Master of Professional Communication, MRP

"Political crises: Chris Christie responds to Bridgegate"

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Abstract

This case study focuses on New Jersey Governor Chris Christie's response to the Bridgegate crisis. This paper presents a case study of a political individual's response during a crisis across three distinct texts. Building on Image Repair Theory (Benoit, 1997a), differences across texts are identified and compared by observing the presence of Denial, Evasion of Responsibility, Reducing Offensiveness, Corrective Action and Mortification. The three distinct texts are analyzed through qualitative textual coding. These consist of Governor Christie's prepared press conference response, his responses to reporter's questions, and messages sent publically via Twitter January 9th 2014. Findings suggest that Image Repair Theory is useful for supporting a comparison between texts within a political image repair effort. Corrective action, as well as mortification strategies, were found to be used most prominently across the texts. The application of image repair theory in this case study led to the recommended addition of two new subcategories (Repentance and Taking responsibility) within the strategy of Mortification from Benoit's (1997a) Image Repair Theory.

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Introduction

When a crisis arises for an organization or an individual, there are both

responsibilities in communicating vital information required by the public (Benoit

1997a; Coombs 2002), as well as recommended responses that should be given to

repair the image of the party at fault (Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Benoit, 1997a).

Crisis response strategies should protect the organization's or individual's image,

by improving the impressions of the organization or individual, or by modifying

the perceived responsibility for the crisis event (Coombs, 1995). Many crisis

communication theories have been developed which recommend strategies to be

employed in crisis situations. Drawing from Image Repair Theory (Benoit 1995,

1997a), this case study analyzes the crisis communication of New Jersey

Governor Chris Christie in his response to the scandal surrounding the lane

closures to the George Washington Bridge from Fort Lee New Jersey from

September 9th to 13th 2013. This paper identifies Governor Christie's use of

image repair strategies in a prepared speech to the public as part of a press

conference, the question and answer section of that press conference, and tweets

shared on Twitter from Governor Christie's Twitter account on the same day as

the press conference. The use of image repair strategies is then compared across

the three texts. This examination will show consistencies and inconsistencies

across the three texts, and whether or not Governor Christie's use of image repair

strategies is aligned with best practices.

Background

The "Bridgegate" (Rucker & Blake, 2014) crisis began with the closure of two lanes leading from Fort Lee, New Jersey onto the George Washington Bridge (which connects New Jersey to New York) on September 9th 2013, the first day of the school year. These lane closures caused major traffic congestion which affected commuters as well as emergency response vehicles. These lanes were closed for four days, and were re-opened on September 13th 2014. When this crisis began, New Jersey Governor Christie was considered a democratic front-runner for the 2016 presidential elections.

Leading up to the crisis, media reports suggested that the lane closures were an act of retribution from Governor Christie and his administration for the failure of the Mayor of Fort Lee to support Governor Christie's re-election bid. The crisis was at full force on January 8th 2014 when it became known to the media that Governor Christie's Deputy Chief of Staff, Bridget Kelly had orchestrated the lane closures intentionally to cause traffic problems for Fort Lee (Rucker & Blake, 2014). The media and the public were questioning Governor Christie's involvement and/or knowledge of these lane closures, which put his reputation and his future career in politics in danger.

Figure 1 shows the key players in the Bridgegate crisis and helps to visualize the political connections which play a role in the audience's attribution of crisis responsibility. Working relationships are shown as connected through solid black lines, and solid gray lines are used to show relationships of influence. Key actors in the crisis are coloured, showing the news media in purple, Governor

Christie in blue, and those who initiated the lane closures in orange (Bridget Kelly and David Wildstein). It is due to Governor Christie's connections with those who initiated the lane closures that he was required to make a public comment and work to repair his image.

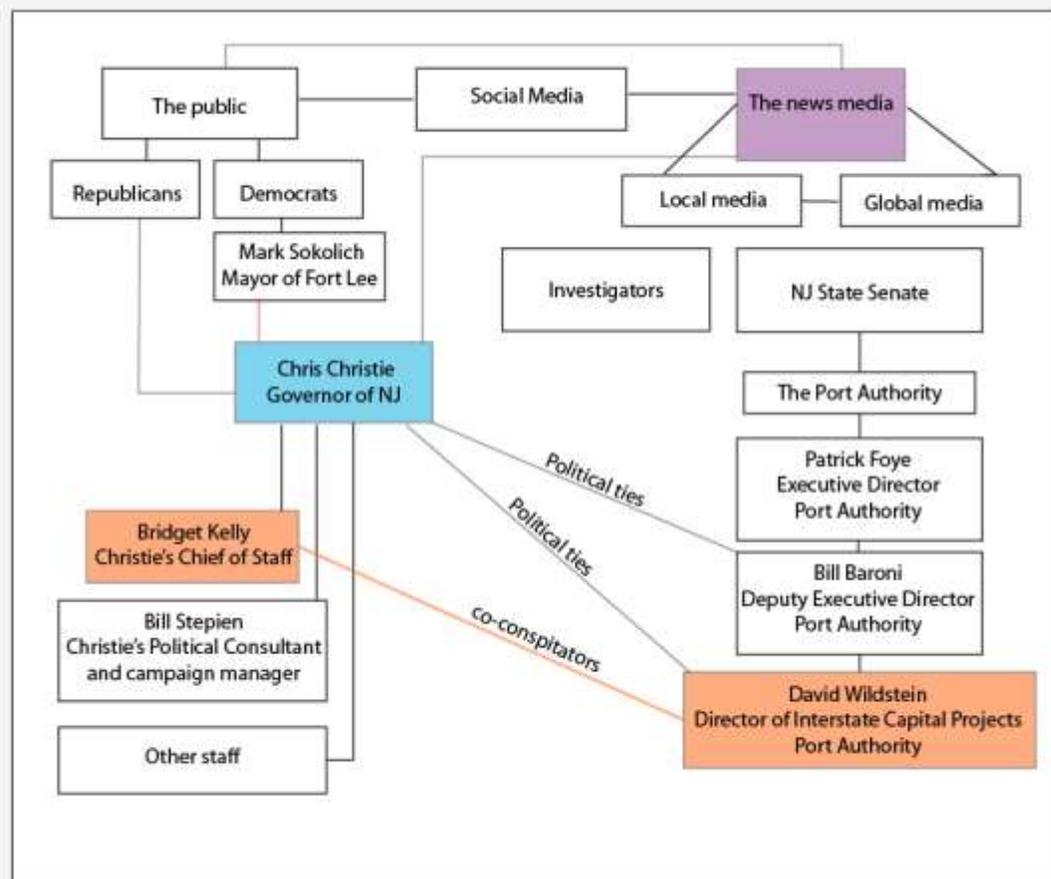**Figure 1: Relations Diagram**

Image Repair Theory outlines strategies that can be used to minimize negative effects on reputation that can result from crisis (Benoit, 1997a). This Masters Research Paper will examine the use of Image Repair Theory in Governor Christie's crisis response through his prepared speech as part of his press conference, his responses in the question and answer section of the press

conference, as well as what was posted on his official Twitter account. Through the analysis of these texts, the strategies Governor Christie uses will be identified and comparisons will made between his prepared speech and the question and answer section which followed. Differences across media use will also be considered by examining the tweets posted to twitter on the same day as the press conference. Through an analysis of Governor Christie's use of image repair strategies across texts, consistencies and inconsistencies can be identified, and ultimately, it can be determined how Governor Christie is using image repair strategies, and if these strategies are aligned with best practices. Before analyzing Governor Christie's response to the public, it is important to review relevant literature on crisis communication, response and image repair.

Literature Review

The main topics explored in this literature review will position Image Repair Theory as part of the larger scope of crisis communication. This will be done by reviewing crisis communication at a high level, then delving into Apologia (Foss, 1995; Ware 1973) and Attribution Theory (Weiner 1985, 2006), which are important theories that inform larger models of crisis communication. Two Crisis communication models, Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Coombs & Holladay, 2002, Coombs, 1997) and Socially Mediated Crisis Communication Theory (Jin, Liu and Austin, 2014) will then be explored, followed by an in-depth look at Image Repair Theory (Benoit, 1997a) and its alignment with political image repair (Benoit 1997b; Eriksson & Eriksson, 2011; Sheldon & Sallot, 2008) .

Crisis Communication

The concept of crisis communication is in a state of evolution. From its grounding in the theory of rhetoric (Foss, 1995) to its place as part of the field of public relations, crisis communication has become its own topic of scholarly theorizing as well as research. Areas of study have included techniques for effectively preventing crisis from taking place (Benoit, 1997a), methods to handle a crisis in a way that minimalizes a crisis' damaging effects (Benoit, 1997a; Coombs, 2007), as well as the study of crisis strategies in traditional media as well as online (Taylor & Perry, 2005; Pang, Hassan & Chong, 2014).

Many definitions of crisis exist, however there are a few key characteristics that are consistent across the literature, which are synthesized within Coombs (2007) definition of crisis as "A sudden and unexpected event that threatens to disrupt an organization's operations and poses both a financial and a reputational threat. Crises can harm stakeholders physically, emotionally and /or financially" (p.164). In addition to this definition it should be added that a crisis can be either that of an organization or of an individual (Benoit, 1997a).

Many theories and models of crisis communication have been developed to provide insight and best practices for managers and public relations practitioners. These theories and models have worked together to build upon a greater understanding of crisis communication, the impact of various factors and strategies on reputation and identifying strategies that can be used for crisis preparation, response and repair. Three theories that have greatly contributed to the way that crisis communication is conceived of today are the theory of

Apologia (Foss, 1995; Ware 1973), Attribution Theory (Weiner 1985, 2006) and

Image Repair Theory (Benoit 1997a). These crisis communication theories

explain specific phases of crises in great detail and often prescribe how these

phases should be handled. In addition to these individual theories addressing

specific elements of crisis communication and response, models have been

created which help us to conceptualize crisis communication as a whole. These

include the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Coombs & Holladay,

2002, Coombs, 1997), and the Socially Mediated Crisis Communication Theory

(Jin, Liu and Austin, 2014). These larger models of crisis communication work to

explain the crisis dynamic as a model with various stages and variables to take

into consideration, and they draw from other crisis communication theories. Both

the individual theories and the models have valuable information for practitioners

to apply to crisis communication efforts, and it is through examining both the

individual theories of crisis communication and the larger models that an in-depth

understanding of crisis communication can be achieved.

Apologia

One of the first theories for conceptualizing crisis communication is based

on the concept of apologia. Apologia has roots in the rhetorical tradition (Foss,

1995) and is conceived as the way in which a person defends themselves from an

attack of their reputation or character (Ware, 1973). Apologia differs from

apology in that apologia is made in direct response to an accusation, and is a form

of defense, whereas apology admits fault (Coombs, Frandsen, Holladay &

Johansen, 2010). Apologia can be thought of as a response to an initial attack, and is defensive in nature.

The concept of Apologia has informed later crisis communication theories by setting the groundwork for the defensive piece of larger strategies. Although an important strategy in crisis communication, apologia does not take into account preparation for crisis or image repair, nor does it consider the form or source in which the response is delivered. In this way apologia is a strategy unto itself rather than a larger conceptual framework for how to manage crises.

Attribution Theory

Attribution Theory adds to the understanding of crisis communication in that it allows for a greater understanding of the public's motivation in their response to crisis, and the importance of perceived crisis responsibility. Attribution Theory explains how the public have a desire to discover the cause of an unexpected crisis event, and that they want to know who is responsible (Weiner 1985, 2006). After determining the responsibility, the public can feel either anger or sympathy towards the subject of the crisis (Coombs 2007). Anger is associated if the responsibility is deemed to be that of an organization, and if an organization is deemed to be the victim of an unfortunate situation then sympathy would apply (Weiner 1985, 2006). This is a valuable insight for crisis communicators when determining their response, as the effectiveness of the strategies are dependent on the public's perceived responsibility of the organization or individual associated with the crisis (Konijn & Ten Holt, 2011).

Crisis communication models

To build on existing theories in crisis communication and to create a useful model for implementation of crisis strategies, Coombs developed the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 2007). This theory is an expansion of Attribution Theory and Image Repair Theory, where through the SCCT model, Coombs outlines the process for effective crisis communication and the best strategies for response in a given situation. In the SCCT model, primary crisis response strategies are given (Attack the Accuser, Denial, Scapegoat, Excuse, Justification, Compensation and Apology) as well as secondary strategies (Reminder, Integration and Victimage). Image Repair Theory is an important part of Coombs' (2007) SCCT model, with the SCCT model using Image Repair Theory response tactics such as Denial, Evasion of Responsibility (Scapegoat, Excuse), Reducing Offensiveness of Event (Justification, Attack the Accuser), Corrective Action (Compensation) and Mortification/Apology (Benoit, 1997a). Coombs' SCCT model incorporates a full continuum of crisis, across all stages of crisis and takes into consideration crisis responsibility, crisis history, prior relationship reputation, crisis response strategies, organizational reputation, emotions and behavioral intentions (Coombs, 2007).

Although Coombs' SCCT model is useful in the development of appropriate crisis responses, a key missing factor is the consideration of the form and source of the information that would be provided. This gap is addressed through Social Mediated Crisis Communication Theory (SMCCT).

The SMCCT model, unlike SCCT, focuses on the form by which the communication is received by the audience and how that affects publics' acceptance of crisis messages. Jin et al. (2014) also stresses that organizations should react proactively to crises, utilizing official organizational online and social media channels to establish information authority and accessibility if the organization is not the cause of the crisis. This additional consideration of form and source is important when considering Governor Christie's crisis response, as he uses both traditional and social media in his messages to the public.

Social media uses in crisis communication

Although there has been a substantial amount of research into the area of crisis communication theories and strategies, much of the research is focused on organizational responses through traditional channels (Coombs, Frandsen, Holladay & Johansen, 2010; Nord, Olsson & Frame, 2013; Sheldon, 2008). Social media has changed the landscape of crisis communication, enabling the use of integrated communication strategies across platforms. To communicate in crisis situations, a variety of media have been used from traditional media such as television and newspapers, and now have expanded to include online tools such as email, websites, and social media applications such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. The addition of these online tools have changed the way in which people communicate, and have affected the way that crisis communication messages are shared. Social media can be defined as "an umbrella term that is used to refer to a new era of web-enabled applications that are built around user-generated or user-manipulated content such as wikis, blogs, podcasts, and social

networking sites" (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2010). Differences exist between traditional media and social media in both the medium and the message shared with the audience. Before social media was as prominent as it is today, studies focused on the use of the internet and organizational webpages in the communication of crisis responses. Perry, Taylor and Doerfel (2003) highlight the importance of sharing crisis information online if it is determined that stakeholders will look online for relevant information. In 2003 when their study was conducted, Perry, et al. found that approximately half of organizations were using both traditional and online tactics for responding to crisis. This same concept applies to new and evolving forms of online media such as social media platforms. Social media is becoming a widely used tool for communication from one-to-one, as well as from one-to-many (Gonzales & Smith, 2008). Online platforms and social media enable the use of links, connecting one piece of content to another. The use of social media in crisis communication has become important to communicate to the general public as well as the news media in a timely way (Gonzales & Smith, 2008).

According to Gonzalez-Herrero and Smith (2008), interactive media are often preferred sources of information for audiences sharing in a peer to peer way online. "In this environment, trust is the new currency and people expect authentic, transparent conversation in a human voice, not company messages delivered in a corporate tone" (Gonzalez-Herrero & Smith, 2008, p. 144). In 2009, Kelleher completed a study where he measured the perceptions of people who communicated with organizations through blogs. His findings showed that

people that interacted with an organization online through blogs believed that the

organization had a more conversational voice, and this in turn meant greater

levels of trust and satisfaction in their relationship with the organization.

Coombs and Halladay (2007) add an additional dimension to the use of

social media in crisis by introducing the negative communication dynamic created

through online word-of-mouth "For most crises, stakeholders will forget about the

crisis and purchase intention should return to pre-crisis levels. With the negative

communication dynamic, the effect spreads to other people and can remain

available online well past the crisis" (p. 309). This is a strong indication that

social media needs to be considered in crisis communication implementation, and

that it can be used as a tool for creating better relationships with the public and

working to avoid the spread of negative communications.

Image Repair Theory

Crisis communication theories and models explored to this point have

been studied mainly within the arena of organizational crisis. When studying

crisis communication for an individual, and specifically a political figure, it is

relevant to consider Benoit's (1997a) Image Repair Theory. Image Repair Theory

has been applied to numerous case studies on political crisis responses (Benoit,

1991; Blaney & Benoit, 2001; Eriksson & Eriksson, 2012; Sheldon & Sallot

2008).

Unlike Attribution Theory, Image Repair Theory builds on the concept of

apologia and focuses on the messages that are used in a crisis response (Benoit,

1997a). Image Repair Theory is made up of five broad categories of image repair

strategies, which are Denial, Evasion of Responsibility, Reducing Offensiveness of Event, Corrective Action and Mortification. Within each of these categories are more specific forms (or subcategories) in which the strategies are used. **Table 1** (p. 13) shows Benoit's Image Restoration Strategies (Benoit, 1997a), which are also referred to as Image Repair Strategies (Brinson & Benoit, 1996).

Image Repair Theory goes a long way in identifying strategies that can be used in image repair messaging by a political figure; however, through the literature review I found there was an opportunity for greater detail within the strategy of Mortification. Benoit's (1997a) image repair strategies would benefit from the addition of two subcategories within the strategy of Mortification, these being Repentance and Taking Responsibility. Coombs introduced the subcategories of Repentance and the Suffering Strategy as image repair strategies in 1995 when he merged together Benoit's image repair strategies and impression management strategies as discussed by Allen and Caillouet (1994). Repentance, which involves asking for forgiveness, was a subcategory of Mortification and Suffering was a higher level strategy identified by Coombs in 1995.

> "The idea behind suffering is to win sympathy from publics; a
>
> positive rather than a negative is drawn from the link to the crisis.
>
> Suffering portrays the organization as an unfair victim of some
>
> malicious, outside entity." (Coombs, 1995 p. 453)

Coombs found these two strategies to be valuable to image repair, but they were not captured in Benoit's Image Repair Theory.

Table 1: Benoit's Image Repair Strategies

Strategy	Key Characteristic	Illustration
Denial		
Simple Denial	Did not perform act	Coke does not charge McDonalds's less
Shift the blame	Act performed by another	Exxon: Alaska and caused delay
Evasion of Responsibility		
Provocation	Responded to action of another	Firm moved because of new state laws
Defeasibility	Lack of information or ability	Executive not told meeting changed
Accident	Act was a mishap	Sears' unneeded repairs inadvertent
Good Intentions	Meant well in act	Sears: no willful over-charges
Reducing Offensiveness of Event		
Bolstering	Stress good traits	Exxon's swift and competent action
Minimization	Act not serious	Exxon: Few animals killed
Differentiation	Act less offensive	Sears: Preventative maintenance
Transcendence	More important considerations	Helping humans justifies tests
Attack Accuser	Reduce credibility of accuser	Pepsi: Coke charges McDonalds's less
Compensation	Reimburse victim	Disabled movie-goers given free passes
Corrective Action	Plan to solve or prevent problem	AT&T promised to improve service
Mortification	Apologize for act	AT&T apologized

Benoit, 1997a, p.179

Image Repair Theory works to help practitioners design messages during crisis, and is also used for analysis of crisis messages. In positioning Image Repair Theory, Benoit (1997a) emphasizes that a crisis and its severity must be understood. "The response must be tailored to the offense" (Benoit, 1997a, p. 102) as well as to the audience. Although Image Repair Theory has often been applied to repairing the image of an organization (Brinson & Benoit, 1996; Schauster, 2012), it can equally be applied to the image repair of individuals such as politicians or celebrities experiencing crisis. "…the basic options are the same for both individual and corporate image repair efforts." (Benoit, 1997a, p. 177). However, strategies may be modified. For example, politicians may be less inclined to use Apology or Mortification due to the threat of potential litigation (Benoit 1997a).

Many studies have been conducted evaluating political crisis responses using the frame of Image Repair Theory. Since Image Repair Theory is concerned with the messages used in crisis communication, it is particularly applicable to analyzing crisis responses individually, outside of other factors effecting crisis.

Benoit (2005) applies Image Repair Theory in his evaluation of the success of President George Bush's April 2004 news conference in response to criticism of the war in Iraq. Through his rhetorical analysis of the image repair strategies used, Benoit found President Bush's image repair discourse to be ineffective due to his lack of Apology.

Brinson and Benoit also applied Image Repair Theory when evaluating Dow Corning's response to their breast implant crisis in 1991 and 1992 (Brinson

& Benoit, 1996). In this case study, Brinson and Benoit found that Denial and Evasion of Responsibility were not effective strategies in this case because it was believed by the public that they were in fact responsible. Ultimately Brinson and Benoit (1996) recommend that when there is clear evidence of wrongdoing, the responsible party takes responsibility and initiates Corrective Action. In Benoit's (2007b) case study of image repair for actor Hugh Grant, he compares image repair for politicians and actors, identifying that there are additional considerations for politicians in their image repair efforts. Benoit (2007b) asserts that for political figures, strategy and messaging must be consistent across the media because of the extreme scrutiny they are under from their oppositional party.

Eriksson and Eriksson (2011) applied Image Repair Theory to the face-to-face communications of two politicians during two relatively similar press conferences. Through their case study of two Swedish politicians they found that Apology and Mortification strategies were most effective as they enabled the politician to have greater control over the interaction. Eriksson and Eriksson also emphasized how the type of questions asked by reporters effect the ability of the politician to respond in way that reflects positively. This study provides insight into why there may be differences between the strategies used in a prepared speech and those used in a question and answer section of a press conference.

Sheldon and Sallot (2008) tested both Image Repair Theory as well as Coombs' adaptation of Attribution Theory in their study of an individual, political crisis caused by a faux pas. A faux pas is defined by Coombs (1995) as ''an

unintentional action that an external agent tries to transform into a crisis by [redefining] the action as inappropriate'' (p.455). Their study experimentally tested three crisis response strategies from Benoit's typology (Mortification, Reducing Offensiveness, and Corrective Action) and two levels of performance history (positive and negative). 352 students participated in the study, which found that "Mortification or apologizing for an offensive act is recommended as the preferred, most effective, image repair strategy in Benoit's typology" (Sheldon & Sallot, 2008, p. 27) and that "Apologizing and admitting fault may win the public's acceptance of accounts and their supportive behavior, but may not restore the politician's reputation" (p. 48). To help restore a politician's reputation, Sheldon and Sallot (2008) recommend combining Bolstering with Mortification.

The focus of this paper is specifically on the response of Governor Christie in one particular press conference and then across media to include his communication via Twitter. This paper is focused on the texts from Governor Christie's response to the public and does not take into consideration unknown factors outside of the scope of this case study, such as the emotion of the public, attribution of responsibility, or mediation of his response over time. For this reason, Image Repair Theory is best suited to provide a focused way to analyze Governor Christie's response over larger models such as the SCCT or SMCCT model. Image Repair Theory has been previously applied in the evaluation of responses to a crisis which were political in nature and the theory encompasses a large breadth of possible crisis responses. For this case study, the use of Image

Repair Theory will enable the comparison of strategy use across texts. Learning from the SMCCT model (Jin, Liu, & Austin, 2014), it is important to consider form when analyzing crisis response, therefore observations of Governor Christie's use of social media (Twitter), in comparison to his use of a traditional medium (a television press conference) are included.

The research questions posed in this case study will address the presence of the five image repair strategies and 12 subcategories as defined in **Table 1**, with the addition of two subcategories (Repentance and Taking Responsibility) as will be defined in **Table 2 (**pg. 22).

Research questions

Question 1: What image repair strategies does Governor Christie employ in response to the bridge crisis during the prepared speech portion of the press conference?

Question 2: What image repair strategies does Governor Christie employ in response to the bridge crisis during the question and answer portion of the press conference?

Question 3: What image repair strategies does Governor Christie employ in response to the bridge crisis via Twitter?

Question 4: How do the image repair strategies vary across the three texts?

Method

This case study uses a textual analysis of Governor Christie's press conference, including his prepared speech and the questions and answer portion that followed, as well as Twitter posts from his official account on the day of the press conference.

Through identifying the various messages associated with Benoit's five image repair strategies and the subcategories within, the image repair strategies used by Governor Christie across the three texts will be identified and compared based on their frequency of use.

All three texts were coded based on the subcategories shown in **Table 2,** which is based on Benoit's Image Repair Strategies with the addition of Repentance and Taking Responsibility. For the purposes of this case study, Repentance has been added as a Mortification subcategory. The definition of Repentance has been constructed by encompassing Coomb's definitions of Repentance and Suffering. The addition of this category is necessary in the case of a political response because Repentance, which is defined as showing regret, putting oneself down, chastising oneself, asking for forgiveness and/or sharing feelings of negative emotion, is an important differentiating characteristic from the defined use of Apology, which is focused on the act of apologizing. The subcategory of Taking Responsibility originates from Attribution Theory. It is an important consideration in crisis communication that the party felt to be responsible for a crisis takes responsibility, and since this can be done in a form different from that of an apology, the addition of this subcategory is also needed.

Content analysis is completed by identifying text samples in the texts that are then coded as part of a pre-existing coding system (**Table 2**). All three texts (the prepared press conference statement, question and answer section which followed and Twitter posts) were coded using this directional approach based on Benoit's Image Repair Strategies. The texts were coded according to Benoit's Theory and items that were not properly represented within Benoit's codes were identified, which resulted in the addition of Repentance and Taking Responsibility to the original set of codes. Content analysis was completed by identifying, on a phrase level, which subcategories of Image Repair Theory were present. Examples of language and wording for each subcategory are given in **Table 2**.

The subcategories are part of larger categories, entitled Denial, Evasion of Responsibility, Reduce Offensiveness, Corrective Action and Mortification. Due to there being a number of different types of possible responses within each of the larger categories, subcategories are used. Benoit's Image Repair Theory (1997a) included all of the subcategories listed in **Table 2,** Benoit's Image Repair Strategies, with the addition of Repentance and Taking Responsibility within the Mortification category. As was explained, the addition of these two subcategories to Mortification enabled clear differentiation between the three types of Mortification used by Governor Christie to be evaluated. Being able to identify these differences through the new subcategories provides additional insight into his crisis response and image repair strategy.

Table 2: Image Repair Strategies Coding

	Subcategory	Description	Example from text or possible word usage
Denial	Simple Denial	Denying that the act occurred, that they held responsibility or that it didn't' harm anyone. Stating that something is false or incorrect	*"I didn't", "Untrue", "False", "Unlikely"* (referring to a past event)
	Shifting the Blame	Stating that another party is responsible for the offensive act	"the conduct that they exhibited is completely unacceptable", *"responsible"* (when referring to another party)
Evasion of Responsibility	Provocation	Stating that the response was justified due to it being a reaction to another's action	*"in response", "was started by"* (when referring to another party)
	Defeasibility	Stating that there was a lack of information or control over important elements, of the issue/incident	"That was the first time I knew about this. That was the first time I had seen any of the documents that were revealed yesterday."
	Accidental	Stating that the event was not planned or expected	*"Unintentional", "shock", "Surprise", "Accident", "Mistake", "Error"*
	Good Intentions	Stating that the negative event was not intentional and that intentions were actually positive	*"Our intention was", "We never intended", "backfired"*
Reduce Offensiveness	Bolstering	Stating the positive aspects of the actor, drawing attention to the actor's achievements, good character and/or track record	"Expectations that we've created over the last four years for the type of excellence in government that they should expect from this office."
	Minimization	Stating that the situation as being less serious than perceived	*"Minor", "Under control", "No serious…"*
	Differentiation	Stating that the act was less offensive than perceived and is different from other more offensive acts	*"In reality", "Taken too seriously", "blown out of proportion"*
	Transcendence	Stating that there are more important considerations or positioning the act in a more favourable light	*"The important thing is…", "At least x wasn't effected", "There are benefits"*
	Attack the Accuser	Stating negative information about the accuser to discredit them	*"Motive", "Track record"*, any negative comment about the accuser
	Compensation	Providing reparation to those affected by the incident	*"Offering x free of charge to those affected"*
Corrective Action	N/A	Stating that something has been done, or will be done, to address or correct the problem	"This morning I've terminated the employment of Bridget Kelly"
Mortification	Repentance	Showing regret, putting oneself down, chastising oneself, asking for forgiveness, sharing feelings of negative emotion	*"I wish I hadn't", "I regret", "I let you down", "I should have", "disappointed"*
	Taking responsibility	Statements that indicate ownership of the issue and ownership of the necessary corrective action	*"I am responsible" "it is my job" "I owe it" "Heartbroken" "disappointed"*
	Apology	A statement of apology using the word apology, apologize.	" I apologize to the people of Fort Lee and I apologize to the members of the state legislature."

Data Collection

Texts from January 9th 2014 were specifically chosen for textual analysis because Governor Christie's press conference and corresponding Twitter posts were his first response to the public after the media brought the crisis to light on January 8th 2014.

All texts are transcripts from responses that occurred on January 9th 2014 in response to the Bridgegate crisis. The content of the press conference, when transcribed, amounts to 41 pages of text. The prepared speech was approximately 3.5 pages of text (1961 words) in length, and the question and answer portion of the press conference was approximately 37.5 pages in length (13,346 words spoken by Governor Christie). Governor Christie's social media messages were reviewed, and it was found that his only public social media response was done via Twitter. Six Twitter posts were analyzed, which consisted of 97 words total.

The transcript from Governor Christie's press conference and the question and answer that followed were retrieved from the Washington Post newspaper online and was accompanied by the full video of the press conference and question and answer segment. The Twitter posts were retrieved from Governor Christie's official Twitter account, @GovChristie and were saved as images to ensure the data would not be lost in case of a possible error with Twitter.

Data Analysis

This initial response from Governor Christie will clearly illustrate his planned response, as well as show the difference between his planned response and the responses to reporters' questions and messages posted on Twitter.

Identifying and comparing the use of image repair strategies across these three

distinct texts provides insight into Governor Christie's overall image repair

strategy, and will enable differences between the prepared statement, question and

answer section and Twitter to be revealed.

For the question and answer section of data, only content relevant to the

crisis was coded as being an instance of the use of an image repair strategy. For

much of the question and answer section of the press conference, Governor

Christie was responding to questions from reporters seeking more detailed

information or asking for information about particular individuals. Where

Governor Christie's responses were not directly connected to the crisis and to his

image repair, the phrases were not coded as being part of his image repair

strategy. As an extreme example, if he had denied his involvement in ordering

lunch that day, it would not be coded as an instance of Denial (even though he

was denying something) because it was not directly related to the crisis and his

image in relation to the crisis. A real example of this is Governor Christie's

response to a reporter's question about an email sent from David Wildstein stating

that General Samson (Chairman of the New Jersey Port Authority's board of

directors) was working with him, and was thus involved in the lane closures:

> "I don't remember exactly what it was. I asked Samson -- General Samson
> about that yesterday. He said he has absolutely no idea what Wildstein's
> referring to…" (Governor Christie, Full Transcript p. 16)

Although the text within this excerpt could be coded as an example of use of Defeasibility because he is denying awareness of something and suggesting that he would need to reach out to someone else who did have the information, the context needs to be taken into consideration. In this case, Governor Christie is not claiming Defeasibility of the bridge crisis, but rather he is claiming Defeasibility about a specific email as per the reporter's question. As this is not part of Governor Christie's intended crisis response, and is rather informing information, it was not coded. However, it was included in the word count to be able to show the density of image repair strategy usage across the question and answer segment. Reporters' questions were excluded from the word count.

Findings

In this section I will review the data collected in this case study from the three texts (the prepared press conference statement, question and answer section which followed and Twitter posts) in order to answer the four research questions posed.

Question 1: What image repair strategies does Governor Christie employ in response to the bridge crisis during the prepared speech portion of the press conference?

Table 3: Image Repair Strategy Usage in the Prepared Speech

	Subcategory	Prepared speech (1961 words)	Percentage of total coded in this text
Denial	Simple Denial	0	0%
	Shifting the Blame	14	18%
Evasion of Responsibility	Provocation	0	0%
	Defeasibility	9	11%
	Accidental	0	0%
	Good Intentions	0	0%
Reduce Offensiveness	Bolstering	8	10%
	Minimization	0	0%
	Differentiation	0	0%
	Transcendence	1	1%
	Attack the Accuser	0	0%
	Compensation	0	0%
Corrective Action	N/A	28	35%
Mortification	Repentance	8	10%
	Taking responsibility	4	5%
	Apology	7	9%

As described in **Table 3**, there were 79 incidences of image repair strategy strategies present in the prepared speech portion of the press conference.

Corrective Action

Corrective Action was found to be the predominant image repair strategy used, with 28 phrases (35% of all items coded within the prepared speech) identified as containing messages of Corrective Action. Governor Christie used Corrective Action to identify the actions that he has taken since he became aware of his staff's involvement in the lane closures. An example of Corrective Action

can be seen when Governor Christie speaks about firing his deputy chief of staff, Bridget Kelly, "This morning I've terminated the employment of Bridget Kelly, effective immediately." (Governor Christie, Full Transcript p. 1). By stating that he has fired the person responsible for the crisis, Governor Christie is positioning himself as having already taken action, even before the press conference had begun. Governor Christie is very explicit in his use of Corrective Action, in 12 of the 28 incidences of Corrective Action, Governor Christie actually used the word "Action" or "Act". Examples from Governor Christie's full transcript include "And that's why I took this action." (p. 4) "taking whatever action may be necessary" (p. 3) and "I'll act accordingly" (p.3).

Mortification

The second strategy most used in the prepared speech was Mortification, with 19 occurrences (24%). Within the Mortification strategy, Governor Christie used Repentance, Apology and Taking Responsibility in his messages in response to Bridgegate.

An example of Repentance is when Christie says "I am embarrassed and humiliated" (Governor Christie, Full Transcript p.1) when referring to the behaviour of his staff. This use of Repentance is for the purpose of gaining sympathy from the audience by showing that the Governor is also in some way a victim of the actions of others. The use of Repentance in this way also works in alignment with the strategy of Shifting the Blame. By saying that he has been hurt

by the actions of his staff, this also works to move the blame away from Christie and over to his staff members instead.

Governor Christie uses Apology in a very matter-of-fact way. Instead of saying that he is "sorry", which implies remorse for wrong doing, Governor Christie chooses to instead say "I apologize" (Governor Christie, Full Transcript p. 1). In all instances of Apology in the prepared speech, Governor Christie uses the word apology as a verb as though it is an action he is doing. Christie apologizes without saying that he is to blame for the crisis, thus making his Shifting the Blame strategies retain their effectiveness. Christie's attempts to Shift the Blame would be unsuccessful if, in other areas of his speech, he admitted to feelings of remorse.

Denial

In Image Repair Theory there are two types of Denial, Simple Denial (stating that something is false or incorrect) and Shifting the Blame, (stating that someone else is responsible). Within the strategy of Denial, Governor Christie doesn't use Simple Denial in his prepared speech, as doing so would mean skirting responsibility or denying facts that are known to be true by the public. Instead, he uses Shifting the Blame, with 14 occurrences (18%) in the prepared speech. An example of Shifting the Blame is when Governor Christie shines the spotlight onto Bridget Kelly and David Wildstein for an email correspondence about causing traffic problems in Fort Lee "the conduct that they exhibited is completely unacceptable" (Governor Christie, Full Transcript p. 1). By showing

his displeasure with the conduct of the people on his team he finds responsible, it shifts the blame from him to them.

Reduce Offensiveness

Within the category of Reduce Offensiveness, Governor Christie uses Bolstering to reinforce his character and track record as Governor. There were 8 instances of Bolstering (10%) throughout the prepared speech, an example being "This is not the tone that I've set over the last four years in this building." (Governor Christie, Full Transcript p. 3). For a political figure, Bolstering is an important strategy for positioning oneself for future success, and it is something fundamental within politics, during and outside of crisis situations or situations of image repair (Benoit 1997b).

Evasion of Responsibility

Throughout the prepared speech, Governor Christie used Defeasibility 9 times, or 11% of his coded image repair strategies used. An example of Governor Christie's use of Defeasibility is when he refers to the large number of people that he has working for him and says "And I cannot know what each one of them is doing at every minute." (Governor Christie, Full Transcript p. 4). Through this statement, Governor Christie is emphasizing his lack of involvement and prior knowledge of the crisis, while also being in alignment with his strategy to shift the blame to his staff.

Question 2: What image repair strategies does Governor Christie employ in response to the bridge crisis during the question and answer portion of the press conference?

Table 4: Image Repair Strategy Usage in the Q and A Section

	Subcategory	Q and A (13346 words)	Percentage of total coded in this text
Denial	Simple Denial	36	17%
	Shifting the Blame	7	3%
Evasion of Responsibility	Provocation	0	0%
	Defeasibility	18	8%
	Accidental	0	0%
	Good Intentions	0	0%
Reduce Offensiveness	Bolstering	31	14%
	Minimization	0	0%
	Differentiation	0	0%
	Transcendence	0	0%
	Attack the Accuser	1	0%
	Compensation	0	0%
Corrective Action	N/A	36	17%
Mortification	Repentance	38	18%
	Taking responsibility	31	14%
	Apology	16	7%

In the question and answer portion of the press conference, the findings differed slightly from that of the prepared speech (see **Table 4**). The total word usage in the question and answer section was much larger with 6.8 times the number of words being used by Governor Christie in his response in comparison to the prepared speech portion of the press conference. The image repair strategy of Mortification was found to be used most, and second to that was Denial.

Mortification

Mortification was used 85 times (39% of all items coded within the question and answer section). Within the strategy of Mortification, Governor Christie uses all three subcategories of Repentance, Taking Responsibility and Apology.

Repentance is used 38 times throughout the question and answer segment, accounting for 18% of the overall coded image repair strategies used in this text. An example of Governor Christie's use of Repentance in the question and answer segment is in his response to a reporter's question of what kind of emotion he is feeling about the crisis "…sadness that I was betrayed by a member of my staff, sadness that I had people who I entrusted with important jobs who acted completely inappropriately." (Governor Christie, Full Transcript p. 20).

Taking Responsibility was present in 31 coded phrases within the question and answer segment, accounting for 14% of the overall coded messages in this text. An example of Governor Christie taking responsibility can be seen in his response to a reporter asking if Governor Christie was responsible because he is ultimately responsible for staffing decisions "The fact is that mistakes were made, and I'm responsible for those mistakes." (Governor Christie, Full Transcript p. 14). Interestingly, the way in which Governor Christie uses Taking Responsibility means that he is not fully taking responsibility for the crisis. He takes responsibility as a default because he is in a position of leadership and power, but does not admit fault in the actual crisis.

Apology was used in the question and answer section of the press conference to a lesser extent, with only 16 instances of Apology, accounting for 7% of the total coded messages in this text. In his response to a reporter's question on how serious Governor Christie thought the implications of the lane closures were Christie said "It's not right, and that's why I'm here apologizing." (Governor Christie, Full Transcript p. 29). Again Christie is using the word apology as a verb as he had in his prepared speech.

Denial

There were 43 incidences (20% of all items coded) of Denial within the question and answer section of the press conference. 36 of these or 17% were Simple Denial, and 7 or 3% were Shifting the Blame. Governor Christie used Simple Denial in the question and answer section of the press conference to deny reporter's suggestions that he felt were inaccurate. This can be seen in Governor Christie's response to reporters asking about his relationship with the Mayor of Fort Lee, Mayor Sokolich: "I don't know this guy." (Governor Christie, Full Transcript p. 28) and further, "…if he walked in the room, I wouldn't have been able to pick him out." (p.28).

Corrective Action

Corrective Action was used 36 times (17%). Governor Christie used Corrective Action to highlight steps he had already taken against those that were responsible for this crisis, as well as to speak to what actions he will take in the future to ensure the public remain informed and that similar situations don't arise.

An example of this is Governor Christie speaking about firing Bridget Kelly "By 9:00 this morning, her position was terminated." (Governor Christie, Full Transcript p. 24).

Reduce Offensiveness

Within the strategy of Reduce Offensiveness, Bolstering was the only strategy subcategory used in more than one occasion. Bolstering appeared 31 times (14%) throughout the text. An example of Governor Christie's use of Bolstering can be seen in this statement "This is an administration that's gotten big things done with a legislature of the other party." (Governor Christie, Full Transcript p. 38). Bolstering is a key political strategy in image repair, and Christie's use of this strategy in the question and answer section of the press conference means that he made good use of opportunities from open-ended reporter's questions (Eriksson & Eriksson, 2011).

Question 3: What image repair strategies does Governor Christie employ in response to the bridge crisis via Twitter?

Table 5: Image Repair Strategy Usage on Twitter

	Subcategory	Twitter (97 words)	Percentage of total coded in this text
Denial	Simple Denial	0	0%
	Shifting the Blame	1	13%
Evasion of Responsibility	Provocation	0	0%
	Defeasibility	0	0%
	Accidental	0	0%
	Good Intentions	0	0%
Reduce Offensiveness	Bolstering	1	13%
	Minimization	0	0%
	Differentiation	0	0%
	Transcendence	0	0%
	Attack the Accuser	0	0%
	Compensation	0	0%
Corrective Action	N/A	0	0%
Mortification	Repentance	2	25%
	Taking responsibility	2	25%
	Apology	2	25%

In the six Twitter posts analyzed, the large majority of posts fit within the image repair strategy of Mortification. Six posts contained phrases relating to Mortification, one post contained a message in the strategy of Reduce Offensiveness and one post contained a message in the strategy of Denial.

Mortification

In the category of Mortification, the appearance of messaging from strategy subcategories was evenly split between all three Mortification subcategories (Repentance, Taking Responsibility and Apology). In his first tweet, Governor Christie apologizes "I apologize to the people of New Jersey". In

his second tweet, he takes responsibility "I am the Governor and ultimately responsible for the things that happen on my watch. The good and the bad." and in his third tweet, he uses Repentance "I am completely disappointed and there is a lot of soul searching that goes along with this." In his sixth Tweet, Governor Christie combines the use of Shifting the Blame (which is a Denial Strategy) and Apology, by saying "What they did hurt the people of NJ and Fort Lee and the person that needs to apologize for that is me".

Reduce Offensiveness

Governor Christie uses Bolstering, which is part of Reduce Offensiveness in his fourth tweet on Twitter the day of the press conference "But I want everyone in New Jersey to know that this is the exception, not the rule".

Question 4: How do the image repair strategies vary across the three texts?

There are both areas of similarity and difference when comparing the prepared portion of the press conference with the question and answer section. The question and answer section of the press conference was much longer than the prepared speech. The number of words used by Governor Christie in the question and answer section of the press conference (13,346 words) was much higher than the number of words used in the prepared speech (1961 words). Overall, the density of messaging was less in the question and answer section than it was in the prepared speech. In the prepared speech, Governor Christie was focused on responding to the crisis and his messaging was 4.0% specifically image repair strategies, as compared to 1.6% for the question and answer section.

In the question and answer section, Governor Christie was responding to reporters' questions, which often delved deeper into timelines, information about events or individuals, and thus required more information in response beyond the use of image repair strategies.

Through the analysis of the press conference held on January 9th 2014, it was found that Governor Christie employs each one of Benoit's image repair strategies. The strategy of Mortification is used most in the question and answer section of the press conference as well as on Twitter. Corrective Action was used most in the prepared speech. The next most used strategies (cumulative from all texts) were Denial, followed by Reduce Offensiveness and lastly Evasion of Responsibility.

When examining the subcategories most commonly used, the use of Corrective Action was prominent for both texts, however it was used over twice as much in the prepared speech as in the question and answer section of the press conference. Corrective Action was used 17% in the question and answer section and 35% in the prepared speech. According to Eriksson and Eriksson (2011), in a question and answer situation, the politician needs to be reactive to the reporter's questions, and not stick tightly to key messages or face possible ridicule from the press. This means that the questions asked by the press will greatly influence the responses from Governor Christie. It is understandable that the press would ask fewer questions with relation to Corrective Action, as Governor Christie had already covered the topic of Corrective Actions he was taking during the prepared speech.

Another similarity was in the use of Bolstering and Repentance. Both were used to a large extent across both larger texts, with Bolstering being found in 15% of the cases in the question and answer segment and 10% in the prepared speech. Repentance was the most used strategy subcategory in the question and answer section, with 18% usage, and was used 10% of the time in the prepared speech. Again this is something that could have been influenced by the types of questions that Governor Christie was receiving from reporters (Eriksson & Eriksson, 2011).

Similarities and differences across the top five image repair strategies used can be seen in **Table 6,** which highlights in green the similar top strategy subcategories used, and in red for the differences in top strategy subcategories. Strategy subcategories are in order of usage, with the most used at the top of each column and the lesser used at the bottom.

Table 6: Top Image Repair Strategies Used

Prepared Speech	Question and Answer
Corrective Action	Repentance
Shifting the Blame	Corrective Action
Defeasibility	Simple Denial
Repentance	Bolstering
Bolstering	Taking Responsibility

A key similarity is the high usage of Repentance, Corrective Action and Bolstering seen in both Governor Christie's prepared speech and the question and answer section of the press conference.

In comparing the Twitter posts to the press conference texts, it was found that predominantly the strategies used were similar. Mortification was the top strategy used on Twitter, and it was also the top used strategy in the question and answer section and the second most used in the prepared speech. On Twitter, the form of the information was much shorter, thus fewer words were used overall to be under the 140 character limit of the medium. In the tweets analyzed, part of their purpose was to draw viewership back to the full press conference by way of a hyperlink to a video of the press conference on YouTube. In this way, Twitter can be considered supplementary to the primary message being shared through the press conference. All of the links within the tweets were links back to the prepared portion of the press conference, rather than to the question and answer section.

Discussion

Corrective Action can be seen as the key focus of the image repair response from Governor Christie to the public, due to its overwhelmingly high usage in the prepared speech portion of the press conference. The use of Corrective Action is recommended by Benoit (1997a), who stressed that for those who admit responsibility, it is important to also use Corrective Action. Although Governor Christie said during the press conference that he takes responsibility, he does so in a way to avoid assuming fault for the crisis. He takes responsibility

only for hiring his staff, and being the one ultimately in a position of authority, but denies knowledge of the information surrounding Bridgegate, and shifts the blame to his staff.

Next highest in usage in the prepared speech were Shifting the Blame, Bolstering and Repentance. Sheldon and Sallot (2008) recommend Repentance (a Mortification strategy subcategory) and Bolstering (a Reduce Offensiveness strategy subcategory) as key image repair tactics for politicians. Shifting the Blame has been seen to be successful in instances where an organization was considered to be not responsible for the crisis and not successful when a company is shifting the blame to someone for whom they are ultimately responsible (Benoit, 1997a). With Bridget Kelly being an employee of Governor Christie's, the strong use of Shifting the blame (the second highest usage of all strategy subcategories in his prepared speech, with an 18% usage) seems to be ill-advised.

In the question and answer section of the press conference, as well as on Twitter, Mortification is the most used strategy. The discrepancy between the prepared speech and the question and answer section can be due to a number of factors. Due to the question and answer section being "off the cuff" it means the messaging is less easily controlled and can be influenced by the questions the reporter's asked of Governor Christie. This dynamic was highlighted in Eriksson and Eriksson's (2011) study of two politician's crisis responses. Eriksson and Eriksson found that the types of questions asked by reporters influenced the nature of the answers and thus affected the politicians image repair efforts. The use of Mortification strategies in combination with Corrective Action and/or

Bolstering can have positive effects on the interaction between the interviewees and the politician by disarming the interviewer. When interviewers were looking for the admission of guilt from the politician, they tended to ask questions that elicited a yes or no response, which limited the politician's control over the interaction. Once guilt had been admitted through Mortification, it meant that interviewers asked questions like "How" or "Why" which gives the politician more opportunity to explain themselves and the situation in a favourable light (Eriksson & Eriksson, 2011). Governor Christie made use of this in his press conference by admitting that he was responsible for his staff and by making it clear through his use of Mortification and Shifting the Blame that he was displeased with the actions of his staff members. When it came time for the question and answer segment, the reporters already had answers to their yes or no questions, and instead delved deeper by asking more open-ended questions, which was beneficial to Governor Christie as he was able to provide a detailed response which included his key messages of image repair.

Governor Christie's use of Twitter was not in-line with his use of strategies in the prepared speech portion or the question and answer segment, although the messaging used in the tweets came directly from his prepared speech. The tweets were released on Twitter after the speech had taken place, as they included links to online video from the press conference. Their focus was on Mortification strategies, rather than Corrective Action, Bolstering or Repentance. Schultz, Utz and Göritz (2011) found through their study on perceptions of and reactions to crisis communication via twitter, blogs and traditional media, that

communicating through Twitter is recommended as part of a crisis response "crisis communication via Twitter led to less negative crisis reactions than blogs and newspaper articles" (p. 25). Governor Christie's choice of Mortification strategy subcategories for use on Twitter may be due to the medium itself. Twitter is known as being a medium where authenticity is of great importance (Marwick & boyd, 2011) and thus other strategies that work to Bolster or Shift the Blame may not work as well in this medium as they could be seen to be inauthentic. According to Marwick and boyd, (2011) "Corporate-speak' or 'work' topics were seen as less authentic than personal, 'human' revelations" (p. 127).

The large focus on Corrective Action in the prepared speech may be attributed to the complex situation politically that Governor Christie was facing. Governor Christie had to take into consideration not only his current image repair efforts, but also his overall image and positioning himself for future political opportunities. This means that strategies that may have value simply for image repair may have less value in establishing a future reputation. For example, Governor Christie portraying himself as a victim through Mortification may be a recommended image repair strategy; however, does he want to be thought of as a victim if he is running in the presidential election in 2016? The answer is surely not.

Through the analysis of Governor Christie's press conference prepared speech, question and answer segment, and on Twitter, the use of image repair strategies is evident. The way in which the strategies were used, however, is not in a clear and prescribed way. There is large variation between use of strategies

across texts, and many of Christie's statements are somewhat contradictory. Governor Christie uses language associated with Taking Responsibility, yet also Shifts the Blame on numerous occasions. These two tactics are in contrast with one another, as how can you genuinely take responsibility while simultaneously be shifting the blame to others? Governor Christie's use of image repair strategies across texts was not entirely consistent, with no clear focus of strategy across all three texts. This is the opposite of the recommendation put forward by Benoit (1997b) for politicians to ensure cohesiveness across media. The use of image repair strategies seemed to be piecemeal, with all strategies being used, but not all fully being committed to (an example being the use of Taking Responsibility previously mentioned).

Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Research

Through this case study it was found that Image Repair Theory was useful for supporting a comparison between texts within a political image repair effort. The application of this theory to Governor Christie's image repair response has identified the need for the addition of two new subcategories within Benoit's (1997a) Image Repair Theory; Repentance and Taking responsibility within the strategy of Mortification. This addition is recommended for use in future case studies applying Image Repair Theory, as these two new subcategories will add greater clarity in the future over specifically what type of messaging is used when communicating in an image repair crisis response. This case study was limited to one particular set of three texts and examined only one phase in the crisis continuum. Further research would be helpful to evaluate how image repair

strategies are employed over a period of time, as well as in different crisis

scenarios and across different media types.

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