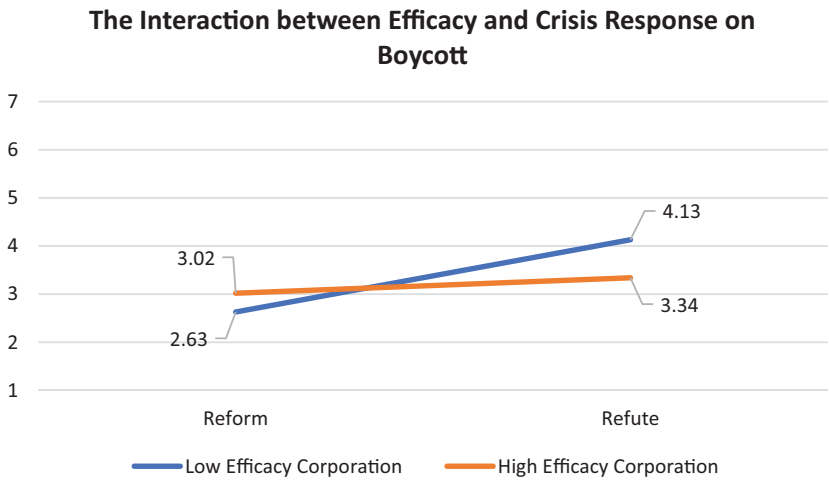
FIGURE 5   The Effect of Crisis Response and Efficacy on Boycott Intention

A Bonferroni post-hoc analysis indicated refutation (M = 4.13, SD = 1.86) generated stronger boycott intention than reform (M = 2.63, SD = 1.38) for the low efficacy corporation (p = .02). In comparison, the difference was not significant for the high efficacy corporation. Figure 5 provides the interaction plot.

RQ4a to RQ4d inquired if the two moderators would interact to exert influence. The research question was tested using SPSS Process Macro Model 3. Regarding account acceptance, despite the overall model being significant (F $(8, 197) = 22.25, p < .001, R^2 = .47$), the three-way interaction was not significant ($b = .26, t(197) = 1.43, p = .15,$ CI[-.10, .62]). Regarding the attitude toward the corporation, the overall model was significant (F $(8, 197) = 10.60, p < .001, R^2 = .55$). However, the three-way interaction was not significant either ($b = .10, t(197) = .52, p = .61,$ CI[-.19, .49]). Regarding trust, the overall model was significant (F $(8, 197) = 6.86, p < .001, R^2 = .22$). Unfortunately, the three-way interaction was not significant ($b = .24, t(197) = 1.51, p = .13,$ CI[-.07, .55]). Regarding boycott intention, again, the overall model was significant (F $(8, 197) = 22.32, p < .001, R^2 = .48$), but the three-way interaction was not significant ($b = -.17, t(197) = -1.02, p = .31,$ CI[-.49, .16]). Therefore, there was no interaction between anger and proxy efficacy.

Discussion

This study intended to compare two crisis response strategies in a CSR crisis and apply AAM to explain the effectiveness of the strategies. The findings showed insight into the use of crisis responses to solve a CSR crisis. They provide both theoretical and practical implications to researchers and practitioners.

Reform being a better solution

Whether a company should deny or apologize after the victim, accidental, and preventable crises have been extensively documented in the literature (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2014; Crijns et al., 2017). However, the discussion on how to respond to a CSR crisis is limited. Unlike previous evidence that reform and refutation produce similar reputation perceptions (Honisch & Más Manchón, 2020), this study indicated that reform was a better solution than refutation because it created higher account acceptance, increased the positive attitude toward the company, created greater trust, and decreased boycott intention in a CSR crisis. The inconsistent finding might be attributed to the manipulated context of the study. While this study examined the company's response to the

Russian invasion of Ukraine, Honisch and Más Manchón's (2020) study was tested a labor exploitation case. Urgency, stakeholders' willingness to take action, is one of the three attributes to evaluate stakeholders' salience (Coombs, 2012; Coombs & Holladay, 2015). As a global event, the Russian invasion of Ukraine attracted meticulous attention from the media and public, which produced a stronger sense of urgency to resolve the issue. The different levels of urgency perception might change the acceptance of crisis response strategies.

Despite the inconsistency with Honisch and Más Manchón's (2000) empirical investigation, this study confirmed Coombs and Holladay's (2015) tenet that "corporations should use the revise or reform strategies when the challenger has urgency, legitimacy, and power and the changes are consistent with corporate strategy" (p. 158). During the event, stakeholders were eager to see changes in the situation and their concerns were legitimate. Therefore, reform was better received by stakeholders. From the perspective of expectation violation, most paracrises emerge due to an expectation gap (Kice & Klyueva, 2022). To tackle the issue, it is necessary to fill the gap by meeting stakeholders' expectations. Practically, CSR and business ethics are, in many ways, intertwined (Joyner & Payne, 2002; Carroll, 1991). Living up to a CSR expectation demonstrates a commitment to business ethics, which is what all companies strive for in today's society.

Anger as a factor in CSR crises

This study asked if participants' anger at the Russian invasion of Ukraine predicts their preferences for the oil company's reform strategy in responding to the CSR crisis in terms of increased account acceptance, positive attitude toward the organization, greater trust, and decreased boycott intention. The question was proposed based on an appraisal tendency view of emotions. Emotions not only reflect an individual's appraisal of a current situation but also activate a predisposition to appraise future events based on the central appraisal dimensions (Lerner & Keltner, 2000). As anger indicates participants' attitudes toward the contextual event (the Russian invasion of Ukraine), it is reasonable to anticipate that the angry publics would expect oil companies

to take actions on their behalf to move a social drive in a direction they support. When such an expectation is not fulfilled, angry publics may view the oil companies as immoral or irresponsible because angry people tend to engage in defensive reasoning (Weeks, 2015). As predicted, anger was found to significantly lower the participants' preferences for a refutation response from the company, while it does not influence their reactions toward the reform response. This finding confirms Coombs and Holladay's (2015) proposition that accommodative crisis response strategies are more effective in diffusing negative feelings when stakeholders experience stronger negative emotions. The finding is also consistent with previous AAM studies' conclusions that anger motivates a preference for activism (e.g., Turner, 2007; Skurka, 2019). If we consider anger as an indicator of the extent to which publics perceive the oil company should fulfill the social responsibility of curbing the war situation, the significant interactive effect of anger with response strategies also supports SCCT's proposition that the more attributed responsibility, the more accommodative crisis response should match (Coombs, 2007). This finding has significant implications for public relations practices when facing CSR crises. When controversial sociopolitical issues arise, companies need to monitor publics' sentiment closely before deciding on taking or not taking sides in addressing the issue. Simply issuing a public statement based on a company's business interests risks eliciting negative attitudes and boycott intentions from the publics who are already provoked by the issue.

Although anger was suggested as a predictor of participants' preferences for the reform strategy, it is unknown why the preference was observed. As mentioned previously, it might be because anger drove the intention to act, but individuals cannot act to stop the Russian invasion. Therefore, they placed such an expectation on oil companies. When the oil company violated the expectation, angry publics developed negative attitudes toward the company. Alternatively, anger was also suggested to trigger biased processing of information during a crisis in a defensive way (Weeks, 2015) and increase the intention to seek information when evaluating organizations' responses (e.g., Weeks, 2015; Jang et al., 2021). Therefore, anger in the context of this study might serve

to motivate the attribution of responsibility for the war to the oil company or create a need for more useful information from the organization. Although both rationales served as potential theoretical backgrounds, this study did not examine the potential mediators of anger in predicting participants' reactions to crisis responses. Future studies should continue to examine all the above-mentioned potential mediators of anger in predicting publics' responses to an organization's crisis management strategy.

Future studies can also explore why people feel angry to identify the psychological mechanism underlying their preferences for an organization's involvement in social activism. As anger can be triggered when individuals feel disgraced, their goals are blocked, or they perceive injustice or violation of rules (Carver & Harmon-Jones, 2009), each reason would influence what publics expect the organization to do on their behalf.

The complexity of efficacy

Unexpectedly, participants' perceived proxy efficacy of the company in changing the war situation does not exert influence on their attitudes toward the company's response to this social-political event. Efficacy does not moderate the effectiveness of crisis response strategies in terms of account acceptance, attitude toward the company, and trust. From the perspective of expectancy violation theory (EVT), such results indicated that people's expectations are consistent regardless of the corporation's ability on the CSR issue. This finding contradicted previous research that argued that people have lower expectations for CSR engagement for small firms (Green & Peloza, 2014). In other words, during normal business operations, people have various expectations toward businesses of different sizes. Small businesses may not need to shoulder the same responsibility as big corporations. However, when facing a CSR challenge, people expect small businesses to use the same strategy as big corporations regardless of their financial resources; rather, it is more about doing the right thing than finding excuses. This finding revealed the financial burden of market followers to change their behaviors when they cannot afford to change their decisions due to the cost. Another possible explanation lies in the way efficacy was manipulated and measured

in the current study. In the original AAM model, efficacy indicates self-efficacy, which denotes one's self-belief in achieving a goal (Turner, 2007). In the current study, the concept of efficacy was reconceptualized as individuals' beliefs in a third-party or proxy agent's competence to act on their behalf to achieve a goal to better suit the organizational context. Future studies should continue to explore the concept of efficacy in the CSR crisis context.

One significant interaction between crisis response strategies and proxy efficacy was found in boycott intention. For a low efficacy corporation, using refutation increased boycott intention. However, a high efficacy corporation wouldn't suffer from using refutation. The finding could be explained from the perspective of sympathy. Sympathy indicates the feeling elicited from witnessing others' suffering (Iyer & Oldmeadow, 2006). Weiner (1995) proposed that anger and sympathy are two major emotions related to responsibility. Sympathy emerges because of a lack of responsibility judgments (Grappi & Romani, 2015). In the same vein, if a company plays a bigger role in the Russian market, sympathy might emerge along with anger because the company has more to lose to withdraw from the market. The sympathy shown toward the company might influence stakeholders' responsibility attribution and further behavioral intentions like boycotts. However, the discussion of sympathy and responsibility is beyond the scope of this study. Future studies could test the two types of emotion and see how they interact to influence people's attitudes and behaviors. Practically, when dealing with a CSR crisis, companies with a strong influence could use narratives to emphasize how much they and their stakeholders could suffer to change a decision.

Limitations and Future Research

This study provides meaningful results to theorize CSR crisis research, however, some limitations remain. First, corporations need to shoulder various social responsibilities depending on their industries, including sustainability, social justice, and ethics. The violation of each type of responsibility may generate various levels of public engagement and emotional involvement. This study used a unique case, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which is clearly different from other types of CSR. Therefore, the

conclusion may not apply. Future research should extend the discussion by exploring the dimensions that could categorize CSR crises. Second, this study tweaked the efficacy definition to fit the context. However, it is unknown if self-efficacy in the original AAM still plays a role in CSR crises. Future research could test both types of efficacy to see if they interact to exert influence. Third, there are only a few big oil companies. Using a fictitious company name could not completely rule out the possibility that participants associated Crescent with the real company, Shell, especially for those familiar with the news.

Despite the limitations, this study uncovered effective crisis response strategies for CSR crises and identified anger as a significant factor to consider when managing CSR crises. The researchers hope this study will encourage more research on this urgent yet underdeveloped research topic in crisis communication.

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Crescent Buys Russian Oil at Bargain Price

By Anthony Dayton

WASHINGTON --- Crescent, one of America's largest oil companies, is continuing to purchase oil and gas from Russia in the wake of the country's invasion of Ukraine, according to a person briefed on the matter.

Crescent bought 100,000 metric tons of Russia's flagship Urals crude on Friday, according to people familiar with the transaction. It paid $28.50 a barrel below the price of international benchmark Brent crude, the widest discount on record.

> **Crescent's decision to buy Russian oil greatly helps Russian economy**
> **---Michael Baines, Energy Sector Analyst at Bank of America**

Russia's energy sector depends heavily upon Western companies. Crescent, BP and Shell will leave a significant void that could be hard for newcomers to fill. It is reported that Russia exports 4% of its total crude oil to Crescent year, and it has a significant impact on Russia's economy.

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> *Even if Crescent cuts ties with Russia, it wouldn't make a huge difference*
> *---Michael Baines, Energy Sector Analyst at Bank of America*

Russia's energy sector does not depend heavily upon Western companies. The void of Western companies' withdrawal from Russia could be somewhat filled by Indian and Chinese buyers. It is reported that Russia exports 0.4% of its total crude oil to Crescent each year, and it has little impact on Russia's economy.

Appendix 2: Crescent Statements

Crescent Statement

Like so many, we have been deeply shocked and saddened by the situation unfolding in Ukraine and our heart goes out to everyone affected.

Yesterday we made the difficult decision to purchase a cargo of Russian crude oil. Our refineries produce petrol and diesel as well as other products that people rely on every day. To be clear, **without an uninterrupted supply of crude oil to refineries, the energy industry cannot assure the continued provision of essential products** to people in America over the weeks ahead. Cargoes from alternative sources would not have arrived in time to avoid disruptions to market supply.

We didn't take this decision lightly and we understand the strength of feeling around it. We will **work with aid partners and humanitarian agencies** to alleviate the consequences that this war is having on the people of Ukraine

Crescent Statement

Like so many, we have been deeply shocked and saddened by the situation unfolding in Ukraine and our heart goes out to everyone affected.

We are acutely aware that our decision last week to purchase a cargo of Russian crude oil was **not the right one and we are sorry**. We will immediately stop buying Russian crude oil on the spot market and we will not renew term contracts. At the same time, we are changing our crude oil supply chain to remove Russian volumes. We will also shut down our service station, aviation fuels, and lubricants operations in Russia.

We didn't take this decision lightly and we understand the strength of feeling around it. We will **work with aid partners and humanitarian agencies** to alleviate the consequences that this war is having on the people of Ukraine