Empirical Study on Trust Repair of Government in Public Crisis Event

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Abstract

The trust of the public for government is greatly damaged because of the frequent occurrence of public crisis event, which has resulted in serious trust crisis of the government. To date trust repair has been a key issue to study by local governments. This paper researches that the initial trust of the public for government and the severity and attribution of public crisis event are exerted influence upon the trust damage of government under the political and cultural environment of current China in the methods of situational simulated and questionnaire survey. Moreover, the repair effects of two different trust repair strategies (denial and apology) are verified in this paper as well. The research findings show that the strength level of initial trust of the public for government and the severity of the public crisis event are positively correlated with the trust damage of government; different attribution of different public crisis event is made no difference with different damage degree of trust of government; different trust repair strategy is made significant difference upon repair effect, and the repair effect of apology is better than that of denial; the strength level of initial trust of the public for government is positively correlated with the repair effect of trust of government, that is to say, if the initial trust of the public upon government is stringer, the damaged trust of government will be easier to repair. Theoretical perspective of trust repair of government is expanded in this paper, which has provided repair strategy and solution for trust crisis caused by government in the current situation of China.

Keywords

Public Crisis Event, Trust for Government, Trust Damage, Trust Repair

1. Introduction

Trust shall be fundamental principle of governing the relationship between government and the public [1].

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However, the trust for government shall be the core and foremost part in the system of social trust, which shall be the basis for establishing the social order and the key to promote and enhance the development of the whole social trust system [2]. In recent years, however, with the rapid development of Chinese economy and society, the public crisis event has been occurred frequently, such as Sanlu Milk Powder Incident, Violent Law-enforcement of City Inspector, forced relocation and other negative public event being repeatedly exposed by media or network, which has a severe impact on government image among the public, by which the credibility and authority of government have been questioned, which will lead to the trust crisis of government. When the public trust of government has been declined, and the public tends to object to the act of government, then negative effect upon social security, economic development and state power will be brought about. Therefore, influence of public crisis event upon trust for government and the method to repair damaged trust for government have been important issues of local governments.

The study of trust repair in academic circles had been started late, until the beginning of the 21st century, there were scholars beginning to study trust repair. To date three theories of trust repair have been formed in the research of trust repair in terms of psychological cognition, interpersonal relationship and social institution, to be more specific, which are trust repair theory based on attribution theory, trust repair theory based on social equilibrium theory and trust repair theory based on institutional theory [3]-[5]. From the existing studies, most literature about trust repair is enterprise-based, in which the trust issue between employer and employee and between employer and employer from angles of employer has been discussed, though the study of trust issue of government-oriented is not common, in which the attribution of trust issue of government has been discussed and the policy and measurement have been put forward to solve the trust issue [6] [7]. This paper researches that the initial trust of the public for government and the severity and attribution of public crisis event are exerted influence upon the trust damage of government under the political and cultural environment of current China, and different trust repair strategies have been tested empirically in the methods of situational simulated and questionnaire survey.

2. Theoretical Review

2.1. Trust and Trust for Government

Trust is a kind of faith and expectation [8] [9] and a kind of social phenomenon [10] as well, is verbal promise having been realized and expressly stipulated regulation having been fulfilled as best as the both parties involved, who have to remain royal in the process of communication and negotiation [11]. While the trust for government is a kind of basic appraisal [12] upon image and behavior of government by the public, whether or not the behavior of government is trustworthy shall be according to the expectation of the public [13]. Scholars tend to fall trust for government into three dimensionalities [14], which are capacity, goodwill and integrity, by which the public would like to appraise government agencies, such as the words and deeds of political workers, internal groups of government agency, the relationship between government and the public, conditions of organization operation, relevant system and policy. The overall level of trust [5] for government upon government agencies have been formed by appraisal of different levels towards government agencies by the public.

2.2. Trust Damage

Trust damage refers to the trust has been broken and gone against, by which the relationship between both parties involved has been broken, which mainly refers to one party has positive expectation towards another party, and that expectation cannot be achieved based on the reality, leading to letdown between expectation and reality, by which the trust has been damaged [15]. Since 1990s, scholars have researched on the trust damage from the perspective of the reason, result and influence of trust damage, and they thought that trust damage is accessible to break the trust relationship between both parties involved, which can come about pressure, harm, uneasiness and other negative consequences upon the trusting party [10] [16]-[21]. Just because of this, the research on trust repair has begun to increase [22] in recent years. Kim *et al.* (2004) thought that trust repair refers to the damaged trust can be recovered and can be even more positive [6]. Tomlinson *et al.* (2004) thought that trust repair refers to release negative emotion and give up revenge [23]. As researched by the scholars, the trust for government shall be the comprehensive perception and evaluation of capacity, goodwill and integrity of government by the public, however, the public crisis event is available to shock or even break the trust relationship between government and the public, by which one or more dimensionalities of trust for government can be changed. Above

all, the trust for government refers to a series of measures and actions adopted by the government to recover the perception for capacity, goodwill and integrity of government by the public, after the public crisis event has been occurred [5].

2.3. Trust Repair Model

In recent years, trust repair model has been put forward by organizational behavior scholars from the perspective of cognition, scene and institution, with some representatives such as attribution model proposed by Tomlinson and Mayer (2009) and dynamic bilateral model proposed by Kim and Driks & Cooper (2009) and four-step model proposed by Gillespie & Dietz (2009) [4] [14] [22], among which attribution theory is one of the most common repair theories, referring to the perception process of one party upon sabotage caused by the other party, which is mainly used to solve problems at the level of recognition and perception. The theory is adopted in this research.

Tomlinson and Mayer (2009) thought that the public tend to look for reasons of public crisis event when the event has been happened, the judgement and analysis of the reasons will further exert influence upon sensation and expectation of government by the public, on which the public would update the trust for government [24]. In other words, countermeasures (apology, explanation, denial, etc.) can be adopted by government by leading the attribution of crisis event by the public and influencing deduction of reason of crisis event by the public, in order to recreate the trust.

2.4. Trust Repair Strategy

Kim *et al.* (2004) thought that trust repair is a difficult process, which not only need to clear negative expectation caused by negative event, but also to rebuild a more positive expectation [25]. After the trust has been damaged, it is necessary to adopt some positive measures and related actions for the party lost trust in order to increase the positive expectation of trusting party. In current researches, there are four strategies being used to repair trust: 1) denial. The denial refers to that the party lost trust thought that it has no relationship with the negative event, hence, no responsibility need to be assumed and no behavior of apology and regret has to be made upon the negative result [26]; 2) apology. The apology refers to that the party lost trust thought that it shall assume responsibilities for the negative event and negative result, and make an apology to the public and feel regret for it [27] [28]; 3) find an excuse [29]; 4) make a promise [30]. Denial and apology have been seen as the most commonly used and efficient trust repair strategies, hence, the denial and apology are chosen as the repair strategies used in this research.

3. Research Hypothesis

3.1. Public Crisis Event and Trust Damage for Government

The trust will change [31] in the process of formation and development of both parties. It is not hard to find out that the initial trust tend to be weak at the very beginning, when the duration of the relationship between trusting party and trusted party is short and both parties are lack of communication, for which the trust built at early stage is too fragile to break. Moreover, it is apt to influence by the external negative factor or misconduct of entrusted party [32] [33]. Researches shows that the occurrence of public crisis event cannot only do harm to the trust relationship between the two parties, but the extent of its damage could be even bigger [3] [34], if the crisis event has been more serious. The public crisis event refers to a kind of emergency incident and disastrous incident, which is available to cause danger to the life and common interest of the public and to pose great realistic or potential danger [35] in the whole social system. Working as administrator and responder in public security, the government may be influenced by the public crisis event to some extent, in which negative influence may be exerted on the government. Furthermore, public crisis event of different order of severity may exert different influence on trust for government. Hence, some hypotheses have been put forward as listed below:

H1a: The higher of the severity order of the public crisis event, the heavier of damage of capacity dimensionality of trust for government is.

H1b: The higher of the severity order of the public crisis event, the heavier of damage of goodwill dimensionality of trust for government is.

H1c: The higher of the severity order of the public crisis event, the heavier of damage of integrity dimensio-

nality of trust for government is.

3.2. Initial Trust and Trust Damage of the Public upon Government

Aaker *et al.* thought that the public with high initial trust tend to act in a more furious and negative way, such as non-reliance sense towards government and bad feelings [23] [35], after the public crisis event has been occurred. Based on current literature, we hold the opinion that the trust damage of government has been influenced upon initial trust of the public for government in two ways.

Gregoire and Fisher (2008) thought that if the initial trust of the public for government is higher, then their expectation towards government will be even higher, who tend to expect the government to make more contributions to society [36]. However, after the public crisis event has been happened, the good will of the public would be broken and the gap between the negative reality and beautiful expectation towards government will enlarge; when the higher of goodwill expectation upon government by the public is, the negative emotion of the public will be severer once the expectation cannot be met. Moreover, people tend to feel sorry for the misconduct of government unceasingly, by which the negative emotion of the public may become more intensive and heavier damage extent of trust may be caused. On other hand, Koehler and Gershoff (2003), Ward and Ostrom (2006) thought that the intensive negative attitude, the great gap between reality and expectation, and the feeling for emotion hurt caused by the public are not apt to disappear as the time goes on, but the damaged trust for government [23] [37] has been deepened ceaselessly. Hence, some hypotheses have been put forward as listed below:

H2a: The higher of initial trust of capacity dimensionality of government, the heavier of the damage extent of the capacity trust of government upon public crisis event is.

H2b: The higher of initial trust of goodwill dimensionality of government, the heavier of the damage extent of the goodwill trust of government upon public crisis event is.

H2c: The higher of initial trust of integrity dimensionality of government, the heavier of the damage extent of the integrity trust of government upon public crisis event is.

3.3. The Relationship between Event Attribution and Trust Damage

When the attribution of the public crisis event concluded by the public has gone against with the expectation of government, then the trust of the public for government may weaken and sense of non-reliance will generate. Weiner (1986) thought that the reason [7] for the public crisis event shall be detected in terms of responsibility attribution, stability attribution and controllability attribution. If it is proved that there is no relationship between the public crisis event and government, then the event would exert no effect on the trust level of government. If the public thought that the reason for the public crisis event is not internal factor of government, then the public would confirm whether or not the event is controllable, if it is proved that this event is uncontrollable, the public would think there is no relationship between the event and government, moreover, the government shall assume no responsibility and the trust for government would not be broken [38]. It follows that it is important to find out that the reason for the event is either external or internal of the government at the early stage of the event, for it has great influence on the damage level of trust for government. If the public thought that the event was caused by external factor of government, then government would take no responsibility for this event and would not be criticized and blamed by the public, and the trust for government would not be damaged.

Weiner (1986) thought that if the public thought that the event was caused by internal factor of government, and the capacity dimensionality, goodwill dimensionality and integrity dimensionality of the trust for government would all be damaged. After the public has attributed occurrence of the event into internal factor of government, the stability and controllability of factor will be judged, among which the attribution of stability has been divided into stable and variable. If this reason is stable, similar public crisis event will happen again under similar circumstances; otherwise, if this reason is variable, similar public crisis event will not happen again under similar circumstances. Moreover, the analysis of controllability attribution is aimed to analyze whether or not the reason is within controllable range. If the public thought the reason is controllable, government would be responsible for the event and the trust level of the public for government would decline; if the public thought the reason is uncontrollable, government would not be responsible for the event and the trust for government would remain unchanged. Hence, some hypotheses have been put forward as listed below:

H3a: If the public has regarded the reason of public crisis event as external factors after the public crisis event

has happened, the trust of government hasn't gotten damaged.

H3b: If the public has regarded the reason of public crisis event as internal factors, controllable attribution and stable attribution after the public crisis event has happened, the trust of government has gotten damaged.

3.4. Repair Strategy and Trust Repair

The occurrence of the public crisis event cannot only break the social order [39], but also the social status and trust of government would be questioned by the public, by which the society will be lack of balance. Government shall take action to recover the unbalanced trust relationship [40] between the public and government, with specific measurements including apology, denial, excuse, etc. The public tend to feel that they have been hurt and offended by government because of the public crisis event, for which negative psychology, such as anger and revenge, would generate. The government shall make an apology first, in order to weaken and eliminate the negative psychology of the public and repair damaged social trust relationship [41]. If positive and reasonable interpretation can be offered by the government after the public event crisis has been occurred, the public would think that government is ready to take responsibility for the event and misconduct involved, by which responsible impression will be given to the public, in order to weaken their negative emotion [42] [43]. Meanwhile, the hurt public hopes to acquire the apology from government in order to rebuild dignity. Government would recognize the occurred harm by making an apology, by which it has shown regret for its misconduct and guaranteed that similar incident and behavior would not be happened in the future. Moreover, some researches shown that apology has positive effect on repairing damaged trust and cooperation, and in general trusting party tend to be more sensitive for apology.

When the occurrence of the public crisis event has broken the trust of the public for government, if government has denied the occurrence of the event, though there are some researches verified that denial is helpful for the repair effect of trust to some extent. However, in our opinion, the denial strategy is risky for trust repair under background of Chinese culture. Because China is a country with low credibility, in which the trust intention is relatively weak, the trusting party tends to regard denial as a way to escape from responsibility by trusted party, who is lack of will to improve relationship, by which it has great possibility to lead to antipathy and contradiction of trusted party, in order to decrease the repair effect of trust and further deteriorate the trust of the public for government. Hence, some hypotheses have been put forward as listed below:

H4: When government has adopted repair strategy to recover damaged trust, the repair effect of apology strategy is better than that of denial strategy.

3.5. Initial Trust and Trust Repair of Government

Hess (2003) and Tax (1998) thought that the degree of initial trust of the public for government has exerted influence upon repair effect of trust in the process of repairing damaged trust by government. Some researches shown that the repair effect of high initial trust tend to be better than that of low initial trust. Some researchers thought that the strong-weak relationship between the public and government has exerted important influences upon trust repair, and the repair effect of strong relationship is better than that of weak relationship. Some other researchers thought that certain appropriate measures of remediation shall be adopted to weaken negative emotion, in order to repair the trust relationship between the public and government. Hence, some hypotheses have been put forward as listed below:

H5a: The higher of initial trust of capacity dimensionality of government, the better of the repair strategy upon capacity trust repair of government is.

H5b: The higher of initial trust of goodwill dimensionality of government, the better of the repair strategy upon goodwill repair of government is.

H5c: The higher of initial trust of integrity dimensionality of government, the better of the repair strategy upon integrity trust repair of government is.

4. Experimental Design

By methods of situational simulated and questionnaire survey, the effect of the severity of public crisis event, the initial trust of the public and the attribution of the public upon trust for government have been verified, meanwhile the effect of adopting different strategies (manipulation item) by government on repair effect has been tested as well. Firstly, we chosen 4 cases on the Internet and in the magazine; secondly, coping strategy

adopted by government had been designed in terms of each case, and related questionnaire had been developed; finally, based on the experimental situational and manipulation item, situational experiment on trust damage and trust repair of government had been carried after the public crisis event had been occurred, and related data of questionnaire analysis had been collected.

4.1. Situational Design

By searching on hot web portals, such as Sohu, Sina and Tencent, and sorting out special coverage and hot comments on microblog and Wechat, the public crisis events occurred from 2010 to 2014 were collected. By sifting and researching, 4 cases had been confirmed, which had been described respectively, in which the name of the event and the its background and its process had been described. The 4 cases were on behalf of different government department, in which the attribution can be fallen into many conditions, such as responsibility attribution, stability attribution and controllability attribution, in order to manipulate the attribution of the case, which had certain representativeness. As shown in **Table 1**.

4.2. Manipulation Design of Situational Experiment

In order to research different attribution of the public crisis event of the public and repair effect of corresponding strategies adopting by government better, we had designed different interpretations for government after the public crisis event had happened in each case we offer. Taking into consideration that different event had different severity order and different event had different attribution and there were two coping strategies, apology and denial, we had designed 8 manipulation items for each case, as shown in **Table 2**.

In order to verify the maneuverability of interpretation way given by government after the public crisis event

Table 1. The situation of the public crisis event.

The Public Crisis Event	Description
Affordable housing with Six Consecutive Numbers in Wuhan	There was a affordable housing project with bid-to-cover ratio reaching to 40:1 at downtown in Wuhan, however, six consecutive certificate number of affordable housing had been gotten by six purchasers strangely, and the probability of it was only quadrillionth. Hence, the public thought that the government had behaved affectedly in this event, in which six purchasers had obtained subscription qualification at the same time and same downtown with the same fake material. Amid skepticism from the public, more and more Shady Deal had emerged from the black.
Virustat was used to feed children in a Kindergarten at Xi'an	In 10th Mar. 2014, a parent had announced via microblog that unknown medicine was used to feed children in SQLF Fengyun Kindergarten in Shanxi Province, and it was said ABOB on the white pills, which was commonly known as Virustat, a kind of antiviral drug, after inquiring certain materials by the parent latterly, which had provoked discontent among the parents. The event was continuously in fermentation, in the same year of 12th, Mar., the parents were gathered at SQLF Hongji Newtown Kindergarten as well because of feeding their children Virustat.
Land Acquisition Case in Pingdu City	A tent was on fire in a field at Duanjiatuan Village of Fengtai Street of Pingdu City of Shandong Province, and 1 farmer had been died of the fire and 3 farmers had been injured in the fire. Later, Grabbing Corpse Disturbance had been occurred on the scene. It was said by some villagers that a large number of policemen with shield and crabstick on hand intruded into the scene where the villagers are trying their best to protect the corpse. The villagers were conflicted with the policemen, who were soon segregated by the policemen. Contradiction had been generated because of land acquisition. The next day, municipal propaganda department of Pingdu had acknowledged on microblog that the developer in the event was involved with delict. After the Commission for Discipline Inspection of the Central Committee of the CPC had involved in the event, the fact of it had been known by the public.
Waifs were frozen to death in dustbin in Bijie City	In 16th, Nov., 2012, five boys were found passed away in dustbin at certain street of Bijie City. A preliminary investigation by local police station found that these boys were died of carbon monoxide poisoning because of getting warm by the fire. As the news spread out, broad attention had been attracted from the public. In 2011, eight ministries and commissions, such as Ministry of Civil Affairs and Ministry of Public Security, had issued notice jointly, in which a special campaign named as Waif Go Home had been carried out and a target, no waif should stay in the street, had to be realized by the end of 2012. Why were the five boys free from the salvation from the Department of social Security? It was the absence of responsibilities of related personnel and it was the fault of government sector and social salvage service.

Table 2. Manipulation of coping style of government in the public crisis event.

The Public Crisis Event	Settling Method of Government
Affordable housing with Six Consecutive Numbers in Wuhan	1) The event was caused by committing irregularities by personal of the Real Estate Bureau in Wuhan… ***Internal*** 2) The event was caused by random factor of lottery surely… ***External*** 3) This was the first time that the Real Estate Bureau in Wuhan had encountered this kind of event, which was an incidental fault… Unstable 4) This was not the first time that the Real Estate Bureau in Wuhan had encountered this kind of event, which was a secondary incidental fault… ***Stable*** 5) Wuhan Municipal Government was enabled to control this event, which was an incidental fault… ***Controllable*** 6) Wuhan Municipal Government was not enabled to control this event, which was not an incidental fault… ***Uncontrollable*** 7) Through investigation this event was proven without any relationship with the Real Estate Bureau in Wuhan, in which there was no malversation and collaboration involved… ***Denial*** 8) The Real Estate Bureau in Wuhan had made an apology for this event, which would like to take responsibility for it and to survey the Six Consecutive Numbers issue exhaustively, and said that it would learn a lesson from the event and no such event would happen again… ***Apology***
Virustat was used to feed children in a Kindergarten at Xi'an	1) The event was caused by that government had played a bad role in medicine management of children… ***Internal*** 2) The event was caused by random factor of drug using in kindergarten for children… ***External*** 3) This was the first time that the drug using in kindergarten for children had encountered this kind of event, which was an incidental fault… ***Unstable*** 4) This was not the first time that the drug using in kindergarten for children had encountered this kind of event, which was not an incidental fault… ***Stable*** 5) Government was enabled to control this event, which was an incidental fault… ***Controllable*** 6) Government was not enabled to control this event, which was not an incidental fault… ***Uncontrollable*** 7) Through investigation this event was proven without any relationship with the children medicine management of government, which was occurred in individual kindergarten… ***Denial*** 8) Related departments had made an apology for this event, which would like to take responsibility for it and to survey the children drug issue exhaustively, and said that it would learn a lesson from the event and no such event would happen again… ***Apology***
Land Acquisition Case in Pingdu City	1) The event was caused by bending the law for personal gain by government staff… ***Internal*** 2) The event was caused by random factor in the process of land acquisition… ***External*** 3) This was the first time that the process of land acquisition had encountered this kind of event, which was an incidental fault… Unstable 4) This was not the first time that the process of land acquisition had encountered this kind of event, which was not an incidental fault… ***Stable*** 5) Government was enabled to control this event, which was an incidental fault… ***Controllable*** 6) Government was not enabled to control this event, which was not an incidental fault… ***Uncontrollable*** 7) Through investigation this event was proven without any relationship with government, in which there was no malversation and collaboration involved… ***Denial*** 8) Government had made an apology for this event, which would like to take responsibility for it and to survey the land acquisition issue exhaustively, and said that it would learn a lesson from the event and no such event would happen again… ***Apology***
Waifs were frozen to death in dustbin in Bijie City	1) The event was caused by that government had played a bad role in social management and social relief… ***Internal*** 2) The event was caused by random factor, and the system of social management and social relief for street children was comparatively perfect… ***External*** 3) This was the first time that the process of land acquisition had encountered this kind of event, which was an incidental fault… Unstable 4) This was not the first time that the process of land acquisition had encountered this kind of event, which was not an incidental fault… ***Stable*** 5) Government was enabled to control this event, which was an incidental fault… ***Controllable*** 6) Government was not enabled to control this event, which was not an incidental fault… ***Uncontrollable*** 7) Through investigation the system of social management and social relief for street children was comparatively perfect, this event was caused by self-reasons or family reasons of the five boys, among who four boys had dropped out from the school, and they had refused to go to school after persuasions for many times by their teachers; moreover, they often played out together, sometimes they even stayed in outside for several days, and local police station had sent them home for many times. Before this event had happened, the five boys were not at home, and their family members had not called the police. Hence this event had happened because of improper use of fire… ***Denial*** 8) Government had made an apology for this event, which would like to take responsibility for it and to find out who was to blame, and said that it would learn a lesson from the event and no such event would happen again… ***Apology***

had happened, we had chosen 60 students from USTC Before the experiment, who had participated in the maneuverability test, as shown in **Table 1**. Firstly, the students had to read the four cases and the interpretation way given by government; secondly, they had to judge whether or not the eight interpretation ways given by government in each case were meeting the manipulation target, such as external attribution, internal attribution, denial and apology. The experimental result shown that the goodness of fit between interpretation way given by government after the public crisis event had happened and manipulation target was 94.58%; while the goodness of fit had reached to 100%, after we had explained further target of manipulation term for the students, by which the experimental manipulation is effective,

4.3. Definition and Measurement of Research Variable

This research was composed by four variables, which were including trust for government, severity of public crisis event, attribution of public crisis event by the public and trust repair strategy government. Moreover, there were another two variables, which were damaged trust of the public for government and damaged trust repaired by government.

As shown in **Table 3**, based on trust scale formulated by Mayer *et al.* (1999), we had modified the trust scale of government, by measuring in terms of capacity (4 items), goodwill (3 items) and integrity (3 items), while there were two items in scale of severity, which were severity and influence scope. There were 2 items in scale of manipulation in trust repair method, which were "the public thought that government has made an apology for the event' and 'the public thought that government has denied the above event". There were three dimensionalities including responsibility, stability and controllability in scale of attribution, with each dimensionality 2 items. Each item in the above scale was measured by 7 point Likert Scale.

4.4. Investigation Process

Based on above scale, we had modified each experimental situation, by which formal questionnaire had been

Table 3. Scale of measurement index.

Scale of Trust for Government	Capacity Dimensionality	Government is enabled to fulfill its responsibility.
		Government is enabled to assume public responsibility and realize public target.
		Government is available to provide high efficiency administrative service for the public.
		Government is available to solve problems for the public.
	Goodwill Dimensionality	The behavior of government is line with the interest of public.
		Government and its staff are honest.
		Government is available to disclosure correct and reliable information.
	Integrity Dimensionality	Government disclosure information for public openly.
		The level of service process of government.
		Government is available to keep its promise.
Scale of Severity of the Event		The event is so serious.
		The event has wide sphere of influence.
Scale of Trust Repair Way		The public thought that government has made an apology for the event.
		The public thought that government has denied the above event.
Scale of Attribution of the Public Crisis Event	Responsibility	The event was caused by internal factor of government.
		The event was caused by external factor of government.
	Stability	The event was caused by stable reason, and similar event would happen again.
		The event was caused by unstable reason, which is incidental.
	Controllability	The event was caused by controllable reason.
		The event was caused by uncontrollable reason, and similar event would happen again.

formed. Each experimental situation was composed by 3 questionnaires, among which questionnaire 1 was mainly including personal information of informant and his/her initial trust for government, which was a questionnaire used before the public crisis event had happened; while questionnaire 2 was mainly used to survey the severity of the event, damaged trust of government, attribution of the event, after the public crisis event had happened; and questionnaire 3 was mainly including the repair strategy adopted by government and trust of the public for government, which was a questionnaire used after the strategy had been carried out.

The situational experiment in this research can be divided into 3 steps, and the first step shall be making a brief introduction and questionnaire 1 shall be filled in by the informant, in order to measure basic variable of population statistics and initial trust for government; the second step shall be introducing the public crisis event and making summarized description for each case, and questionnaire 2 shall be filled in by the informant; the last step shall be introducing coping way and action of government to repair damaged trust to the informant, and questionnaire 1 shall be filled in by the informant.

4.5. Data Collection

In order to prevent deviation caused by informant with single background, we had chosen college students, teacher, civil servant, employees of the enterprise and community residents as our informant in this research, who tended to have good education and were available to understand our research topic. We had distributed 310 questionnaires in school, government sector, enterprise and community, and 295 questionnaires had been collected back, after some invalid questionnaire had been removed, 280 questionnaires were left as valid questionnaire, with valid rate of questionnaire as 94.9%. Based on simulated situation, there were 73 questionnaires for Six Consecutive Numbers event, and there were 58 questionnaires for Virustat event, and here were 47 questionnaires for Land Acquisition Case, and there were 102 questionnaires for Waifs were frozen to death in dustbin in Bijie.

4.6. Data Analysis

4.6.1. Test for Reliability and Validity of Test Variable

In order to guarantee the effectiveness of the test variable, reliability and validity of the questionnaires had been analyzed in this paper, by which reliability of the questionnaires had been tested. 1) Analysis of reliability. By calculating Cronbach's an Index of 18 items for each variable, Cronbach's a = 0.812 had been obtained, which had exceeded the acceptable level by 0.7, which refers to that the scale was reliable. 2) Analysis of exploratory factor. Factor of related experimental research had been measured by adopting SPSS19.0, with its result shown that the KMO value of the scale applied in this research was 0.835, and the P value of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was 0.000, which had all reached minimum standard. Hence, the construct validity of the scale was good.

4.6.2. Dynamic Test of Trust for Government

The trust condition of government might be change at different time-point, which had been test at three time-point, before the public crisis event had happened, after the public crisis event had happened, and after the repair strategy of trust adopted by government, and damaged trust of government and ways of repairing damaged trust of government in public crisis event had be researched further.

After government trust sample had been T tested at three different time-point, the capacity dimensionality after/before the event was $t = 11.406$ and $p < 0.001$; the goodwill dimensionality after/before the event was $t = 9.513$, $p < 0.001$; and the integrity dimensionality after /before the event was $t = 11.396$, $p < 0.001$. The result shown that negative emotion had been generated by the public and the initial trust of the public for government had been decreased quickly, and the trust for government in capacity dimensionality, goodwill dimensionality and integrity dimensionality had notably lowered that the former level, after the public crisis event had happened. However, when repair strategy had been adopted immediately after the public crisis event had happened, negative emotion of the public towards government would decrease or eliminate, and the trust for government might be improved to some extent. After trust repair strategy had been adopted, the capacity trust ($t = -2.246$, $p = 0.026$), goodwill trust ($t = -2.266$, $p = 0.024$) and integrity trust ($t = -3.176$, $p = 0.0021$) had been advanced markedly.

Moreover, variance analysis had been carried out upon trust at three different time-point, by which the result shown that the capacity dimensionality of trust for government is $F = 31.870$ and $P < 0.01$; the capacity dimen-

sionality of trust for government is $F = 21.767$ and $P < 0.01$; the capacity dimensionality of trust for government is $F = 24.397$ and $P < 0.01$, which means that there was significant difference among the three dimensionalities of trust for government by the public.

5. Hypothesis Test

5.1. Effect Test of Severity of the Event, Initial Trust for Government and Trust Damage

The variance analysis had been carried out to test hypothesis 1 and hypothesis. In **Table 4**, after analyzing the variance between the severity of the public crisis event and trust damage, the trust damage of capacity was $F = 2286.073$, the trust damage of goodwill was $F = 2017.142$, and the trust damage of integrity was $F = 2099.182$, with the Sig of three dimensionalities as 0.000. From data in **Table 5**, with different initial trust, its F value of trust damage was 1866.565, 1067.666, 1045.788 respectively, with Sig as 0.000. Hence, we can assume that different severity of the public crisis event and different initial trust of the public for government had significant influence on trust damage of government. That is to say, the more severe of the public crisis event, the larger extent of trust damage of government is; the higher of initial trust, the more severe of trust damage of government is. Hence, we assumed that la, 1b, 1c, 2a, 2b, 2c hold.

5.2. Effect Test of Attribution of the Public Crisis Event upon Trust Damage of Government

The attribution of public crisis event had used to test the informant by "caused by internal factor" (question 1) and "caused by external factor of government organization" (question 2). Under the background of same event, if the informant had high recognition degree toward question 1 and had low recognition degree toward question 2, then it could be regarded as internal attribution; on the other hand, it could be regarded as external attribution; if there were two identical answers for question 1 and question 2, which mean that the recognition degree for both questions were high or low or without obvious tendency at the same time, then it can be regarded as invalid answer. Based on item of choice and judgement of internal/external reason of crisis event in questionnaire 2, the sample of the public crisis event with goal of external attribution more than 4 and goal of internal attribution less than 4 had been chosen, in the end 87 samples of external attribution had been obtained; the sample of the public crisis event with goal of external attribution less than 4 and goal of internal attribution more than 4 had been chosen, in the end 81samples of internal attribution had been obtained.

The sample of external attribution had been analyzed first in this paper, the total goal of item related to trust

Table 4. Variance analysis of severity of the event, initial trust for government and trust damage.

	Severity of the Event	Initial Trust of Capacity
Trust Damage of Capacity	2286.073**	1866.565**
Trust Damage of Goodwill	2017.142**	1067.666**
Trust Damage of Integrity	2099.182**	1045.788**

$^{+}P < 0.1$; $^{*}P < 0.05$; $^{**}P < 0.001$.

Table 5. Change of trust for government after/before the public crisis event with different stability.

		Internal Attribution		
		Before Event	After Event	Trust Damage
Stable	Capacity	5.236	4.083	1.153
	Goodwill	4.426	3.284	1.142
	Integrity	4.296	3.086	1.210
Unstable	Capacity	5.13	4.49	0.64
	Goodwill	4.373	4.067	0.306
	Integrity	4.467	3.72	0.747

for government in questionnaire 1 and questionnaire 2 had been averaged by adopting SPSS19.0, the mean value of capacity dimensionality, goodwill dimensionality and integrity dimensionality of trust for government had be obtained before/after the public crisis event had happened. Hence, pair sample t in three dimensionalities of trust for government had been tested respectively before/after the public crisis event had happened, related data shown that the trust in three dimensionalities for government were damaged, and the trust for government declined, after the public crisis event had happened. During this process, the t value of capacity dimensionality was 4.510, and the *t* value of goodwill dimensionality was 4.586, and the *t* value of integrity dimensionality was 4.609, and the *P* value for each was 0.000. In view of this, the attribution was regarded as external factor after the public event had happened, and there was no significant influence on capacity dimensionality, goodwill dimensionality and integrity dimensionality of trust for government. Hence, we assumed that 3a don't hold.

Sample data of internal attribution had been analyzed next. By using the same method, corresponding mean value and situation of trust damage in three dimensionalities of trust for government had been calculated out before/after the public crisis event had happened. By comparison of the mean value, the trust for government had been damaged after the public crisis event had happened. T test had been carried out to check the change of trust for government in three dimensionalities. The result shown that (1) the *t* value of capacity dimensionality was 7.287, and the *t* value of goodwill dimensionality was 5.162, and the *t* value of integrity dimensionality was 7.587, and the *P* value for each was 0.000. It was shown that when the reason of the public crisis event had been regarded as internal attribution, the three dimensionalities of capacity trust for government were reduced significantly.

Finally, the influence of stability and controllability of reason for the public crisis event upon trust damage of government had been verified. By above similar method, the samples could be divided into stable group and unstable group, and the mean value and damage value of analysis result of dimensionality of capacity, dimensionality of goodwill and dimensionality of integrity of the two groups were as shown in **Table 5**. The variance analysis had been carried out upon the severity of trust damage of government under stable attribution and unstable attribution. It was shown that the *F* value of inter-group variance of capacity dimensionality was 3.333, and its *P* value 0.72; (2) the *F* value of inter-group variance of goodwill dimensionality was 0.310, and its *P* value was 0.580; (3) the *F* value of inter-group variance of integrity dimensionality was 5.333, and its *P* value was 0.024. The above analysis result shown that the stable attribution of the public crisis had non-significant influence on trust damage of government in three different dimensionalities.

In the same way, sample could be divided into controllable group and uncontrollable group, and the mean value and damage value of analysis result of dimensionality of capacity, dimensionality of goodwill and dimensionality of integrity of the two groups were as shown in **Table 6**. 1) The *F* value of inter-group variance of capacity dimensionality of trust for government in controllable group was 1.167, and the *P* value of inter-group variance of capacity dimensionality of trust for government in controllable group was 0.284; 2) The *F* value of inter-group variance of goodwill dimensionality was 3.775, and the *P* value of inter-group variance of goodwill dimensionality was 0.056; 3) The *F* value of inter-group variance of integrity dimensionality was 1.449, and the *P* value of inter-group variance of integrity dimensionality was 0.233. The above analysis result shown that the controllable attribution of the public crisis had non-significant influence on trust damage of government in three different dimensionalities. Hence, we assumed that 3b don't hold.

Table 6. Change of trust for government after/before the public crisis event with different controllability.

		Internal Attribution		
		Before Event	After Event	Trust Damage
Controllable	Capacity	5.515	4.51	1.005
	Goodwill	4.741	3.776	0.965
	Integrity	4.667	3.517	1.150
Uncontrollable	Capacity	3.882	3.25	0.632
	Goodwill	3.176	3.02	0.156
	Integrity	3.294	2.569	0.725

5.3. Effect Test of Different Trust Repair Strategy

Hypothesis 4 had been verified by adopting *F* test and *t* test in this paper, and two different trust repair strategies, denial and apology, had been analyzed and discussed, in order to check whether or not the repair effect of damaged trust of government had significant difference.

Firstly, variance analysis had been carried out upon trust repair of government by adopting denial and apology as trust repair method. It was shown that: (1) the *F* value of inter-group variance of capacity dimensionality was 46.253, and the *F* value of inter-group variance of goodwill dimensionality was 33.634, and the *F* value of inter-group variance of integrity dimensionality was 27.985, and the *P* value for each was less than 0.001. It was shown that there was significant difference upon repair effect of trust for government by adopting apology and denial as repair method.

Secondly, *t* test had been carried out on difference between damaged trust of government and trust repair. When government had adopted denial as the repair strategy, its *t* value of capacity dimensionality was 4.463, and its *t* value of goodwill dimensionality was 5.207, and its *t* value of integrity dimensionality was 4.445, and each *p* value was 0.000, by which there was significant difference between trust after adopting denial as repair method and trust before repair. Moreover, minus the mean value before repair by mean value of trust repair of each dimensionality after repair, we found that trust repair values of three dimensionalities were negative values (the trust repair value of capacity dimensionality, goodwill dimensionality and integrity dimensionality was −0.8305, −1.0655 and −0.7917 respectively), by which negative effect by adopting denial as repair method by the government had exerted on the damaged trust.

When government had adopted apology as the repair strategy, its *t* value of capacity dimensionality was −5.188, and its *t* value of goodwill dimensionality was −7.245, and its *t* value of integrity dimensionality was −8.238, and each *p* value was less than 0.001, by which there was significant difference between trust after adopting apology as repair method and trust before repair. However, the trust repair values of the three dimensionalities were all positive values (the trust repair value of capacity dimensionality, goodwill dimensionality and integrity dimensionality was 0.6695, 0.9259 and 1.0741 respectively), by which significant positive effect by adopting apology as repair method by the government had exerted on the damaged trust. Hence, the hypothesis 4 holds.

5.4. Repair Effect Test of Initial Trust for Government upon Trust for Government

Regression analysis had been used to test the influence and its influence degree of initial trust upon trust repair of government. From **Table 7**, it was shown that after the capacity dimensionality of trust for government had broken, the higher initial trust of the public for government, the easier to repair damaged trust is (standard index = 0.321, $p < 0.001$), as for the repair effect of trust of capacity dimensionality influenced by initial trust. The severity of the public crisis event had no influence on repair of trust dimensionality of government (standard index = 0.062, $p > 0.1$). That is to say, whether or not the severity of the public crisis event is high or not, it would exert no influence on repair of capacity of dimensionality of trust for government. The adoption of trust repair method had significant influence on effect of repairing goodwill trust (apology = 1, denial = 0), with significant difference (standard index = 0.437, $p < 0.001$), and the effect of repairing trust by adopting apology was better than that of repairing trust by adopting denial. Hence, hypothesis 5a holds.

Table 7. Regression analysis of factors upon the three dimensionalities of trust for government.

	Capacity Repair of Trust for Government	Goodwill Repair of Trust for Government	Integrity Repair of Trust for Government
Gender	0.052	0.045	−0.006
Repair Method	0.437**	0.481**	0.431**
Severity of Event	0.062	0.006	0.014
Initial Trust of Capacity	0.321**		
Initial Trust of Goodwill		0.343**	
Initial Trust of Integrity			0.398**

$^{+}P < 0.1$; $^{*}P < 0.05$; $^{**}P < 0.001$.

In the same way, from **Table 7**, it was known that initial trust of goodwill dimensionality (standard index = 0.343, $p < 0.05$) of trust for government and integrity dimensionality (standard index = 0.398, $p < 0.05$) had significant influences on trust repair. That is to say, after the trust of capacity dimensionality or integrity dimensionality of government had been broken, the higher of initial trust of the public for government, the easier to recover the damaged trust is (standard index = 0.256, $p < 0.05$). In the same way, datum in the above two tables were shown that the adoption of trust repair method had significant influence on effect of repairing goodwill trust, which means that the repair effect of goodwill trust or integrity trust by adopting apology was better than that of repairing trust by adopting denial (apology = 1, denial = 0), after the public crisis event had happened. Hence, hypothesis 5a and 5c hold.

6. Research Conclusion

Based on the above analysis, the following conclusions are reached.

1) Severity of events and initial trust are in direct proportion to government trust.

Research verifies that higher levels of negative impacts of public events indicate lower levels of public trust in government, thus damaging government trust more seriously. The higher level of severity may damage government trust more seriously. Otherwise, government trust is less damaged.

Higher levels of initial public trust in government indicate higher public anticipation on governmental actions. When governmental actions fail to fulfill their needs or live up to their anticipation, trust levels also decline sharply, thus damaging government trust more seriously. So, before the occurrence of public crisis events, public initial trust in government anticipation is in direct proportion to anticipation. After the occurrence, levels of government trust damage will be higher. Otherwise, levels of government trust damage will be lower.

2) Differences between various attribution and government trust damage are not obvious.

The study indicates that after the occurrence of public crisis event, when general public attributes to crisis event to external factors, government trust will be obviously damaged. The general public attributes to crisis event to internal factors, government trust will be also damaged. Meanwhile, attribution of crisis event stability and controllability don't have obvious impacts on the damage of government's three dimensions. In other words, as long as crisis events occur, government trust will be damaged. The public will not consider that they are related to external or internal factors of the government, nor will they consider that the causes are stable or controllable.

As for results obtained are different from hypothesis in the thesis, we think it may be because of the following two reasons. On one hand, relevant basic theory on trust mainly originates from western countries. The experiments in this study are based on Chinese cultural conditions. China is a nation with relatively low trust levels. In the minds of general public, government tends to be versatile. They tend to believe that the government should be responsible for occurrence of any crisis event. On other hand, in the experiment of the study, various questionnaire operations haven't been conducted for long. Experimental subjects may be in lack of time concerning the reasons and causes for crisis event.

3) Different repair strategies have different effects of trust repair.

As for causes of negative events, government may adopt denial strategy, *i.e.* denying the relevance to the government. Based on above conclusions, the general public may think that government denial is irresponsible. This strategy will not have obvious effects on government trust repair. It may also have adverse effects. Another strategy is to apologize, *i.e.* to admit mistakes, express regret and take relevant actions. General public think that this is positive and responsible attitude. The strategy has obvious effects on government trust repair. It shows that denial and apology have different effects on government trust repair. Apologies have better effects than denial.

4) Initial trust is in direct proportion to government trust repair.

If general public has high initial trust in government, *i.e.* they have good anticipation for the government, and think that it can represent public interests. They tend to trust and support the government. When negative events occur, if the government takes measures of remediation, public with high initial trust may still continue to trust in the government, and accept measures of remediation. So such measures will have good effects on trust repair. High levels of initial trust indicate better effects of repair.

Research shows that if government has obtained high levels of initial trust, negative events will also have obvious impacts on trust. General public will show emotional fluctuation. When event begins, higher levels of initial trust indicate more serious damage trust. But this does not influence the repair of government trust. When

serious public crisis event occur, as long as government adopt proper repair strategies, higher levels of initial trust also indicate better trust repair.

7. Contribution, Weaknesses and Future Direction of the Research

Based on public crisis event, the paper introduces attribution theory, and discusses the impacts of crisis event severity, initial trust and attribution on government trust repair. It also studies how initial trust and different repair strategies may influence effects of trust repair. We think that there are three aspects of contribution. Firstly, previous research on trust and trust repair were based upon western social background. Research subjects are mostly enterprises and organizations. While this paper regards government as research subject. Based on Chinese actual conditions, it discusses government trust repair, supplements and expands research scope on trust repair. Secondly, the paper analyzes how different levels of initial trust may impact on government trust damage and trust repair. It shows that public initial trust on the government is of great importance. It also clearly indicates that government should focus on initial trust in order to establish positive image of the government. Then, research in this paper indicates that in government trust repair, active apologies have better effects than denial. In other words, when crisis event occurs, government should actively take responsibilities. While apologizing, it should also promise that similar events will no longer occur. It also has practical significance on the issue of Chinese government trust.

Limitation and future research direction of this paper is mainly shown in the following aspects:

1) The paper mainly explores effects of denial and apology on government trust repair. Future research may focus on more trust repair strategies, such as trust repair mechanism and strategies on levels of system reactions and behavior reactions.

2) The paper considers fewer factors of government influences. Factors concerning public trust orientation, values, and cultural different are not included in the research. In future research, we may conduct multiple-factor analysis.

3) Although the samples selected in this research eliminated effects of relevant factors such as gender, age, education, occupation and experiences to some extent, due to the limited number of sample, representativeness is still not adequate. Whether or not the conclusions obtained in this research can be applied in other regions still requires further verification in future research.

Lastly, in addition to the focused factors in the paper, in future research, we can also understand more about the influence factors of government trust require, provide theoretical guidance for government trust repair after occurrence of crisis event, enhance public trust in the government, and promote the development of social economy and public welfare.

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