

Careful and Careless Repairs: Crisis Responses to Transportation-Related Reputational Disasters in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Due to various geographical and economic conditions in the Philippines, public transportation remains a debilitated system in the country. This article argues that the shortcomings of both public and private institutions in repairing the national transportation system not only constitute an infrastructural crisis, but a reputational crisis as well. This nationwide situation raises the questions of whom the Filipino public attributes this transportation crisis, what crisis strategies institutions have employed over the years, and how ethical such crisis communications have been. Using Image Repair Theory and Care Ethics framework, this article presents a qualitative content analysis of two case studies which categorizes and critiques the crisis response messages published between 2017 and 2023 of a public and private local organization. Results indicate that between these organizations, the latter responded ethically to reputational crises. Focusing on corrective, proactive, and inclusive image repair strategies that empathize with the Filipino stakeholders, private sector communications exhibited ethical care on both affective and relational dimensions of the care ethics framework. On the other hand, by displaying aggression, apathy, and dishonesty through strategies of denial and offense reduction—the public sector communications exacerbated the local public sector crisis. This article contributes to existing crisis communication literature focusing not only on applying crisis responses typologies but also on evaluating and prescribing crisis communications guided by an ethical framework of care.

Keywords: crisis and organizational communication, ethics of care, organizational transportation

INTRODUCTION

In the Philippines, an average Metro Manila commuter spends 66 minutes in traffic daily, which was considered the third longest average commute time in Asia in 2019 (Fallaria et al. 2019; Piojo 2021). The experience is made worse by long queues and overcrowded transport terminals by Filipino commuters, resulting in physical and mental distress among ordinary citizens using public transportation systems (Chang et al. 2021). Previous reports indicate an economic loss of over PHP 2.4 billion (Philippine Pesos = USD 42.2 million) because of ongoing transportation issues (Fallaria et al. 2019). These, along with the lack of formal public transportation options, paint a troublesome picture of the Filipino commuter experience.

Considering the current transport crises in the Philippines, I argue that the shortcomings of both public and private institutions in terms of effectively fixing the public transportation system is not only a transportation crisis, but an image crisis as well. An image crisis is described as an event or series of events that pose threats or inflict damage to the reputation, trustworthiness, and character of the organization (Benoit 1997). In the context of the national transportation crisis the national government is one of the central authority figures, an agent perceived to have the capacity, authority, and obligation to resolve such crisis. In this case, the Filipino government also becomes the institution whose image or reputation might be most vulnerable to public scrutiny and negative publicity.

Using two case studies, I demonstrate that the Philippines current transportation crisis is also an image crisis. I contextualize my analysis emphasizing the 2017 anti-jeepney phaseout mass protests targeting the national government and business discontinuation threats by the State concerning the Angkas local private transport company in the same year. These two cases were selected as both fit the criteria for what constitutes an image crisis, as outlined by Benoit (1997), and Coombs and Holladay (2022). These two cases (1) involved a single or a series of events that posed threats to the organizations' image or others-facing reputation; (2) exhibited a level of attribution of the events by the stakeholders and the general public to the organizations; (3) included attempts by the organizations to respond to the image threats; and (4) involved strategies which demonstrate the dimensions of information quality, accountability, self-preservation, and organizational responsibility.

I discuss the development of the Filipino transportation crisis and institutional responses to them using William Benoit's (1997) Image Repair Theory identified earlier. By also using Gilligan's (1977) Care Ethics Perspective, also known as the ethics of care, I critique the crisis responses of the national government and Angkas in the face of the respective image threats they faced during the period of 2017 to 2023. Considering Image Repair Theory, this pertains to the general representation of an organization or individual's identity and reputation as perceived by other organizations, individuals, and the public (Benoit 1997). An institution's image is the sum of its others-facing presentations, history, values, and overall reputation. However, while the national government is primarily responsible for the current image crisis, other agents such as the private sector and transportation-related corporate organizations are secondary figures to which this mobility crises may be attributed as well. In what follows, I present further context concerning the

local transportation crisis, the theoretical framework for this study, methodological considerations, an analysis of data and a discussion concerning crisis communication in this scenario.

THE PHILIPPINES' TRANSPORTATION CRISIS

Due to several geographical, cultural, microeconomic, and macroeconomic conditions in the Philippines, public transportation remains to be one of the most debilitated systems in the country (Boquet 2012; Dimalanta et al. 2023; Pojani and Stead 2017). Among urbanized regions alone, public transportation constitutes up to 80% of the means which Filipino commuters regularly depend on (Dimalanta et al. 2023). Despite the consistent and overwhelming demand for effective and formalized public transportation options, the supply remains limited and the national needs among the Filipino people are perpetually unmet (Cervero 2000; Chang et al. 2021; Zulueta et al. 2024). Informal transportation such as jeepneys, tricycles, and taxis are popular alternatives in response to the lack of standard or state-run transportation services in the Philippines (Mendoza 2021; Regidor et al. 2009). These alternative options for commuting are labelled as paratransit seeing they lack proper safety measures and considered unsustainable due to their significant carbon emissions (Dimalanta et al. 2023; Regidor et al. 2009).

Local paratransit operators are also unmonitored and unregulated by either local or national government transportation agencies (Regidor et al. 2009). Despite their reputation as unsustainable and unsafe transportation options, these paratransit vehicles are nonetheless patronized by Filipinos due to their affordability, accessibility, and convenience (Dimalanta et al. 2023; Mendoza 2021; Mettke et al. 2016). Jeepneys and tricycles have become cultural symbols in the Philippines, signifying the resourcefulness, creativity, innovativeness, religiosity, and resilience of Filipino people (Mateo-Babiano 2015; Vinzons 2015). Issues of safety and sustainability between formal and informal transportation options are overshadowed by continuing demand for a more efficient public transportation system and the lack of effective public policy responses to resolve such issues.

This unfortunate situation raises questions concerning whom the Filipino transportation crisis is attributed to by national stakeholders, including experts and the general public. The national government is often seen as the main cause of local transportation issues (Boquet 2012; Cervero 2000; Dimalanta et al. 2023; Pojani and Stead 2016; Rivas 2023). For example, Pojani and Stead (2016) argue that most of the transportation and mobility crises experienced in emerging economies such as the Philippines are a result of the State's limited managerial capacities and appropriate resources to resolve systemic inefficiencies. As such, the government's profit-oriented initiatives such as charging high-priced metro tickets to offset large operational costs instead of fully subsidizing such services contribute to maintaining the problematic status quo in local transportation systems (Pojani and Stead 2016). Boquet (2012) also points to the ineffective coordination and lack of communication between the national government and relevant local government bodies, private transportation agencies, and local transportation groups. In addition, Cervero (2000) and Rivas (2023) both argue that the people's patronage of the paratransit stems from the government's failure to fulfill public demand. I turn attention framing the transportation

crisis in the Philippines including the ways in which corresponding institutional communications might respond to such predicaments.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Scholars highlight typologies which categorize various crisis management and resolution strategies employed by individuals and organizations (Coombs and Holladay 2022). These typologies also differentiate crisis management and resolution strategies according to several dimensions but are not limited to the quantity and quality of public information, degrees of accountability exhibited concerning a crisis response, self-preservation or detachment, assertion of organizational responsibility—or the lack thereof, and levels of aggression or defensiveness (Coombs and Holladay 2022). With crisis response ethics, crisis management and resolution strategies are differentiated and evaluated based on the dimensions of impartiality, fairness, logic, empathy, compassion, and care demonstrated by crisis responses (Simola 2003). The national government and private transportation-related corporations in the Philippines employed management strategies in response to the reputational threats that they faced. These strategies too had exhibited different dimensions and qualities found in the typologies offered by crisis communication theories. As such, the ethicality of crisis responses also differs significantly based on the circumstance.

Image Repair Theory

Building on earlier remarks, my use of William Benoit's (1997) Image Repair Theory in this study pertains to the overall reputation of an organization or individual as perceived by other organizations or individuals. Scholars also note that Image Repair Theory was previously known as Image Restoration Theory since its inception the late 1990s, highlighting a shift away from the term "restoration" to "repair" which indicates an image can only be repaired and improved but never restored to its former state (Coombs and Holladay 2022). The Image Repair Theory also considers corrective actions and apology as the two repair strategies under this framework (Benoit 1997). On one hand, corrective action is a method of acknowledging an organization's offense by offering reparations and improvement plans. On the other hand, apologies are expressions of acknowledgment, guilt, accountability, and desire to compensate some form of loss. These two image repair strategies reflect the ethical and preferable crisis responses outlined in other crisis management and communication theories. An organization or individual's image is vulnerable to reputational threats and can be damaged by a crisis. However, a crisis does not automatically damage or threaten the image of an organization as a crisis first needs to satisfy two criteria. First, an event is considered a crisis when perceived as negative, offensive, or scandalous in nature and second, stakeholders must attribute the crisis to the organization or individual (Benoit 1997; Coombs and Holladay 2022).

Moreover, if an event is not perceived negatively or offensively by stakeholders and a crisis is not attributed to an organization or individual, a crisis of reputation would not have occurred. What dictates the presence or absence of the image damage is the perception of the public and the stakeholders, regardless of if their perceptions and attributions are accurate or not (Benoit 1997).

As a result, much of the image repair strategies outlined by Benoit (1997) focus on denying, evading, and reducing rather than simply correcting the negative perceptions of the public. There are three major categories of image repair strategies: denial of the act, evasion of the responsibility, and reduction of the offensiveness (Compton 2016). The first strategy under the category of denial is simple denial—the organization or individual under threat simply claims that they did not commit the offensive act that led to the crisis. The second strategy focuses on shifting the blame which entails that the organization points at a different organization or individual who might have performed the offensive act instead of themselves. While both simple denial and blame-shifting strategies depend on denying the performance of the offensive act, blame-shifting strategies also proceed to shift the attribution to someone else after the denial. This is further exemplified in crisis situations wherein organizations decide to blame the victims of a disaster or accident for the crisis (i.e., victim-blaming). Whereas simple denial strategies only involve simply rejecting the attribution without transferring it to another organization or individual.

Care Ethics Perspective

The Care Ethics Perspective, also known as the ethics of care framework, is an ethical and moral evaluation theory that centers on the importance of empathy, compassion, and care in social interactions and social responses among others (Gilligan 1977; Coombs and Holladay 2022). This ethical theory considers that individuals should prioritize communicating and enacting empathy and care in social relationships and interpersonal interactions above all else, while also seeking to resolve conflicts and differences (Carroll 2009). The care ethics perspective is commonly used in crisis management studies as both a lens and a method for communicating during and resolving conflicts after a crisis (Simola 2003; Carroll 2009; Bauman 2010). Apart from examining the crisis management styles of individuals, the ethics of care framework has also been used by experts in analyzing organizational crisis responses and the perceptions of the affected publics (Bauman 2010; Diers-Lawson and Pang 2016).

The Care Ethics Perspective has two dimensions in the context of crisis communication which are the affective and relational aspects of a crisis response. The affective dimension concerns responses of empathy, compassion, and care (Simola 2003). With this framework organizations are expected to enact care not because it merely wants to save face, but because it genuinely does care for and about the affected stakeholders and publics. This affective dimension entails centering a crisis response on the emotions of the affected parties while also attending to the practical demands of crisis resolution (Bauman 2010). On the other hand, the relational dimension of care ethics emphasizes the importance of maintaining relational ties and mutual trust among stakeholders, reflecting the interpersonal nature of crisis communication (Simola 1977). Relationships, in the context of care ethics constitute long-lasting connections between stakeholders (Simola 2003). The relational dimension also highlights the weight of not only maintaining but also strengthening stakeholder relationships through trust-building which is also considered a priority. Like individual relationships, organizational relationships are also maintained and strengthened through constant communication and open dialogue that showcases listening, understanding, and responding with compassion and care (Carroll 2009).

METHODOLOGY

I employ deductive qualitative content analysis to thematize and assess various crisis response messages according to the previously discussed frameworks. This methodology follows the process of similar crisis response analysis studies that deductively thematized crisis response communications vis-a-vis Benoit's (1997) image repair typology (Compton 2018; Holtzhausen and Roberts 2009) and evaluated the ethicality of crisis messages using Gilligan's (1977) care ethics dimensions (Diers-Lawson and Pang 2016; Simola 2003). This study aims to categorize and critique the two cases of transportation-related crises responses employed by the national government and the private corporation of Angkas in 2017. The first crisis involves mass protests staged by Filipino jeepney drivers and allies against the national government's jeepney phaseout plan. The second crisis then involves business discontinuation threats faced by the Angkas transport company, issued by the national government, which lasted for over two years. The analysis was conducted on 26 crisis response messages which include press releases, news articles, and social media posts of these organizations—published between October 2017 and March 2023—that either contain statements or illustrate actions reflecting crisis response strategies. Such crisis response strategies include, the presentation of corrective actions, attempts to reduce offensiveness of transgressions, denial of action, and expression of mortification. These contents were sourced from the websites and social media pages of the Department of Transportation (DOTr), the Department of Education (DepEd), the Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board (LTFRB), Philippine News Agency (PNA), Rappler, Inquirer.net, Angkas Official Facebook Page, Angkas Newsroom, ABS-CBN News, and Manila Bulletin.

A total of 18 identifiable crisis responses were elicited from the national government agencies and 8 from Angkas respectively. These strategies were then deductively categorized using Benoit's (1997) image repair typology and further evaluated through Gilligan's (1977) care ethics framework. The two sets of crisis response strategies were then assessed in terms of the salience of image repair strategies used, and ethicality on both the relation and affective dimensions of care ethics. As the content analysis focused on the crisis response strategies performed by the organizations to which the crisis is primarily attributed, communications by affected publics were excluded from the analysis. In the succeeding discussion of the cases, the collections of crisis response messages were tabulated according to the month and year of publication, and general and specific categories of crisis response based on Benoit's (1997) typology for crisis communication. Each crisis response message was presented either as quote or summary capturing the essence of long-form articles.

THE NATIONAL JEEPNEY PHASEOUT CRISIS

In 2017, in compliance with the Paris Agreement on global decarbonization initiatives, the Philippines Department of Transportation (DOTr) along with the Land Transportation Franchising Regulatory Board (LTFRB) and the Land Transportation Office (LTO) spearheaded the Public Utility Vehicle Modernization Program (PUVMP) which would later pave the way for the phasing out of public jeepneys nationwide (Andalecio et al. 2020). Given the problematic paratransit status of public jeepneys in being unsafe, unsustainable, and unregulated (Regidor et al. 2009), the national government attempted to replace the traditional jeepneys with modernized ones since 2017

(Dimalanta et al. 2023; Rivas 2023). These modernized jeepneys were supposedly designed to be environment-friendly, fuel-efficient, reliable, safer, and more comfortable (Mendoza 2021). With evidence proving the possible threats to human safety and the environmental posed by paratransit vehicles such as public jeepneys (Andalecio et al. 2020), the PUV Modernization Program only further marginalized jeepney drivers and transferred economic control to foreign transportation companies (Dimalanta et al. 2023).

One contentious issue is financial cost associated with jeepney modernization (Rivas 2023). A modern jeepney as of 2023 is priced at a total of PHP 1.6 million to 2.8 million (USD 27,900 to 48,840) as most vehicular parts are imported from foreign transportation companies such as China Six Eleven International Sales, Global Autodistribution Incorporated, and Izuparts Center Incorporated among others (Ramos 2023; Peña 2024). In contrast with traditional jeepneys costing PHP 200,000 to 400,000 (USD 3,400 to USD 6,800), the procurement and acquisition of modernized jeepneys were unsustainable for many working class Filipino jeepney drivers (Dimalanta et al. 2023). Under the PUV Modernization Program, jeepney drivers will also be required to form or join cooperatives that have their own comfort rooms, garage, maintenance bays, and waiting areas without any financial assistance from the national government. These cooperatives will also be required to pay for franchising and franchise consolidation which cost at least PHP 300,000 (USD 5,100) in addition to the individual jeepney franchises that cost PHP 20,000 each (USD 340). Local jeepney drivers be burdened by the financial costs of the modernization program and Filipino commuters would also end up paying significantly increased fares (Dimalanta et al. 2023). Apart from the financial burden, the PUV Modernization Program also further exposes the local transportation economy to foreign competition through the importations, loans, and corporatization (Rivas 2023). Such a program undermined the local transport industry, among others, and further disenfranchised many Filipinos in managing their own livelihoods (Dimalanta et al. 2023). Despite the numerous burdens that the PUV Modernization Program entailed for the jeepney drivers nationwide, the national government and its relevant agencies had continued to impose the national jeepney phaseout.

In response to the Filipino government's transport reform initiative, various local transport-based interest groups such as PISTON (Pinagkaisang Samahan ng Tsuper at Opereytor Nationwide), Stop and Go Coalition, and Manibela had staged countless transport strikes, and public and online protests against the state (Relativo 2023). Apart from these transport groups, allied coalitions and national democratic organizations such as Anakbayan and League of Filipino Students also joined the call for a more mass-oriented transportation modernization in the Philippines and the rejection of the "anti-poor" transport reform program (Abello 2023; Gloria 2024). Across all the transport strikes, public and online protests, press statements, mobilizations, and media coverage—the national government had been consistently demonized (Almendral 2017; Ballaran 2017, Corrales 2017). The image crisis in this situation lay in the attribution of the transportation crisis not to the jeepney drivers and transport groups, but to the national government as the central authority figure. Citizens expressed displeasure with the national government, along with its transportation agencies, over their inefficiency, incompetence, and neglect of Filipino jeepney drivers' livelihood (Relativo 2023).

The start of the PUV Modernization Program implementation in 2017 had further aggravated prior negative perceptions from the public concerning local public transport (Andalecio et al. 2020; Dimalanta et al. 2023). Yet the national government still maintained support of many citizens and in the effort to preserve such support and counter civil resistance in the form of transport strikes and protests, several crisis responses were employed (Gutierrez 2024; Cervantes 2023; De Vera-Ruiz 2023). Considering the image crisis faced by the national government, several government agencies and individuals had attempted to employ image repair strategies, including the offices that are not directly connected to the issue such as the Department of Education. Table 1 summarizes and categorizes various image repair strategies employed by the Filipino government. These strategies were elicited from press releases, news articles, speeches, and social media posts of different government offices and officials between October 2017 (the beginning of PUVMP implementation) and March 2023.

Period & Source	Crisis Response Statements & Actions	Image Repair Category	Image Repair Strategy
October 2017 (Corrales 2017)	Rodrigo Duterte: PISTON is a legal front of the communists and committing rebellion through the transport strikes.	<i>Reduction of Offensiveness</i>	<i>Attack Accuser</i>
October 2017 (Almendral 2017)	Rodrigo Duterte: You are poor? Son of a bitch, suffer hardship and hunger, I do not care. Do not endanger the public.	<i>Reduction of Offensiveness</i>	<i>Transcendence</i>
October 2017 (Ranada 2017)	DOTr: The government is offering a generous loan program to help jeepney drivers and operators purchase new vehicles.	<i>Corrective Action</i>	<i>Corrective Action</i>
October 2017 (Ranada 2017)	Rodrigo Duterte: You Piston, you know that you are poisoning the people. 2030, one-third of Filipinos, mostly poor, die of lung cancer because you do not want to fix your engines.	<i>Reduction of Offensiveness</i>	<i>Attack Accuser</i>
October 2017 (Pateña 2017)	DOTr: We draw our strength and energy from the President's constant reminder to always be guided by the public good and give the Filipino people the service they deserve.	<i>Reduction of Offensiveness</i>	<i>Bolstering</i>
October 2017 (GMA News 2017)	DOTr: Moving forward, we would like to appeal for the support of all the stakeholders in this endeavor. The PUV Modernization Program is long overdue and Filipino commuters have suffered enough. Let us make this program happen for them.	<i>Reduction of Offensiveness</i>	<i>Transcendence</i>
October 2017	DOTr: We are one with the President in effecting badly needed reforms in the	<i>Reduction of Offensiveness</i>	<i>Transcendence</i>

(Pateña 2017)	public transportation sector. Rest assured that we will not stop until these reforms are put into effect.		
December 2017 (Ballaran 2017)	Harry Roque: PUV modernization program not anti-poor, but it is a mechanism to improve the country's public transport sector.	<i>Denial of the Act</i>	<i>Simple Denial</i>
December 2017 (Rocamora 2017)	Harry Roque: The Palace clarifies that the PUVMP of the Duterte administration is not anti-poor, contrary to the claims of some transport groups.	<i>Denial of the Act</i>	<i>Simple Denial</i>
December 2017 (Rocamora 2017)	Harry Roque: It was not designed to phase out jeepneys. In fact, the program aims to strengthen and guarantee the profitability of the jeepney business.	<i>Evasion of the Responsibility</i>	<i>Good Intentions</i>
October 2019 (Mercurio 2019)	Arthur Tugade, DOTr Chief: Past administrations wanted to modernize transportation, but every time people wave flags saying that the program is anti-poor, they take a step back. This has to stop.	<i>Denial of the Act</i>	<i>Shifting Blame</i>
October 2019 (Mercurio 2019)	Martin Delgra, LTFRB Chief: The government is firm on the directive of President Duterte to implement the PUV modernization to ensure safe and convenient transport system for commuters.	<i>Reduction of Offensiveness</i>	<i>Transcendence</i>
February 2023 (Dela Cruz 2023)	Jaime Bautista, DOTr Chief, invited public utility vehicle (PUV) operators to a dialogue to address their concerns and grievances with the PUV modernization program (PUVMP) instead of staging a transport strike.	<i>Corrective Action</i>	<i>Corrective Action</i>
February 2023 (Dela Cruz 2023)	Jaime Bautista, DOTr Chief: We are working closely with the Development Bank of the Philippines (DBP) and with Landbank to help them finance the acquisition of modernized equipment	<i>Corrective Action</i>	<i>Corrective Action</i>
March 2023 (ABS-CBN News 2023)	Sara Duterte, DepEd Chief: The first failure of this transport strike is the failure to consider our learners and our teachers. The transport strike is a painful interference in our efforts to address the learning gaps in our education system.	<i>Reduction of Offensiveness</i>	<i>Attack Accuser</i>

March 2023 (Department of Education 2023)	Sara Duterte, DepEd Chief: PISTON is an organization with leaders and some members poisoned by the ideologies of CPP, NDF, and NPA.	<i>Reduction of Offensiveness</i>	<i>Attack Accuser</i>
March 2023 (Salcedo 2023)	Sara Duterte, DepEd Chief: The DepEd wholeheartedly appreciates the efforts of LGUs in helping our learners during this learning-disruptive transport strike.	<i>Reduction of Offensiveness</i>	<i>Attack Accuser</i>
March 2023 (Argosino 2023)	Jaime Bautista, DOTr Chief: We never recommended the immediate phaseout of the jeepneys. There are many components in the PUV modernization program, and jeepney phaseout is one of the last.	<i>Denial of the Act</i>	<i>Simple Denial</i>

Table 1: Crisis response messages of national government offices and individuals between October 2017 and March 2023. Sources: DOTr, DepEd, LTFRB, PNA, Rappler, Inquirer.Net, Manila Bulletin.

Based on the crisis responses exhibited through the statements and actions issued by various government agencies and corresponding public figures, the recurring crisis responses can be classified as reduction of offensiveness, denial of the act, and corrective action through the deductive thematic analysis following Benoit's (1997) image repair typology. Strategies frequently used under the reduction category, by order of salience, are attack accuser and transcendence. This implies that most of the representative crisis responses of the national government, through the relevant channels, depended on attacking the credibility of the accusers such as PISTON and other progressive groups or individuals. This method was done by associating the groups with the Communist Party of the Philippines, National Democratic Front, and the New People's Army—organizations often framed as terrorists, rebels, and radicals (Sarao 2023). These groups were also blamed for delaying national progress and for compromising the health and services to other Filipino people. To repair their image, government agencies often focused on tarnishing the image of their accusers. The most aggressive and salient attack accuser strategies were employed by the former president Rodrigo Duterte, and his daughter and current vice president Sara Duterte (Corrales 2017; Ranada 2017; ABS-CBN News 2023).

The second most observable strategy employed by state agencies were under the reduction category is transcendence or the assertion that more significant goals were achieved in comparison with the costs and compromises. This strategy also relied on asserting that the end justifies the means, including the phasing out of public traditional jeepneys. Among the most salient crisis responses from the national government were arguments that the modernization program sought to improve the lives of the Filipino people, and the argument that the jeepney phaseout ensures safety and convenience for the commuters (Pateña 2017; GMA News 2017; Ballaran 2017; Rocamora 2017; Mercurio 2019). These crisis responses include the former LTFRB Chief's statement: "The government is firm on the directive of President Duterte to implement the PUV modernization to ensure safe and convenient transport system for commuters" (Mercurio 2019).

These assertions were made as if the public jeepney drivers were not part of Filipino citizenry that the national government was referring to. As demonstrated by the national government, the strategy of transcendence relies on shifting the attention of the public away from the tragic costs and onto the possible gains of an offensive act.

The third significant strategy in this case was simple denial. There were various instances and utterances wherein the national government denied their original intentions behind the PUV Modernization Program and the jeepney phaseout (Argosino 2023). The initial intention of the state was to phase out the traditional jeepneys and penalize those who would not comply, either by revoking their license or imposing a penalty fee. However, several authority figures claimed that the PUV Modernization Program was not meant to immediately phaseout traditional jeepneys (Rocamora 2017; Ballaran 2017; Argosino 2023). While the motive of the program was clear since its first year of implementation in 2017, the then secretary of the Department of Transportation, Jaime Bautista, retroactively asserted that the state never demanded the immediate phaseout of the iconic paratransit (Argosino 2023). This image repair strategy was also used to deny the anti-poor nature of the program despite the presence of various evidence illustrating the marginalizing effects of the nationwide jeepney phaseout.

The last strategy that was frequently demonstrated by the national government was mention of a corrective action or an improvement plan. For instance, Jaime Bautista invited various representatives from the public utility vehicle (PUV) operators' sector to a dialogue to address their grievances (Dela Cruz 2023). While the effectiveness of such resolutions was unclear, assuming that the corrective actions were implemented to begin with, the motives and intentions behind the strategy still do not appear to be genuine due to the presence of other contrasting aggressive strategies such as attack accuser and shifting blame. The salience of reduction and denial strategies supersedes the ethicality of the corrective actions.

The national government and its representative agencies did not demonstrate an ethic of care in their attempt to repair their image. Instead of empathizing with the plight of Filipino jeepney drivers nationwide, the national government responded with aggression through their attack accuser strategies. Instead of showing compassion as an acknowledgment of the program's flaws and shortcomings, the national government responded with denial through their simple denial and blame-shifting statements. The former president Rodrigo Duterte and the current vice president Sara Duterte, for example, exhibited the greatest hostility against the representatives of the jeepney drivers (Corrales 2017; Ranada 2017; ABS-CBN News 2023). Working-class members were told to die out of hunger if they choose not to cooperate and were tagged as terrorists and rebels due to their participation in transport strikes (Corrales 2017; Almendral 2017). As Duterte stated addressing the jeepney operators, "You are poor? Son of a bitch, suffer hardship and hunger, I do not care. Do not endanger the public" (Almendral 2017).

While there were attempts by the government to dialogue with local interest groups, there was little evidence of genuine intention to enable favorable for the government-citizen relationship. In this context, the dialogue appeared to be transactional and only pacifist at best, seeking to only silence and gratify jeepney drivers in the present through performative and tokenistic dialogues. This was a manifestation of incidental care—caring only to save face and pacify the people—rather

than of intentional care where emotions and relationships take center stage. The lack of relational care manifests in the form of relational distrust between the institution and the stakeholders. In contrast to the state-led approaches to crisis communication, the next section discusses an alternative approach by a private local transport company.

THE ANGKAS BUSINESS DISCONTINUATION CRISIS

Angkas is a popular motorcycle-based, ride-hailing platform which is less expensive than car-hailing options (Dionora 2020). Its advantage is based on the flexibility of motorcycles in standard vehicular traffic and cheaper fare offered compared to other private ride-hailing companies such as Grab. While not an ideal solution to the inherent issues of the Philippine transportation system, it presents the citizens with an efficient and reasonable alternative for travel. Angkas has also shown professionalism and ingenuity through its mobile applications, advertisements, online presence, and customer transactions, contributing to its reputation as a trusted ride-hailing company (Royeca 2023; Nakpil 2017).

In November 2017, the national Government ordered the closure and termination of Angkas because of the company's initial failure to present its business permits (Talabong 2017). The LTFRB had also apprehended several Angkas drivers due to this business termination order (Pateña 2017). Apart from the failure to present their business permit, the apprehending transportation agency also cited that motorcycles can only be legally registered as vehicles for private use and could not be rented or offered as public transport vehicles (Dionora 2020). There were citations of possible lapses against Angkas in terms of motorcycle-riding safety which posed threats to the lives of their passengers (Arceo 2018). From these instances alone, I draw attention to the pressure that the national and local governments imposed onto this private company. Such legal and operational pressures lasted for two years, starting late 2017 until early 2020 when Angkas was eventually permitted to continue their business (Dionora 2020).

Unlike the national government, Angkas was enthusiastically supported by the general Filipino public (Royeca 2023). Because of its expression of social responsibility, Angkas enjoyed support from the Filipino public both online and offline (Nakpil 2017). As such, Angkas opted for damage control to repair their compromised image due to the accusations from the national and local governments. Table 2 summarizes and categorizes the image repair strategies employed by Angkas during a two-year period. These strategies were elicited from press releases, news articles, and social media posts of Angkas between the first business termination order in 2017 and the last crisis response enacted by the company in 2019 (Dionora 2020).

Based on these crisis responses, exhibited through the statements and actions performed by Angkas Corporation during 2017-2019, the main image repair strategy of the ride-hailing company was that of corrective action. According to Benoit (1997), corrective action and mortification are two complementary strategies that an organization or individual uses to resolve a crisis and repair their image. Compared to the major categories of reduction of offensiveness, evasion of the responsibility, and denial of the act—corrective action and mortification are more likely to be ethical due to their non-evasive and transparency-based natures (Benoit 1997). In the case of Angkas, most of their corrective actions focused on organized community-based mobilizations, training and

retraining of their motorcycle riders for safety, and being open to civil dialogues with the transportation agencies (De Jesus 2017; Rey 2018; Galvez 2019). For instance, Angkas stated that they had re-trained 12,000 riders and would continue training 15,000 more after receiving their permit to operate again to signify their commitment to service and safety (Galvez 2019).

Period & Source	Crisis Response Statements & Actions	Image Repair Category	Image Repair Strategy
November 2017 (Angkas 2017)	Angkas reiterated that they were open to dialogues with the transportation authorities and were willing to discuss possible resolutions for the discontinuation crisis.	<i>Corrective Action</i>	<i>Problem Solution or Prevention</i>
November 2017 (AngkasPH 2017)	Angkas released a call for unity online and introduced the hashtag <i>#OneWithAngkas</i> which sought to engage the support of the online public for the company's campaign for business continuation.	<i>Corrective Action</i>	<i>Problem Solution or Prevention</i>
November 2017 (AngkasPH 2017)	Angkas discouraged the public from attacking the transportation authorities and had reiterated once again that they were patiently cooperating with them to better serve the Filipino commuters.	<i>Corrective Action</i>	<i>Problem Solution or Prevention</i>
November 2017 (De Jesus 2017)	Despite being terminated eventually during this year, Angkas nonetheless apologized to the LTFRB for the possible inconveniences that they have caused, but still expressed their willingness to reopen the dialogues.	<i>Corrective Action</i> <i>Mortification</i>	<i>Problem Solution or Prevention</i> <i>Apology</i>
December 2018 (Rey 2018)	After a year of alternating decisions from the government agencies, Angkas had organized a unity ride with its riders to protest against the unfair ruling of the said agencies.	<i>Corrective Action</i>	<i>Problem Solution or Prevention</i>
December 2018 (ABS-CBN News 2018)	Angkas held the <i>#SaveAngkas</i> event, a free thanksgiving concert for its loyal riders and drivers that included Nadine Lustre, Sam Concepcion, and Gab Valenciano among others.	<i>Corrective Action</i>	<i>Problem Solution or Prevention</i>
June 2019 (Galvez 2019)	After receiving permission to operate once again, Angkas disclosed that they had re-trained 12,000 riders and would	<i>Corrective Action</i>	<i>Problem Solution or Prevention</i>

	continue training 15,000 more to hopefully employ 27,000 drivers.		
December 2019 (Cabrera 2019)	After being ordered to downsize the number of its employees from 27,000 to 10,000, Angkas joined its riders in their protest against LTFRB in light of the potential unemployment of 17,000 riders from the company.	Corrective Action	Problem Solution or Prevention

Table 2: Crisis response messages of Angkas between November 2017 and December 2019. Source: Angkas Official Facebook Page, Angkas Newsroom, Rappler, Inquirer.Net, ABS-CBN News.

From the perspective of the ethics of care framework, the crisis responses employed by Angkas had exhibited affective and relational image repair strategies, and an embodiment of social responsibility in the face of two-year discontinuation threats. There are three major points that support this assertion. First, the most salient strategy exhibited by the corporation’s crisis responses, again, is corrective action. Compared to the evasive, denialist, and often aggressive approach of the national government over the accusations they had faced, Angkas opted to be more proactive, transparent, civil, and compassionate. The company showed care not only for their own employees but also for the authorities who expressed willingness to work with them. For example, Angkas discouraged the public from attacking the transportation authorities in 2017 and had reiterated once again that they were patiently cooperating with them to better serve the Filipino commuters (AngkasPH 2017). The corrective nature of their crisis responses also contributed to their reputation of being professional and caring as private ride-hailing corporation.

Second, the crisis responses of Angkas were inclusive and community-oriented. Their own riders, passengers, online followers, and even executives had joined together to forward their causes and aspirations as an organization through in-person and online unity protests (AngkasPH 2017; Rey 2018). The membership and contributions of each group were valued equally and presented proudly by Angkas. In addition, the company was also able to forward the interests of their employees alongside the interests of their organization.

Third and most importantly, Angkas was able to maintain and even strengthen its relationship with the authorities, stakeholders, and the general public through their proactive and empathetic crisis responses. Despite the constant discontinuation threats from the national and local governments, the company maintained composure, respect, and care for these authorities (De Jesus 2017). For instance, Angkas has repeatedly apologized to the LTFRB for the possible inconveniences that they have caused, but still expressed their willingness to reopen the dialogues. However, when the company was forced to decide between the interests of the government and the interests of its employees and passengers, the company was quick to opt for the latter.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to existing crisis communication literature not only on applying crisis communication typologies to the Filipino context, but also on evaluating institutional crisis responses using ethical frameworks. Highlighting two specific cases of national crisis responses to

the Philippines local transport system, the data illustrates varying degrees of effectiveness and ethicality of national crisis management strategies by representative organizations of the Philippines public and private sector. Using Image Repair Theory (Benoit 1997) and the Care Ethics Perspective (Gilligan 1977), this study demonstrates how the Philippines national transport crisis is simultaneously an image crisis with an important ethical dimension. I employed these theoretical tools to describe and critique national crisis response strategies, emphasizing the importance of ethicality in Filipino crisis communication.

Considering the national government and local private transport company Angkas, I argued that the latter responded ethically to the national transportation-related crises faced by the Filipino public. Angkas accomplished this through corrective, proactive, and inclusive image repair strategies that involved direct and relationship-sensitive resolutions concerning the local transportation and image crisis. This approach included community-based mobilizations, retraining of their motorcycle riders for safety, and civil dialogues with other local the transportation agencies. As such, Angkas was able to exhibit an ethic of care on both affective and relational dimensions of the framework. On the other hand, with displays of aggression, alienation, and dishonesty, including strategies of denial and reduction of offensiveness, the national government did not demonstrate ethical crisis management.

Angkas' crisis management response was not simply a display of ethicality, but a sustainable strategy that resulted in perceived organizational transparency, compassion towards stakeholders, unity and uniformity between organizational and public interests, and care for stakeholder affect and relationships. Using crisis response messages as the main unit of analysis, the data strongly suggests that institutions focusing on affective and relational dimensions of a crisis responses can better manage their institutional image and solicit favorable support from stakeholders.

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