



ICLET 2021

THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON LANGUAGES, EDUCATION AND
TOURISM 2021

MH370 Crisis: Image Repair Strategies Used by Malaysia Airlines.

Aina Sahira Abdul Karim, Lilisuriani Abdul Latif & Abdul Kadir Sulaiman

Overview of Presentation

POINTS OF DISCUSSION:

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Problem Statement
- 3 Research Objective and Research Questions
- 4 Key Term Definitions
- 5 Literature Review
- 6 Research Methodology
- 7 Findings and Discussion
- 8 Conclusion

Introduction



- The aviation industry is one of the vulnerable industries which easily exposed to crises - happened due to terrorism, financial constraints, and management failure (Warsihantari & Putra, 2018).
- Another factors - pilot error, mechanical failure, and weather (Statistic Brain Research Institute, 2016).
- On March 8, 2014, Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 disappeared from radar while flying from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing (Argenti, 2016).
- The signal disappeared from Malaysia's Department of Civil Aviation at 1:30 am (Malaysia Time) and MAS responded to the crisis 10 hours after the incident (Azmi et al., 2016).

Problem Statement

There are limited studies which highlighted on the language used in image repair strategies, specifically Benoit's Image Repair Theory regarding to the tragedy.

Research Objective

The study intends to investigate the image repair strategies used by the Malaysia Airline System (MAS) to manage MH370 crisis while sustaining the organisation's image and reputation.

Research Questions

RQ 1: What are the image repair strategies used by MAS?
RQ 2: What are the themes used by MAS to repair its image?

Key Term Definitions

Crisis

A major catastrophe that may happen either naturally or as an outcome of human error, intervention, and suspicious intent (Argenti, 2016).

Image Repair

Strategies that can be used to restore one's image in an event where the reputation has been damaged (Benoit, 1997).

Image

The public and stakeholders' views on an organisation or corporation (Argenti, 2016).

Literature Review

Crisis Management

- A process of how an organization prevents crises and alleviates damages that take place (Coombs, 2007).
- If a crisis is not managed properly and strategically, it can give rise to serious complications to the stakeholders, losses for an organization and failure of a business (Ho, Wong and Kong, 2015).
- An organization can restore its public image by responding well to the crisis (Ott, 2013).

Literature Review

Prominent Crisis Management Theories

- **Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Model of Benoit's Image Repair Theory** are two theories which are frequently used to react and respond to the crisis (Dypiangco, 2017).
- **Benoit's Image Repair Theory** - focused on the descriptive system of messages strategies which can be employed in crisis communication (Benoit, 1997a)
- Focused on message option instead of describing different types of crisis stage (Heikkinen, 2020)
- Relatively relevant to linguistic research, specifically discourse analysis (Heikkinen, 2020)

Benoit's Image Repair Strategies

Corrective Action

- Company's plan and steps which function as the solutions to solve the problem (Cooper, 2015).
- It is important to appear as the source of solutions rather than the cause of the problem (Xu & Lin, 2020).
- Corrective action is vary to compensation (Grace Lee, 2019).
- The most appropriate strategy that can be used (Xu & Lin, 2020).

Reducing the Offensiveness

- Used to diminish the negative feeling related to the act (Benoit, 1997b).
- Can be a minimiser to make the offence appear less offensive to the public (Cooper, 2015).
- Can be categorised into 6 types and one of it is bolstering.
- Bolstering - can be done by presenting something that is cherished and valued by the audience (Briki, 2019).
- By highlighting the company's positive achievements and traits (Cooper, 2015).

Mortification

- When the company takes full responsibility and apologises (Grace Lee, 2019).
- By showing the expression of empathy and condolences to the affected people can be considered as mortification (Katila, 2018).
- Can be used positively and negatively by the company depending on the crisis situation (Kim et al., 2009 as cited in Sumer et al., 2017).

Research Methodology

- Adopted the qualitative approach to explore which image repair strategies executed by MAS.
- In reference to the Model of Benoit's Image Repair Theory.

- **Written press conference and official press releases delivered by the spokesperson of MAS and Government.**
- **Analysed 27 transcripts with a total of 143 excerpts.**
- **Analysed by using content analysis and thematic analysis.**

Findings and Discussion

RQ1: What are the main types of image repair strategies used by MAS?

<p>Corrective Action 91 out of 143 excerpts</p>	<p>Bolstering 22 out of 143 excerpts</p>	<p>Mortification 12 out of 143 excerpts</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The most frequent and main image repair strategy used by MAS. • The excerpts portrayed that MAS tried to resolve the crisis by offering many alternatives. • MAS putting huge effort in search and rescue operation. • By showing the necessary measures taken, it can alter the public's view. • It can be seen as the spokesperson mentioned, 'Today, I met with the 4 Ministerial Committees and discussed on our way forward in the search for MH370.' • The most appropriate image repair strategy that can be used (Benoit, 1997a). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MAS constantly show their positive attributes throughout the search and rescue operations. • 'Malaysia Airlines is fully committed to support all efforts relevant.....' • MAS attempted to depict transparency in managing the crisis by mentioning, 'we have nothing to hide'. • Used bolstering as a way to strengthen the public's positive feeling towards affected organisation (Benoit, 1997a). • Gives supplementary effectiveness to corrective action (Leeflang, 2017). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MAS showed their concern to the victims' families and heartfelt sympathy. • 'In the meantime, our thoughts remain with the family and friends of those on board.' • 'I understand the anguish and pain the families are going through and I give my personal assurance that our committee is keeping the families' best interest close to our hearts.' • MAS put the affected families' feelings as priority. • Can shift the way stakeholders perceive an affected organisation (Heikkinen, 2020). • MAS chose the appropriate strategy along with corrective action and bolstering.

Findings and Discussion

RQ2: What are the main themes used by MAS to repair the image?

Collaboration in Search and Rescue Operation 56 out of 143 excerpts	Transparency Attempts in Updating Information 30 out of 143 excerpts	Support for the Victims' Families 28 out of 143 excerpts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Government of Malaysia worked together with several government from other countries. • 'We are working closely with governments especially countries whose nationals were on board MH370.' • The Government of Malaysia worked with various agencies as well. • 'PETRONAS together with DEFTECH and Phoenix International will deploy a Prosas Side Scan Sonar...' • The greater the disaster, the more necessities and resources needed to maintain the efficiency of the SAR work (Chiu et. al, 2020). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The spokesperson frequently mentioned 'we have nothing to hide' and 'transparency'. • 'In line with Malaysia's stand in ensuring greater transparency in communicating...' • Demonstrated the transparency by sharing the necessary and information needed. • 'I would like to share the development...' • Transparency is a top priority especially with the wide usage of technology and social media (Cheung & Leung, 2016). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displays the emotional support by mentioning the word and phrases, 'families', 'support', and 'understand the pain'. • The announcement 'A Family Assistance Centre (FAC) will be established in Perth...' as the centre point to provide moral support and welfare for the families. • Appeared as an organisation that took responsibility and looked after the families' welfare. • MAS inserted elements of hope and connectedness.

Conclusion

- Crisis can happen to all organisations and it is important to have proper crisis management plans.
- Language is important while communicating the plans to the public.
- The findings obtained shall not be generalised as the whole crisis management plan efforts done by MAS.
- Further studies on the language discourse of image repair strategies are needed.
- Recommended to look into cultural influences on the language used in image repair strategies.

Thank you!