

Research on public trust repair paths of corporate social responsibility visual narratives in crisis public relations contexts

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Abstract. In the context of crisis public relations, corporate social responsibility visual narrative has become an important way for corporations to respond to public doubt, explain responsibility relations, and rebuild public trust. Compared with written statements, audiovisual texts can transform corporate responsibility into a more perceptible narrative experience through shot organization, character presentation, scene arrangement, and emotional rhythm. Based on CSR videos publicly released after corporate crises from 2020 to 2024, visual text coding, questionnaire experiments, and statistical analysis are combined to examine the effects of visual authenticity, responsibility recognition, emotional resonance, and action commitment on public trust repair. The results show that the narrative path composed of factual explanation, responsibility recognition, and action evidence has a stronger trust repair effect. Responsibility recognition and action commitment have more prominent effects on public trust. Emotional narrative can increase viewing involvement, but its trust repair effect remains limited when responsibility explanation and remedial action are absent. These findings indicate that post crisis CSR videos should not remain at the level of public welfare display and emotional appeal. They should build a more credible visual communication path through clear factual response, visible responsibility assumption, and sustained action evidence.

Keywords: CSR visual narrative, crisis public relations, public trust, film communication, trust repair

1. Introduction

In crisis public relations, corporate social responsibility visual narratives have gradually become an important medium through which corporations respond to public doubt, rebuild organizational image, and repair public trust. Compared with traditional statements and press releases, audiovisual texts can transform corporate responsibility into perceptible narrative experience through shots, characters, scenes, and emotional rhythm, allowing audiences to form judgments about corporate sincerity, capacity for action, and the boundaries of social responsibility [1]. Existing studies have explained trust repair mechanisms from the perspectives of CSR communication, crisis response strategies, and brand reputation management, while the relationship between visual narrative structure, emotional organization, and trust formation still requires deeper analysis from a film studies perspective [2]. Focusing on CSR videos released after corporate crises, the discussion can

examine how visual authenticity, responsibility recognition, emotional resonance, and action commitment influence the repair of public trust.

2. Literature review

2.1. CSR communication and public trust

CSR communication research emphasizes how corporations construct value-based connections with the public, consumers, and stakeholders through responsibility-related information. The literature suggests that whether CSR information can be transformed into public trust depends on the specificity of responsibility expression, the verifiability of action outcomes, and the degree of correspondence between communication content and crisis facts [3]. In crisis contexts, public judgment of corporate motivation becomes more sensitive, and public welfare narratives that lack responsibility explanation and remedial action are easily interpreted as image diversion or reputation packaging [4]. Trust in CSR communication is therefore not automatically generated by positive values. It is formed through a dynamic relationship among responsibility facts, action evidence, and public emotional judgment.

2.2. Visual narrative logic in film studies

Film studies regards visual narrative as a process of meaning production jointly shaped by camera language, mise-en-scène, character relations, sound design, and editing rhythm. CSR videos often use documentary-style scenes, ordinary-person narration, and dramatized conflict to present corporate responsibility, transforming abstract social responsibility issues into visible experiences with contextual meaning and emotional warmth [5]. In crisis communication, camera distance, narrative sequence, and character positioning can influence how the public understands responsible subjects, affected groups, and remedial processes [6]. The core of visual narrative lies not only in presenting a benevolent image, but also in organizing the audience's cognitive path toward facts, responsibility, and action through audiovisual structure.

2.3. Crisis public relations and trust repair

Crisis public relations research focuses on crisis responsibility attribution, organizational response strategies, and reputation restoration, stressing that corporations need to build a clear response chain among factual explanation, responsibility assumption, and relationship repair [7]. Public trust is shaped by crisis severity, previous corporate reputation, and response strategy. Responsibility recognition can reduce the confrontational effect caused by defensive communication, while remedial action can strengthen public expectations of future change [8]. When CSR visual narratives enter the context of crisis repair, images perform not only an explanatory function, but also emotional regulation and relationship reconstruction [9]. Different narrative paths may produce different effects under different levels of crisis responsibility. High-responsibility crises rely more on factual explanation and action evidence, while low-responsibility crises are more likely to produce attitude softening through emotional resonance.

3. Experimental methods

3.1. Sample selection and visual text coding

Data collection includes two types of data: visual text data and audience questionnaire data. The visual texts are selected from CSR related video materials publicly released by corporations after crisis events from 2020

to 2024. These materials include videos from corporate websites, public Weibo videos, brand short films on Bilibili, public welfare communication videos on Douyin, and corporate responsibility videos reposted by news platforms. The sample selection criteria are as follows. The video content must clearly involve crisis response, social responsibility action, public welfare remedy, or public communication. The video length is controlled between 1 and 8 minutes. The publishing organization can be identified. The video can be publicly accessed and fully viewed. Finally, 24 visual samples can be formed. They are divided into four types according to industry crisis categories: product quality, environmental responsibility, labor rights, and public safety. The coding content includes visual authenticity, responsibility recognition, representation of affected groups, corporate action display, presentation of public welfare outcomes, and emotional intensity. Each item is coded on a five point scale. Two coders complete the coding independently and conduct an intercoder reliability test. Items with low consistency are reviewed again to unify the coding criteria.

3.2. Questionnaire experiment and variable design

The questionnaire experiment uses the coded CSR videos as stimulus materials. Respondents are randomly assigned to different viewing groups. Each group watches one video and then completes the questionnaire. The sample size is set at 320. After excluding samples with abnormal viewing duration, highly repetitive answers, and failed attention checks, no fewer than 300 valid questionnaires are retained. Public trust is used as the dependent variable. It is measured by adapting mature items from Mayer et al.'s organizational trust scale [10] and McKnight et al.'s initial trust scale [11], covering perceived corporate ability, benevolence, and integrity. The core independent variables include visual authenticity, responsibility recognition, emotional resonance, and action commitment. All variables are measured with a five point Likert scale. Control variables include gender, age, education level, brand familiarity, perceived crisis severity, and CSR skepticism. A pilot test with 30 questionnaires is conducted first. Items with unclear meanings are revised before formal distribution, so that the scale structure can fit the crisis communication context.

3.3. Statistical analysis and path testing

Statistical analysis follows the sequence of visual coding, questionnaire measurement, and path testing. The visual text coding data are first used to describe the narrative features of different CSR videos. Mean values, standard deviations, and intercoder reliability coefficients are used to test sample stability. The questionnaire data are then examined through Cronbach's alpha reliability testing, KMO testing, and Bartlett's test of sphericity to confirm whether the scales are suitable for further analysis. Pearson correlation analysis is used to examine the relationship between visual authenticity, responsibility recognition, emotional resonance, action commitment, and public trust. Multiple linear regression is then used to test the independent effects of each variable on public trust. If perceived corporate sincerity is significantly related to public trust, the Bootstrap mediation effect test can be further used to analyze whether responsibility recognition and action commitment influence trust repair through perceived sincerity. One way ANOVA is used to compare differences among crisis types and to examine the effects of different narrative paths in high responsibility and low responsibility crisis contexts.

4. Results

4.1. Effects of visual narrative elements on trust repair

As shown in Table 1, the 24 CSR visual samples present clear differences across different narrative paths. The path of factual explanation, responsibility recognition, and action evidence records a mean score of 4.18 for visual authenticity, 4.25 for responsibility recognition, and 4.31 for action commitment. Its corresponding mean score for public trust reaches 3.94, which is clearly higher than that of the purely emotional narrative path. In comparison, the path of public welfare outcomes and emotional appeal records a mean score of 4.06 for emotional resonance, while its responsibility recognition score is only 3.02. Its mean score for public trust is 3.41. This indicates that emotional expression can increase viewing involvement, but it is difficult to support trust repair independently. The path of weak responsibility response and public welfare display has the lowest public trust score, only 2.96, while its CSR skepticism score reaches 3.88. This shows that when post crisis videos avoid responsibility attribution, the public is more likely to interpret them as reputation diversion. Overall, the data show that visual authenticity and action commitment have relatively stable effects on trust judgment across different paths. Responsibility recognition is the key variable that distinguishes high and low trust repair effects.

Table 1. CSR visual narrative coding and public trust scores

Narrative path	Video samples	Visual authenticity	Responsibility recognition	Emotional resonance	Action commitment	Public trust
Factual explanation plus responsibility recognition plus action evidence	7	4.18	4.25	3.87	4.31	3.94
Responsibility recognition plus emotional resonance	6	3.86	3.91	4.12	3.74	3.68
Public welfare outcome plus emotional appeal	6	3.64	3.02	4.06	3.37	3.41
Weak responsibility response plus public welfare display	5	3.21	2.58	3.62	2.96	2.96

4.2. Differences among narrative path combinations

As shown in Figure 1, the heatmap matrix presents the trust repair differences across four CSR visual narrative paths without relying on a simple line chart, bar chart, bubble chart, or radar chart. The darker cells indicate stronger effects on a five point scale. The path of factual explanation, responsibility recognition, and action evidence shows the strongest overall performance. Its scores for responsibility recognition, action commitment, and public trust are 4.25, 4.31, and 3.94 respectively. This indicates that trust repair becomes more stable when factual explanation is connected with responsibility recognition and visible remedial action. The path of responsibility recognition and emotional resonance also achieves a relatively high trust score of 3.68, but its action commitment score is lower at 3.74. This suggests that emotional resonance can support trust repair only when it is connected with a clear responsibility position. The path of public welfare outcome and emotional appeal records a high emotional resonance score of 4.06, while its responsibility recognition score remains at 3.02. This imbalance explains why its public trust score is limited to 3.41. The weakest path is weak responsibility response and public welfare display, with public trust at 2.96 and responsibility

recognition at 2.58. This result shows that public welfare imagery cannot effectively repair trust when crisis responsibility is visually weakened.

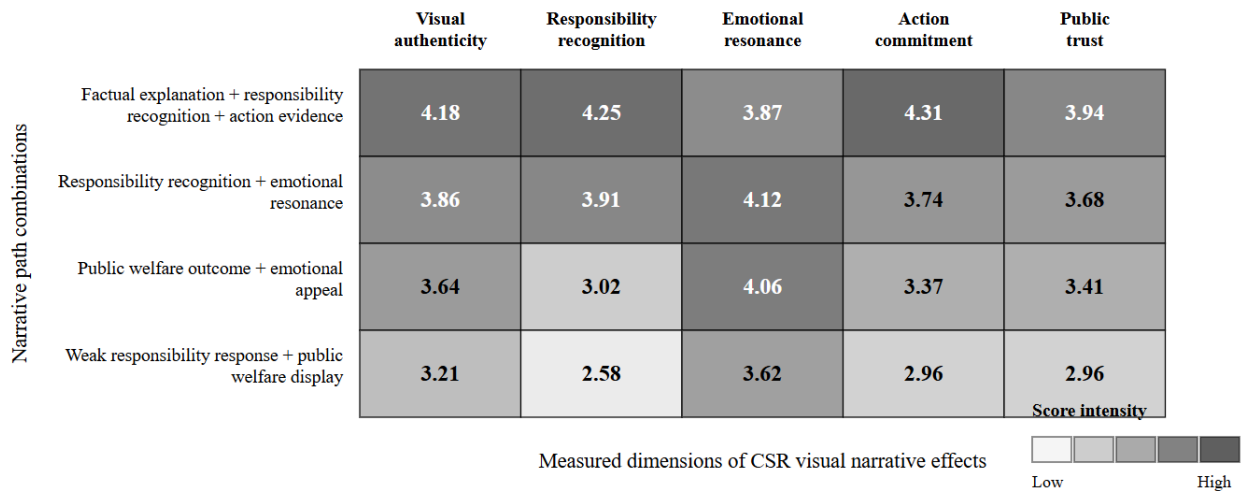


Figure 1. Heatmap matrix of trust repair effects across CSR visual narrative paths

5. Discussion

The trust repair effect of CSR visual narrative mainly comes from the visualization of responsibility relations, rather than from visual aesthetics or public welfare themes alone. The results show that when audiences watch corporate videos after a crisis, they judge whether the corporation explains facts, recognizes responsibility, and presents real action at the same time. Emotional resonance can improve communication acceptance, but without specific responsibility content, it may be interpreted as image modification. A film studies perspective helps explain how camera distance, character position, narrative order, and scene authenticity influence public judgment of corporate sincerity. Effective crisis CSR videos should reduce one way promotion and strengthen the narrative continuity among facts, responsibility, and action.

6. Conclusion

CSR visual narrative in crisis public relations needs to shift from brand image expression to public trust repair. The analysis based on visual coding and questionnaire experiments shows that visual authenticity, responsibility recognition, emotional resonance, and action commitment jointly affect public trust. Among them, responsibility recognition and action commitment play more decisive roles. The path that combines factual explanation, responsibility recognition, and action evidence can better reduce public skepticism and improve perceived corporate sincerity. These conclusions provide practical guidance for corporate audiovisual communication after crises. They also offer a narrative analysis perspective for the integration of film studies and CSR communication research.

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