

Crisis Management in Public Relations about Children Abuse Events in Kindergartens

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Abstract

This study takes the cases in China of *Children Abuse* in RYB Education pre-school and Ctrip Parent-child Garden in 2017 to explore the response strategies of public crisis. Online content analysis based on big data technology which combining with web mining and machine learning is utilized. This research presents an overview of two cases, measures the responsibility subject and communication principle of crisis management in public relations involving children abuse. It has been discovered that three points of suggestions for responding the crisis. Firstly, identify the crisis facts and wait for the authority's investigation result. Secondly, establish a constant public relations mechanism and publish information with one voice. Thirdly, specify implementation plan, the more detailed the better. It is expected to provide a methodological reference for the response strategy of crisis public relations management in related these issues.

Keywords: Crisis Management, Public Relations, Big-data-aided Content Analysis, Web Mining

Introduction

In recent years, the children abuse has been exposed frequently in China, and with the development of the Internet, people concentrated more on the fermentation of child abuse incidents. In 2017, the two companies, one is Ctrip.com and the other one is the RYB Education pre-school, which had become the focus of public opinion and been fermented in Sina weibo and WeChat. This study is based on the two cases to explore the kindergarten children abuse events, including behaviors abuse mentioned, involved stakeholders, and the response strategies of enterprises in the face of the crisis incident etc.

Children Abuse in Ctrip Parent-child Garden

On November 8th, 2017, Children Abuse video in Ctrip Parent-child Garden in Shanghai was exploded. In the video, the teacher forced children to eat mustard, squirted poison water into the child's eyes and mouth, and the teacher pushed the child into a coma. As soon as the news broke, it caused wide public concern over the whole society. In the aftermath, the Shanghai women and children's working committee released the results of the investigation, and the President of the *modern family magazine* who was a third-party custodian of Ctrip Parent-child Garden, was removed from office and the teachers involved was detained.



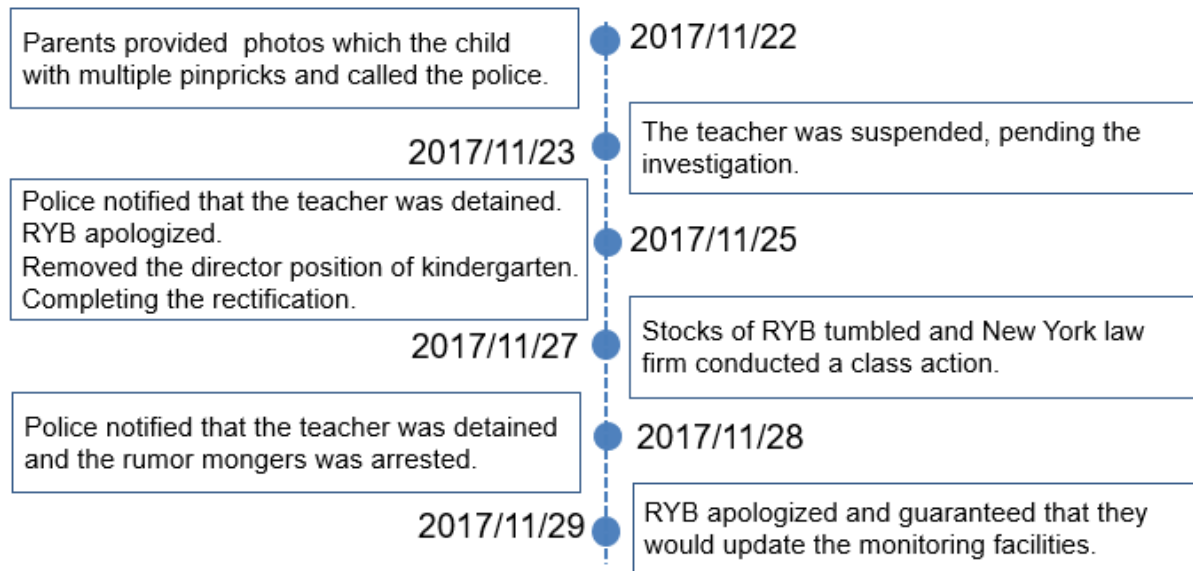
On November 8th, Ctrip was acknowledged the incident and announced the processing procedure officially. It is the seventh day of the case occurrence; the public was waiting for Ctrip's response. After the responding, the discussion was explored in Weibo at first time, the next day of 8th, the discussion was explored in WeChat.

Children Abuse in RYB Education pre-school

On the evening of November 22th, 2017, several children's parents provided the photos which showed the pinholes in the children's body. They pointed out that the children in the international junior class of RYB Education pre-school (Xintiandi sub-park) in Chaoyang district in Beijing were suffered the needle abuse and feeding the unknown white tablet by the teacher.

On the evening of November 25th, police have notified the incident. The kindergarten

teacher, who was suspected of children abuse, was detained. On November 28th, police released another notification, declared that the rumor mongers and the teacher involved were arrested. On November 29th, RYB Education pre-school issued an apology letter.



It's shown in the timeline that on November 23rd, RYB Education pre-school responded to the media that the case is a rumor. On the second day of the case occurrence, RYB Education pre-school put out a formal announcement that they will cooperate with the police and public security department investigation. After the notifications of police, RYB Education pre-school released the related statement. The discussion was explored in Weibo and WeChat during those days.

Based on the two cases, this study applies online content analysis, combining web mining and big data technology, presents the whole picture and details of the events, and the specific response options and strategies towards the cases, which can provide reference for the crisis research and practice.

Literature review

Public relations crisis management

The crisis is “characterized by a certain degree of risk and uncertainty” (Fink, 1986, p.15), which is labeled by three elements: (a) a threat to the organization, (b) the element of surprise, and (c) a short decision time (Shrivastava, P. Mitroff, I.I., Miller, D. and A. Miglani, 1988). Coombs defined crisis as ‘the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization’s performance and generate negative outcomes’ (Coombs, 2007).

Public relations are always related to the crisis, which as a vital means of crisis communication. The value of public relations is to minimize damage to the organization in a crisis (Lin, 2013). It is used for preventing a crisis or recovering from a crisis (Fearn-Banks, 2001). In other words, public relations are used to help the main body in the management of public crisis obtain public forgiveness and rebuild credibility. Therefore, crisis public relations management is implemented according to certain strategies.

Crisis response strategy

After the crisis, it usually takes a short time to respond. Therefore, weakening or suppressing relationships between crisis subjects and crisis responsibility is a common practice in crisis management. Some strategic advises in crisis management had been giving by Fitzpatrick and Rubin (1995) “(1) say nothing, (2) say as little as possible and release it as quietly as possible, (3) say as little as possible, citing privacy laws, company policy or sensitivity, (4) deny guilt and/or act indignant that such charges could possibly have been made, or (5) shift or, if necessary, share the blame with the plaintiff” (p. 22).

But in the face of the occurrence of the established facts, it is also an important means to reconstruct positive image through the honest admission of mistakes and correction. Another suggestion for crisis response is (1) state company policy on the issue (if appropriate), (2) investigate the allegations, (3) be candid, (4) voluntarily admit that a problem exists, if true, then (5) announce and implement corrective measures as quickly as possible (James, 2003).

To study the strategic application of crisis management from the perspective of communication. This study focuses on communication during the damage and recovery phases of a crisis. The strategic of response to a crisis was categories from basic strategy, denying, diminishing, and rebuilding to reinforcing, which is throughout the crisis management process.

Providing information about the crisis in order to reduce uncertainty is the means to achieve the purpose of crisis management strategy (Ray, 1999). Instructing information and adjusting information is the first and basic responses of crisis management (Coombs, 2007b). The instructing information refers to the “information that helps people psychologically cope with the magnitude of the crisis situation” (Sturges, 1994, p. 308). Generally, it includes basic information, action, intention, protecting public, discussing preparation and confusion, which are the basic strategies for the crisis response. In addition, emotional expression helps to increase public acceptance and reduce anger (Van der Meer and Verhoeven, 2014). Adjusting information refers to compassion, sympathy, sadness, support for the victims and other emotional expressions that are measured in this research.

Denying is referring to nonexistence strategies, which eliminated the crisis by denying its existence. Diminishing is about distance strategies, which weaken the relationship between the organization and the crisis. These two strategies are all about reducing the crisis responsibility. Rebuilding is pointed to mortification strategies, which tried to win forgiveness

such as remediation, repentance and rectification. Reinforcing is referring to ingratiation strategies, which focused on ways to gain public approval through tell the public about past and current achievements of the organizations. (Coombs, 1995). These two strategies are trying to build positive organizational image.

Stakeholders in a crisis

Stakeholders in a crisis influence the response of crisis management. Stakeholders during a crisis are as any person, group, or organization that can affect and be affected by an organization's performance (Ray, 1999; Bland, 1998; Lerbinger, 1997). In this research, the type of stakeholders includes *Managers of Ctrip*, *Managers of Ctrip Parent-child Garden*, *Managers of RYB Education pre-school*, *Teachers get involved*, *Victims*, *Police*, *Education management*, *Women's Federation*, *Other government organizations*, *Military*, *Other specialized institutions*, *Modern Family Magazine*. As one of the important factors to influence the crisis management, the different type of stakeholders will be explored.

Research question

In the past, the previous study on crisis strategy by content analysis has failed to form a systematic study. There is a study tried to examine the level of responsibility were used by the media according to crisis type from the news frames point of view (An & Gower, 2009). Message strategies are used by organizations during crises, which the involved technical details are explored (Stephens & Bailey, 2005). It focus on the image restoration or reputation management in the crisis responses analysis, which makes insightful crisis response recommendations regarding consideration of organizational type which involved in a crisis

(government, corporation, or individual) and targeting active publics when selecting crisis responses (Kim & Lariscy, 2011).

Base on the above researches, the strategy of comprehensive crisis public relations is oriented, and carries on systematic research in this paper. At the same time, with huge amounts of data from multiple media channels as the analysis sample, from the perspective of a more comprehensive overview in parent-child garden child abuse, the attitude of the public and the strategy of crisis public relation have been explored, in order to provide reference for social hot issues of the crisis management theory and practice.

Following this lead, the study explores the specific crisis communication of two companies and explores the public opinions from different media of different stakeholders. Based on above, there are three research questions.

RQ1: What is the general overview about *Children Abuse*? What behaviors of children abuse are mentioned about? What stakeholders are involved in the crisis?

RQ2: Which crisis-response strategy did Ctrip Parent-child Garden and RYB Education pre-school use during the crisis? What attitudes from the public toward the response are?

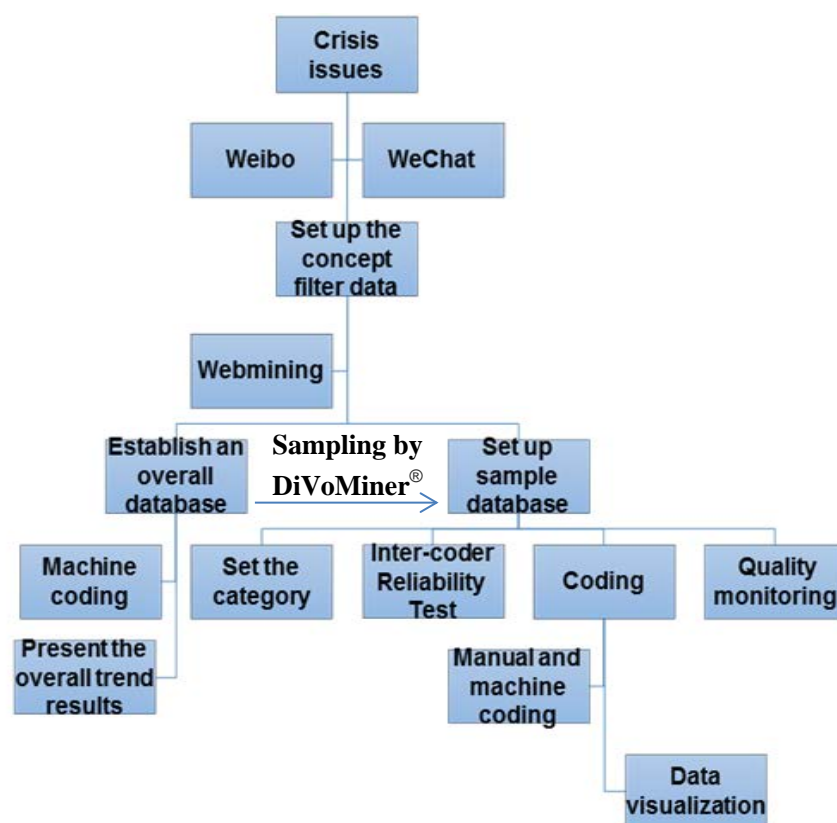
RQ3: What is the implication for the response strategy in these two cases?

Method

Content analysis is an objective, systematic and quantitative method to measure variables in the process of analyzing the content of communication (Kerlinger, 1973). Content analysis was conducted to identify the involved companies' crisis-response strategy. This study applied automated online content analysis, which combined big data technology and

network mining technology auxiliary. The data mining platform, DiVoMiner[®], was used as the main research tool. The platform provides a variety of research quality assurance mechanism, such as multiple databases of data cleaning process, the reliability between coders before measuring methods, monitoring mechanism of the regulatory efficiency and accuracy of coding coder performance. Through the integrated public opinion monitoring and analysis process, we strive to achieve high efficiency, accuracy, breadth and depth. The basic operation process includes three parts: preparation stage, coding and quality control and results (Zhang & Cao, 2016).

Both latent and manifest content in social media would be analyzed, in order to explore the factors involved in the crisis and the relationship between the different variables.



Sample

Media is an essential platform for public to get information. Particularly, social media

creates the condition for public to participate in discussions, which gathered the public opinion. Public opinion could influence individual attitudes and opinions, even could reframe and revise individual's attitudes and opinions (Lin, 2013). Therefore, we collected related reports and discussions on the social media from the date of the occurrence of this event (November 1, 2017), which focuses on the cases of child abuse in RYB Education pre-school and Ctrip Parent-child Garden. 80,209 pieces of texts were collected during this period, which were identified and categorized for in-depth content analysis.

The human-coded data set consisted of 2,000 accounts from November 11th, 2017 to February 28th, 2018, of which 1,000 were Weibo blogs, 1,000 were WeChat articles.

	Population	Sample for coding
Sina Weibo	21,508	1,000
WeChat	58,701	1,000

Reliability

A small inter-coder reliability test was conducted, which three researchers have coded. A random sample of 100 was selected for a reliability check upon completion of the coding. The resulting of Holsti inter-coder reliability rate was 0.91, which is higher than the standard coefficient 0.85 (Kassarjian, 1997). It shows excellent reliability on this research.

Code book

The content coding focused on obtaining frequency counts for five-category model strategies which were used in response to crises, and for types of stakeholders. Our initial code sheet (see the appendix) listed six categories for the crisis issues, they are incidents or cases, behaviors of children abuse mentioned, stakeholder, dialogic characteristics, response

options and strategies (Base, Deny, Diminish, Rebuild, Reinforce), attitudes from the public toward the response.

Results

The study explores the specific crisis communication of two companies and explores the public opinions from different media of different stakeholders. The following results from 1-5 parts are the answers for the research questions.

Part 1-3 is the answers for the RQ1: What is the general overview about *Children Abuse*? What behaviors of children abuse are mentioned about? What stakeholders are involved in the crisis?

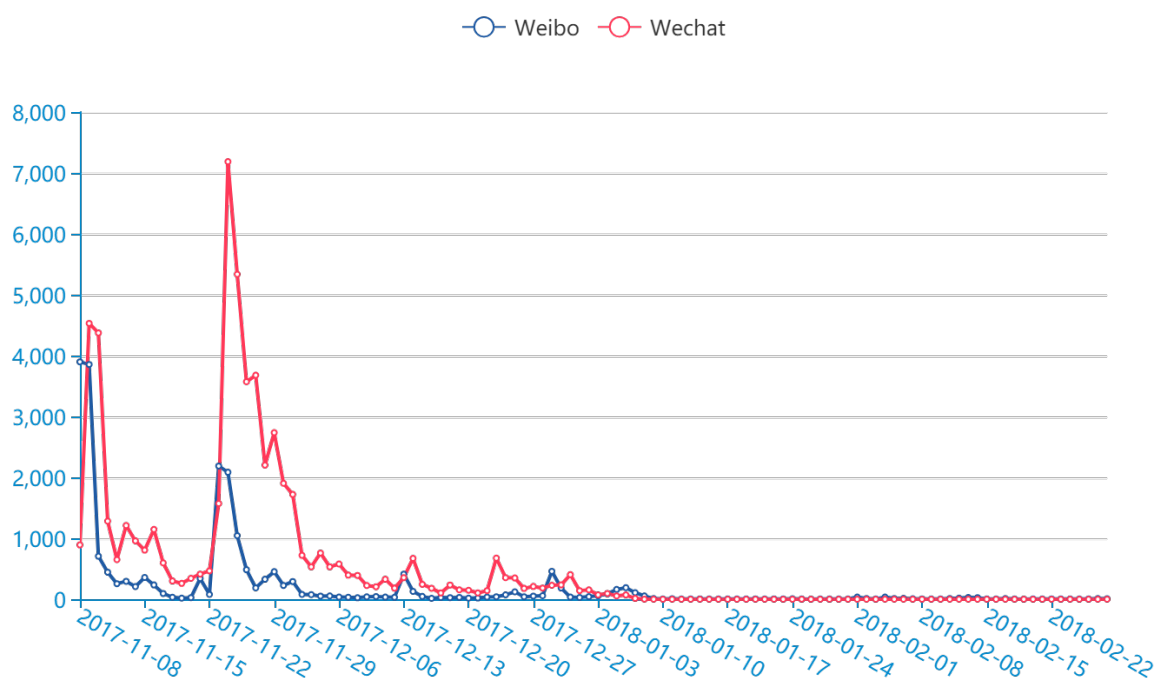
Part 4-5 is the answers for the RQ2: Which crisis-response strategy did Ctrip Parent-child Garden and RYB Education pre-school use during the crisis? What attitudes from the public toward the response are?

After answering RQ1 and RQ2, we will find the answer of RQ3: What is the inspiration for the response strategy in these two cases?

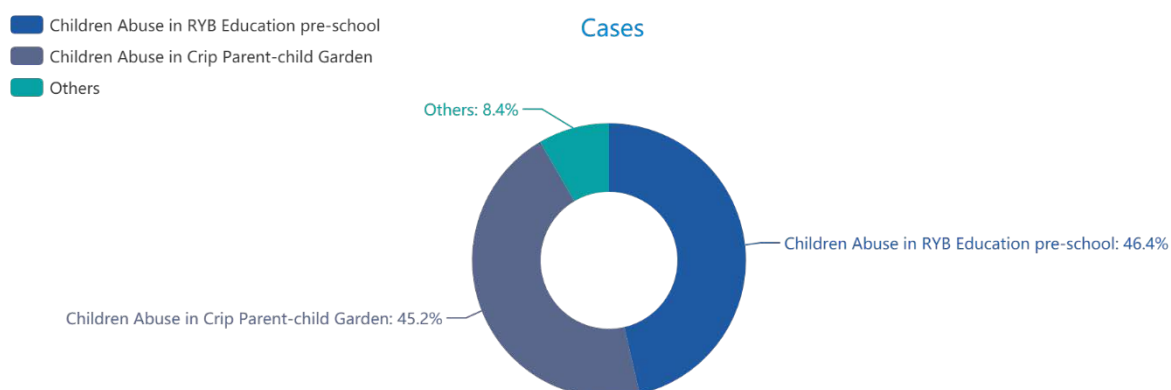
The following parts are about the overall information trend, cases and behaviors of children abuse mentioned, cases and stakeholders, cases and dialogic characteristics, and response strategies.

1. Overall information trend

Overall Information Trend (by media type)



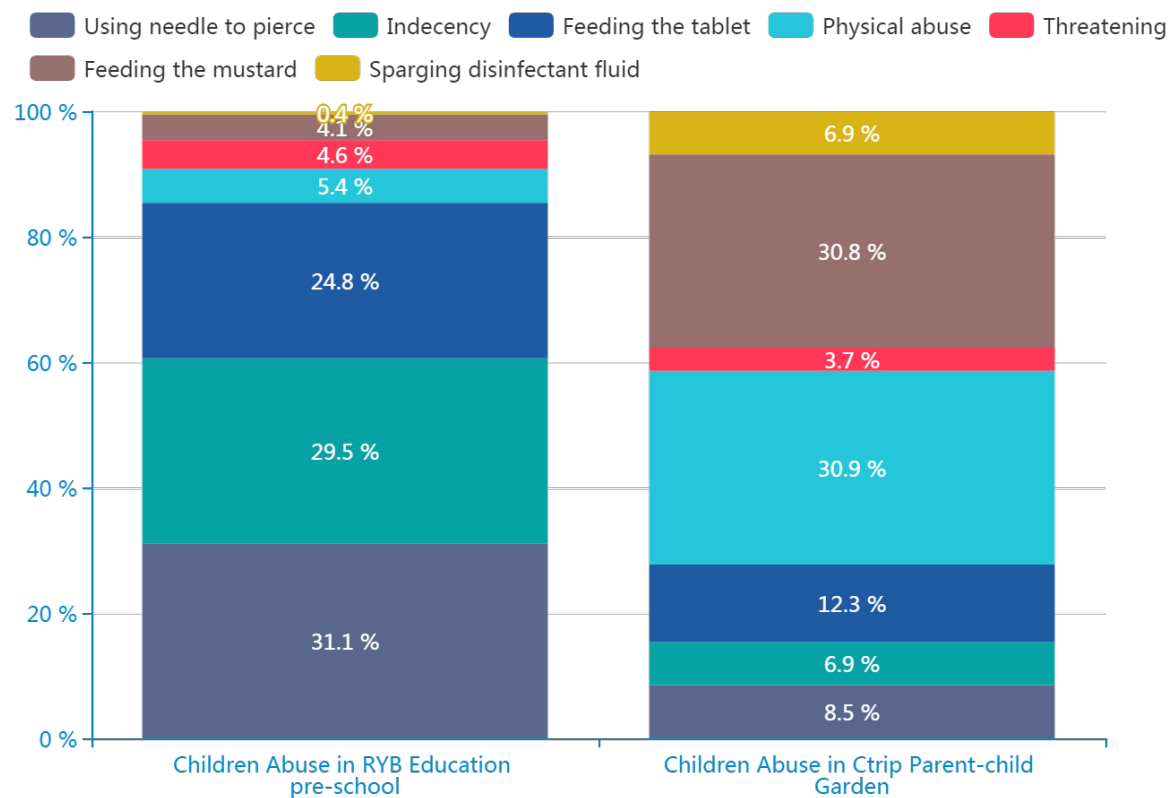
As shown in the figure above, the overall information of Children abuses incidents mentioned in social media showed a trend of fluctuation. The discussion on Weibo presented as a peak on November 8th, while reached peaked on WeChat on November 9th. The second peak appeared in November from 23rd to 24th on Weibo and WeChat. And then the discussion information trend goes down.



In the sample data, both cases accounted for almost 50% of the discussion. The case of children abuse in RYB Education pre-school is mentioned more than the case of children abuse in Crip Parent-child Garden.

2. Cases and behaviors of children abuse mentioned

Cross Relation between Cases and Behaviors of Children Abuse

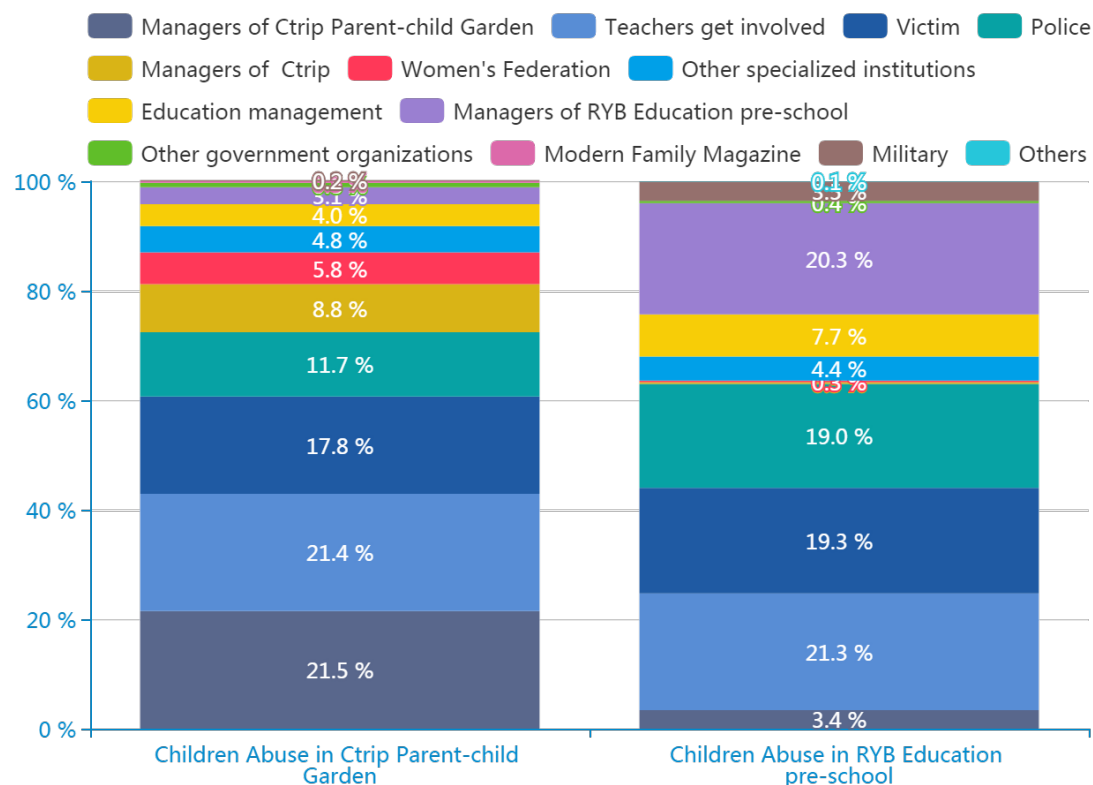


*Note: $X^2 = 1319.125$, $df=12$, $p<.001$ ***

The top-3 behaviors of children abuse in RYB Education pre-school are using *needle to pierce* (31.1%), *indecenty* (29.5%) and *feeding the tablet* (24.8%). The top-3 behaviors of children abuse in Ctrip Parent-child Garden are *physical abuse* (30.9%), *feeding the mustard* (30.8%), and *feeding the tablet* (12.3%). It can be seen that the behaviors of children abuse are mentioned most are about physical direct injury. These behaviors all challenge the moral bottom line, which is easy to arouse people's discussion and attention.

3. Cases and stakeholders

Cross Relation between Cases and Stakeholders

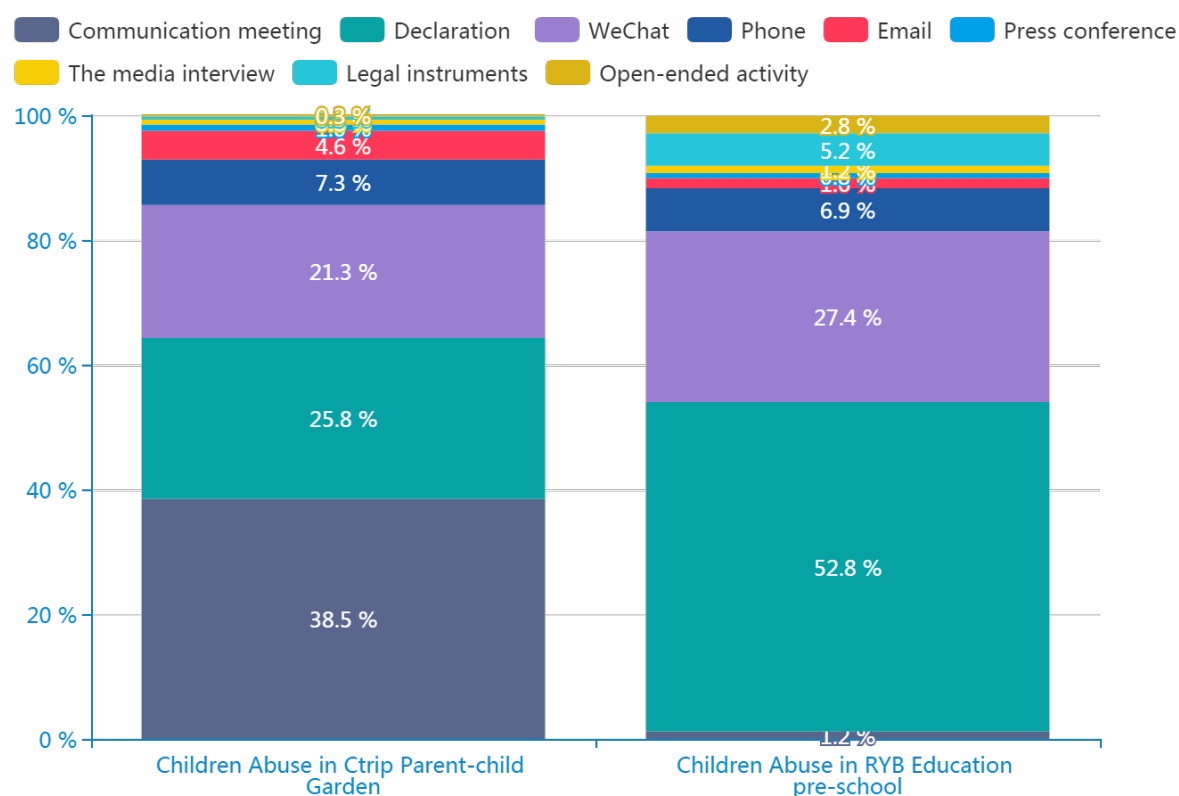


*Note: $X^2 = 1498.754$, $df=12$, $p<.001***$

Among the two cases, the garden's managers and teachers get involved, the victims and police are mentioned the most. It can be seen that the seriousness of this incident has involved the attention of the public inspection department. In the children abuse of Ctrip Parent-child Garden, the managers are pointed to the Ctrip Parent-child garden and Ctrip, while the managers are only point to the RYB Education pre-school in the children abuse of RYB Education pre-school. There are more types of stakeholders for the case of children abuses in Ctrip Parent-child Garden, for example the *women's federation* and *modern family magazine*, which is the third-party commissions of the Ctrip.

4. Cases and dialogic characteristics

Cross Relation between Cases and Dialogic Characteristics



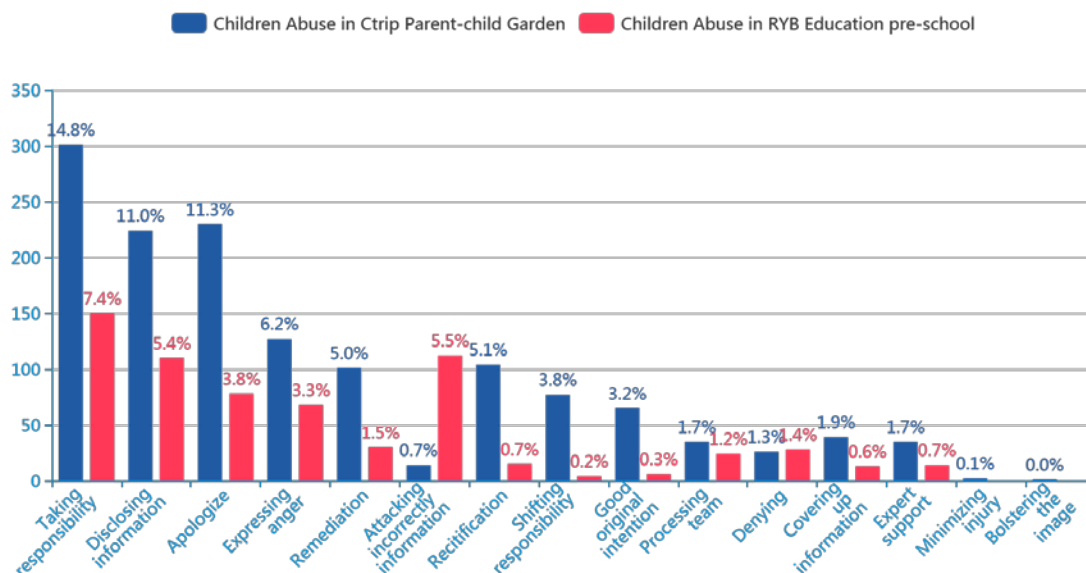
*Note: $X^2 = 147.923$, $df=8$, $p<.001$ ***

Dialogic characteristics of the two cases is shown above, the types of dialogic characteristics applied in children abuse in Ctrip Parent-child Garden is *communication meeting* (38.5%), *declaration* (25.8%), *WeChat* (21.3%), *phone* (7.3%) and *email* (4.6%). In the case of children abuse in RYB Education pre-school, the dialogic characteristics are most about *declaration* (52.8%), the *WeChat* is about 27.4%, *phone* (6.9%) and *legal instruments* (5.2%), the *legal instruments* are applied a few. It can be seen that the Ctrip paid more attention to the form of communication. However, the communication meeting that was hold by Ctrip didn't gain the public forgiveness. Most people think it's pointless to kneel and apologize.

5. Response strategies

As for diverse cases, the companies took the different response options and strategies to the crisis. In the Ctrip case, taking responsibility, apologize and disclosing information are the most used strategies. While in the RYB case, taking responsibility, attacking incorrectly information and disclosing information are the top-3 of the strategies.

Response options and strategies in two cases

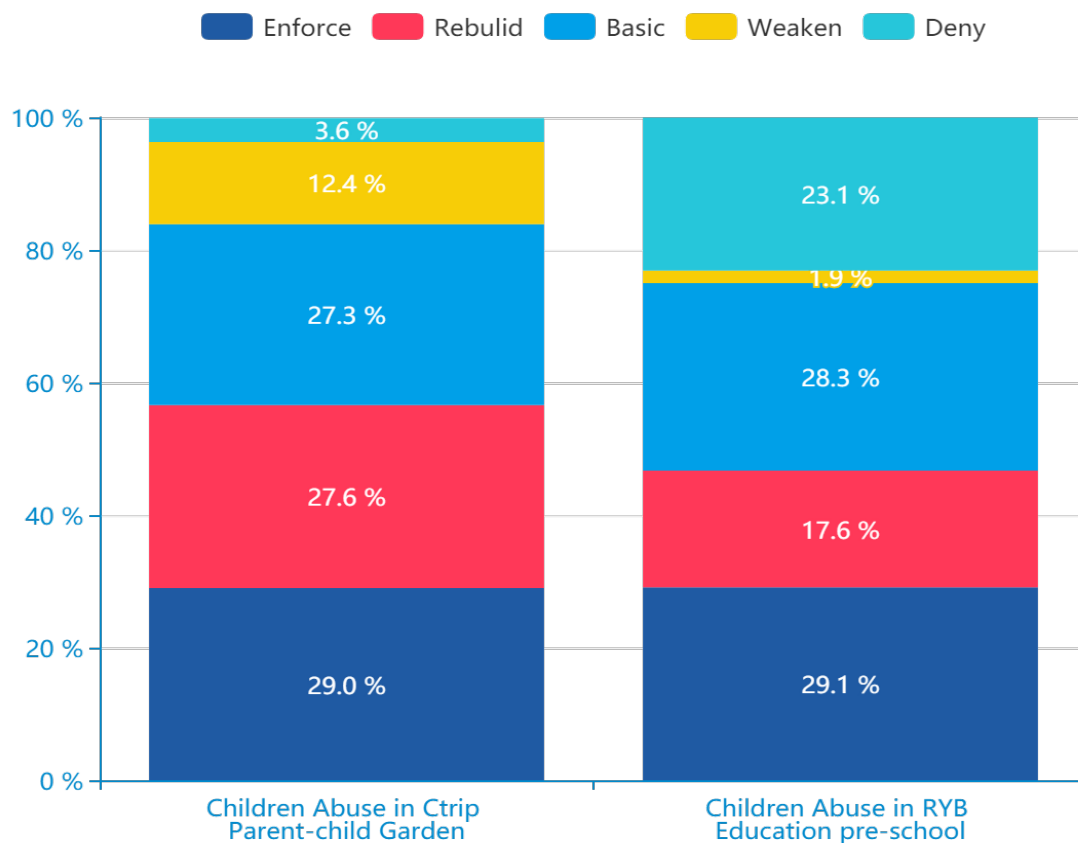


*Note: $X^2 = 280.156$, $df=14$, $p<.001$ ***

The cross relation between response options and attitudes is shown below, all of the response options are all pointed neutrality, they all accounts for more than 50%. Then there are almost 20% entirely negative attitudes point to the response options. Shifting responsibility is 29.1%, expressing anger is 27.7%, apologize is 26.2%, taking responsibility is 26.0%, disclosing information and attacking incorrectly report and processing team are also mentioned more than 20%. There are 19.1% conditional negative pointed to the good original intention.

From the point of public relations crisis strategies, in Ctrip case, it emphasized on rebuilding and weakening strategies, while RYB Company tended to deny / attack incorrect information more.

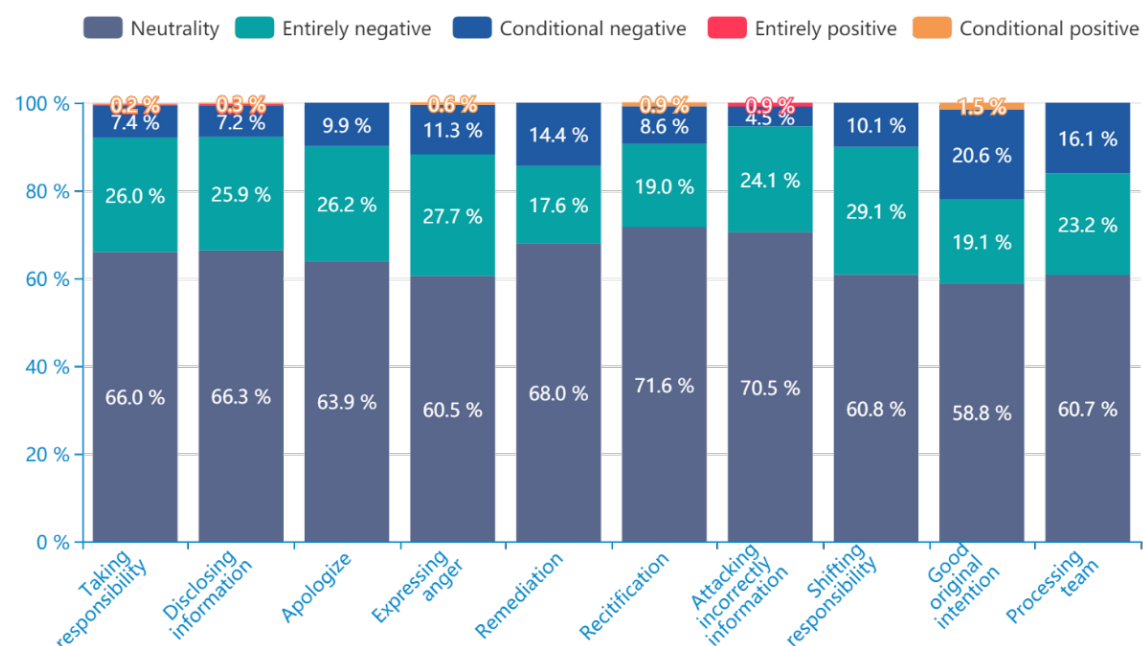
PR strategies in two cases



*Note: $X^2 = 189.981$, $df=4$, $p<.001$ ***

In addition, there are 1.5% conditional positive attitudes towards the good original intention for the Ctrip Parent-child garden. Ctrip said that they had been trying to help their employees to balance the contradiction between work and parenting, and take the lead in establishing parent-child garden. The project also received support and encouragement from the municipal government, the general trade union and other relevant government departments.

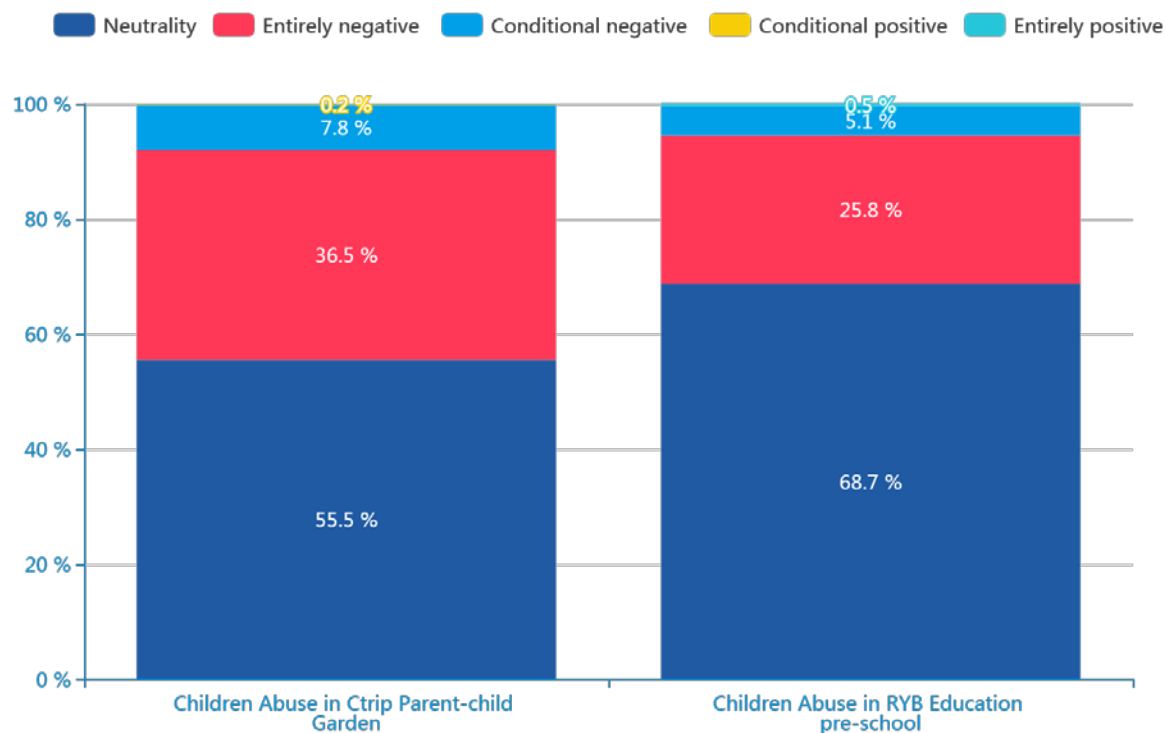
Cross Relation between Response Options and Attitudes



*Note: $X^2 = 132.476$, $df=56$, $p<.001$ ***

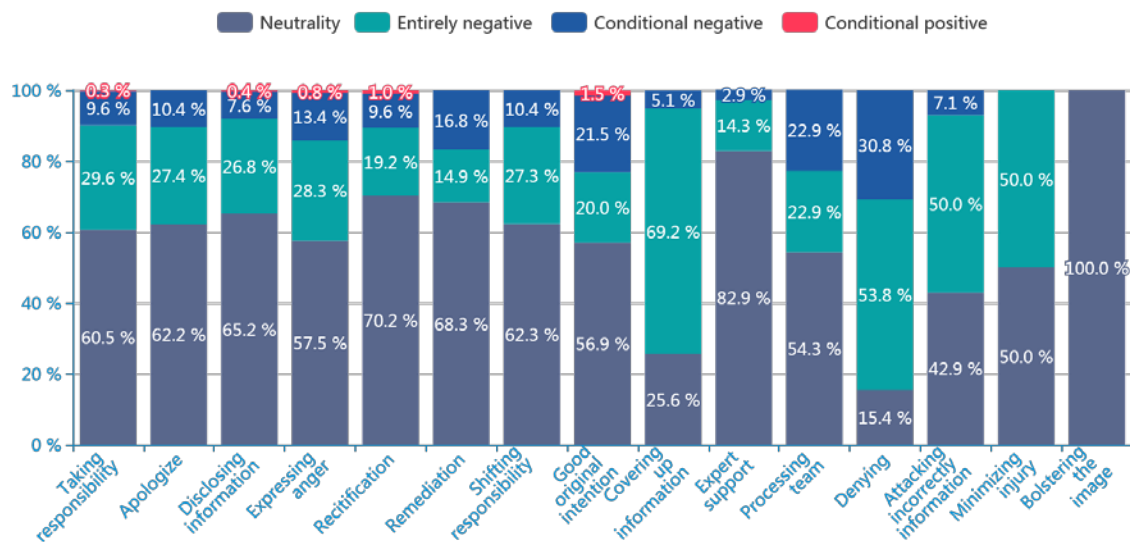
The distribution of the different attitudes about Children abuse in Ctrip Parent-child Garden and RYB Education pre-school are shown above. The negative attitude in the Ctrip case (36.5% entirely negative and 7.8% conditional negative) is more obvious than RYB case (25.8% entirely negative and 5.1% conditional negative).

Cross Relation between Cases and Attitudes toward the response



*Note: $X^2 = 13.431$, $df=4$, $p<.01$ **

Ctrip-Response Options and Attitudes



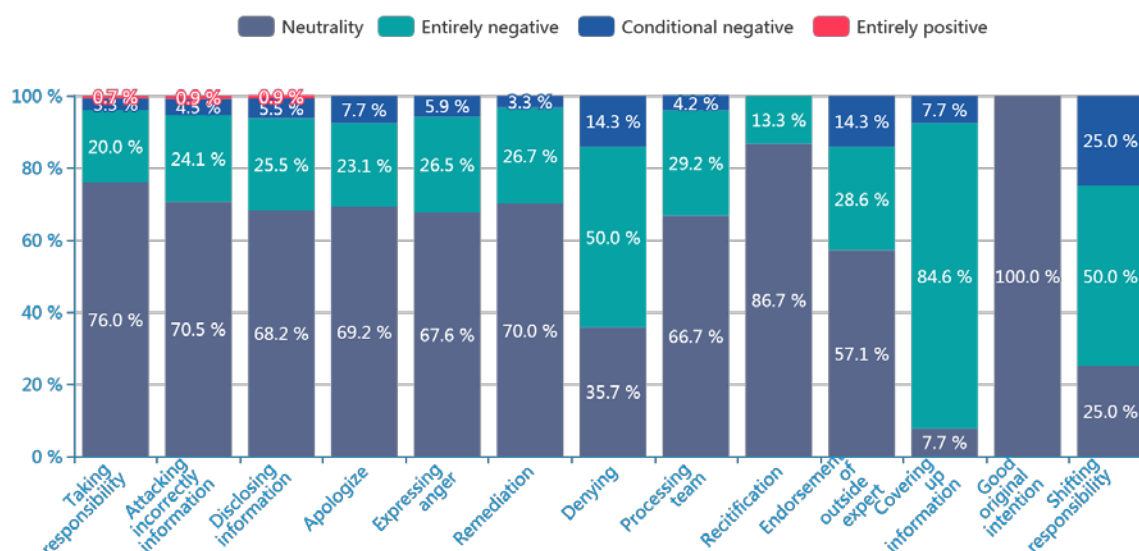
*Note: $X^2 = 108.213$, $df=42$, $p<.001$ ***

The attitude distribution toward response options of children abuse in Ctrip

Parent-child Garden is shown above. The top 3 options are all over 60.0% neutrality attitudes.

There are 29.6%, 27.4%, and 6.8% entirely negative attitudes toward taking responsibility, apologize and disclosing information. In addition, for covering up information, there are 69.2% entirely negative attitudes. For denying, attacking incorrectly information and minimizing injury, the attitudes are all almost 50% entirely negative. The expert support, remediation, rectification and bolstering the image are caused smaller proportion of negative attitudes, which are all less than 20%.

RYB-Response Options and Attitudes



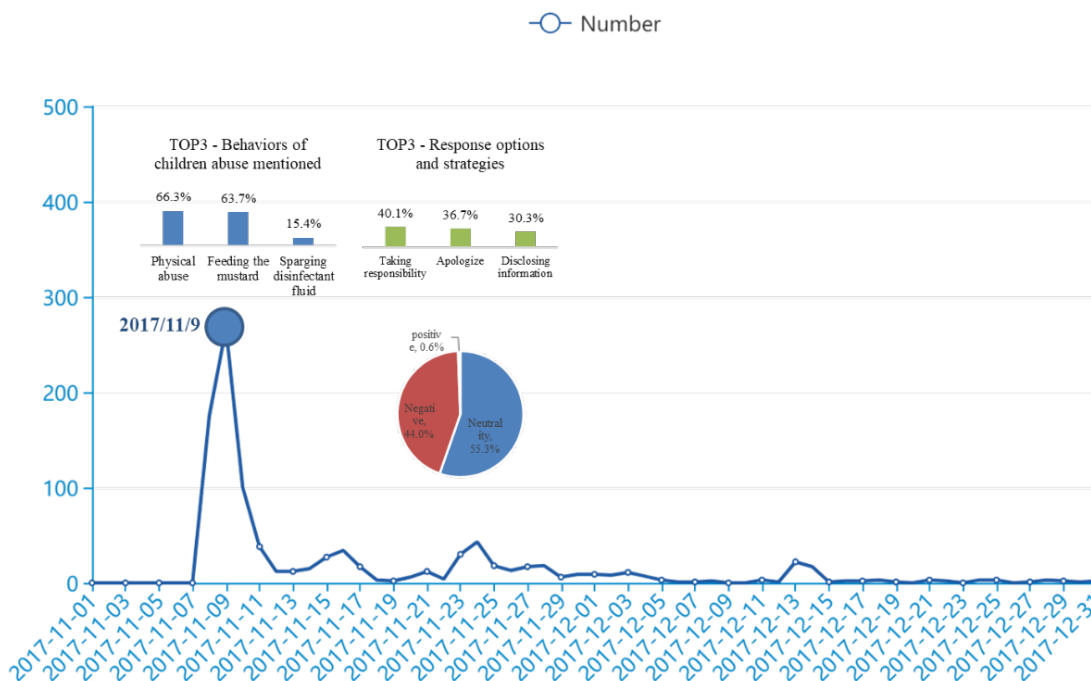
*Note: $X^2 = 60.044$, $df=36$, $p<.01$ **

The attitudes toward response options by RYB Education pre-school are shown above. For top3 options, the neutrality attitudes are all over 60%, but are higher than it toward Ctrip Parent-child Garden. The entirely negative attitudes are all less than Ctrip Parent-child Garden. There are 20%, 24.1% and 25.5% entirely negative attitudes toward taking responsibility, attacking incorrectly information and disclosing information. For covering up information, most of attitudes are entirely negative (84.6%). There are 50.0% entirely negative toward the

denying and shifting responsibility. The good original intention and rectification are both caused smaller proportion of negative attitudes.

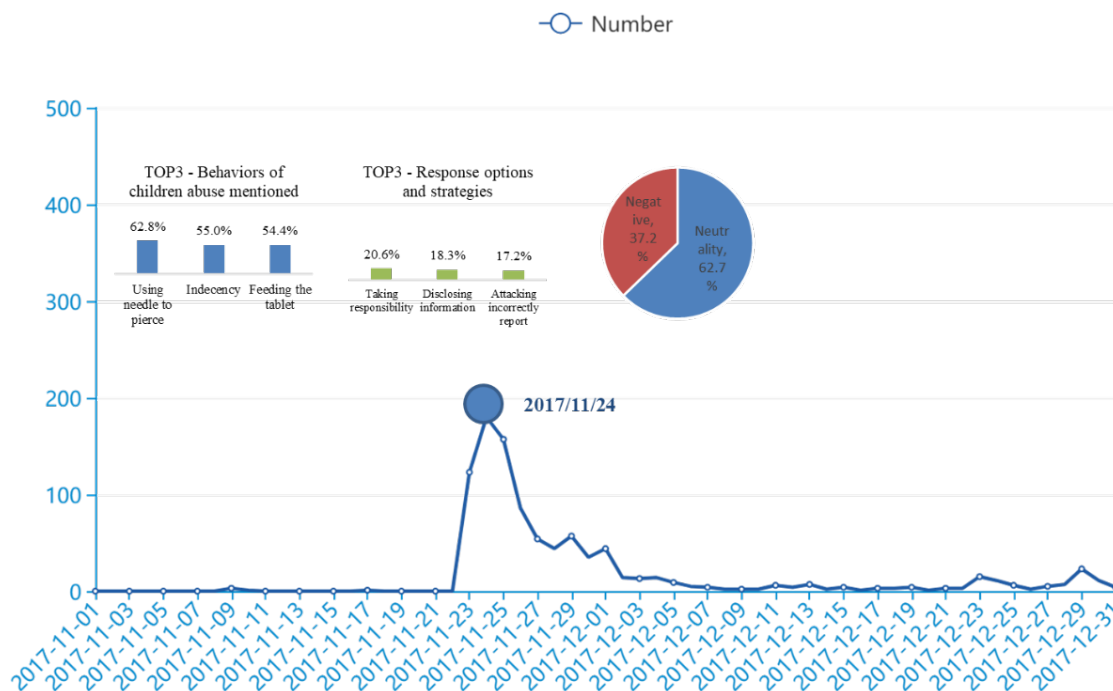
6. Development stages of cases

Development stages of the Ctrip Children abuse event



In the Children abuse of Ctrip case, the top3 of the behaviors of children abuse mentioned are physical abuse, feeding the mustard and sparging disinfectant fluid. Meanwhile, the response options and strategies top3 are taking responsibility, apologize and disclosing information, which obtained 44.0% negative and 55.3% neutral opinion.

Development stages of the RYB Children abuse event



From the data of the summit of the information trend, in the RYB children abuse case, the top3 behaviors of children abuse mentioned are using needle to pierce, indecency and feeding the tablet. Meanwhile, the response options and strategies top3 are taking responsibility, disclosing information and attacking incorrect information, which obtained 37.2% negative and 62.7% neutral opinion.

Distracted the data of the public opinion summit in each case, the results express that, the top3 behaviors of children abuse mentioned in the social media are the physical injury that challenge the moral bottom line. As for the Ctrip and RYB, taking responsibility, apology, disclosing information and attacking incorrect information are the most common used methods, which received the neutral and negative opinion.

Conclusion and discussion

Based on above, the cases of children abuse in Ctrip Parents-child Garden and RYB

Education pre-school are presented, and there are some factors that make this event ferment.

The behaviors of children abuse are mentioned about the *using needle to pierce*, *physical abuse*, *feeding the tablet*, *indecent* and *Feeding the mustard*, these behaviors are rare and challenge the moral bottom line.

The stakeholders are mainly about the manager of Ctrip Parent-child Garden and RYB Education pre-school, the teachers involved and the victims. Especially, it involves the participation and intervention of the public security organs departments, which arouse public concern.

Besides communication meeting and official declaration, Social network personal media (WeChat) becomes an important communication method for the companies. The screenshots of WeChat's chat pages are added into the media reports and were used as the companies' statements and evidences.

From the public's attitudes which most are neutrality and negative, there are more negative attitudes towards Ctrip than RYB. It can be seen that the public relations of the above two subjects are not successful. But there are lessons to be learned. Based on the foregoing study, the thesis draws the following conclusions:

Firstly, identify the crisis facts and wait for the authority's investigation result

In terms of the identification of crisis facts, distinguishing facts from rumors is the first step. When it involved legal issues, standing in legal position and waiting for the investigation result would be a better choice. Don't be too eager to argue the facts. It's better to respect the authority's investigation findings. From WeChat to email, Ctrip tried many kinds of communication methods. In particular, Ctrip hosted a live communication meeting, the teacher knelt down to apologize, but this did not win public forgiveness. To some extent, this also involves moral issues. Sometimes, citing laws is another better way to respond.

Compared to Ctrip's multiple vocalizations, the RYB Education pre-school didn't acknowledge the facts before the official authority survey published the results. When the established results have been published, they are expressing the attitude of actively cooperating with the investigation. In addition, they published the processing result and making the promise for the future. This approach of fully respecting the findings of authoritative institutions is also a path of choice.

Secondly, establish a constant public relations mechanism and publish information with one voice.

The response strategies by Ctrip Parent-child Garden and RYB Education pre-school, for covering up information and denying are all sparked most entirely negative attitudes in both cases. In addition, shifting responsibility, attacking incorrectly information and minimizing injury are also caused negative evaluation. It can be seen that most of the actions about burying one's head in the sand, such as covering up information, denying and so on, are prone to produce negative effect.

Therefore, trying to cover on information is not a good choice, the basic information including introduction information and emotion information are all necessary for public to know. Sincere communication attitude is expected by the public, and it is also an excellent choice for public relations subjects.

Ctrip Parent-child Garden and RYB Education pre-school all set up processing team for the crisis. This shows a constant public relation mechanism is necessary for them to deal with emergencies, which is with more experiences. It's for releasing information at a better time.

Thirdly, specify implementation plan, the more detailed the better.

Public relations are defined as communication between organizations and the public which includes communication and actions has been taken effectively (Grunig, 1984, Steyn, 2011). Therefore, the actions and measures taken are the greatest concern to the public. In the face of the occurrence of the established facts, it is also an important means to reconstruct positive image through the strategies, which express the good original intention and express their decision for rectification and remediation. Moreover, the support from the outside of experts is another important option for organization to choose. Specifying implementation plan is very important to correct the errors and restore confidence to the public.

Ctrip admitted the abuse in a statement and expressing their apologies for the incident, announcing it has formed an emergency work group to investigate the incident. The company also promised it would provide health check-ups and psychological counseling to the children and parents involved to ensure that the impact of incident was minimized. This is the strategy of taking responsibility, apologizing, setting up process team, tracing accountability and providing the compensation. There are still many steps that can continue to be concrete. A more detailed planning maybe wins more trust from public.

In the future, this research can be done from the perspective of psychology, combined questionnaire survey and focus group to explore expectations from the public. It can provide another oriented reference for the public relations strategy. In addition, the current education status, policy text, education staff status and other investigations can be combined to provide an optimized path for the future pre-school education development and much more cases can be analyzed. The public relations strategy can be adjusted according to the specific events, trend and specific changing, and it is expected that this paper will provide a reference theory and operation for the public relations involving the children abuse issues.

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Appendix

Coding book

1. Incident or case (multiple choice)

Children Abuse in RYB Education pre-school

Children Abuse in Ctrip Parent-child Garden

Others

2. Behaviors of children abuse mentioned (multiple choice)

Physical abuse

Feeding the mustard

Feeding the tablet

Using needle to pierce

Indecency

Sparging disinfectant fluid

Threatening

Others

3. Stakeholder (multiple choice)

Managers of Ctrip

Managers of Ctrip Parent-child Garden

Managers of RYB Education pre-school

Teachers get involved

Victim

Police

Education management

Women's Federation

Other government organizations

Military

Other specialized institutions

Modern Family Magazine

Others

4. Dialogic characteristics (multiple choice)

Phone

WeChat

Email

Press conference

Legal instruments

Declaration

Communication meeting

Open-ended activity

The media interview

Others

5. Response options and strategies (multiple choice)

Disclosing information

Processing team

Expressing anger

Covering up information

Denying

Attacking incorrectly report

Good original intention

Shifting responsibility

Minimizing injury

Apologize

Remediation

Rectification

Bolstering the existing organizational image

Endorsement of outside expert

Taking responsibility

6. Attitudes from the public toward the response

Entirely positive

Conditional positive

Neutrality

Conditional negative

Entirely negative

Unable to judge