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Reputation Management: A Qualitative Analysis of the Effective Use of Reputation Management Techniques Applied to Personal Reputations during a Crisis

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**Thesis submitted to the
School of Journalism
at West Virginia University
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ABSTRACT

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Joseph A. Saulen

Understanding the concept of image has been a cornerstone of public relations since its professional beginnings in the early 20th century. However, practitioners and scholars have introduced crisis management and reputation management techniques into the repertoire of public relations relatively recently. This research study analyzes the concepts of reputation management and image and their applications in respect to people during a crisis. It uses content analysis to examine John Edwards and Eliot Spitzer; and the resultant tone of media coverage to ascertain the effectiveness of their reputation management strategies.

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Introduction

High-profile crises are commonplace in our 24/7 celebrity-driven culture. Politicians, corporate officers, and celebrities fall victim to media attention and public scrutiny. Although many recommended crisis communication strategies (e.g. tell the truth, apologize), throngs of people still do not follow these rules. A whole discipline has come about surrounding crisis communication and reputation management, evidenced by the large number of public relations firms who advertise such services.

However, practitioners and scholars have introduced crisis management and reputation management techniques into the repertoire of public relations tools relatively recently, with much public and academic discussion about good crisis management arising only after the Johnson & Johnson Tylenol crisis of 1982. Beginning in the mid 1980's, the components of reputation management were being explored. Business demands to improve existing marketing techniques fueled this exploration. From the 1990's onward, the concept of reputation management has received much attention from the business and academic communities, which has led to a rapid growth of literature and discussions pertaining to this concept.

Managing a major organization's reputation is considered the zenith of most public relations practitioner careers.¹ The consensus among many academics and professionals is that reputation is an intangible asset with potential benefits to an organization, such as profit growth and profit strategy.

Corporations that have an above average reputation as measured by the Fortune reputation surveys also exhibit a greater ability to sustain an above-average return on

¹ Michael Morley, *How to Manage your Global Reputation: A Guide to the Dynamics of International Public Relations*. rev. ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 17.

assets (ROA) or a greater ability to attain an above-average ROA.² These findings support the “comparative advantage theory” of corporate strategy, assuming firms can gain a sustainable competitive advantage by developing their intangible and inimitable assets—such as their corporate reputations.³ Another reason this area of study is gaining interest is that the people who have studied corporate strategies have begun to realize intangible assets can possibly provide a more enduring source of competitive advantage than patents and technologies.⁴ Even if companies are involved in legal disputes, managing their reputation can serve the greater interest of the organization by counteracting negative publicity, providing more balanced media coverage, defusing hostile environments and minimizing potential financial losses.⁵

The importance of reputation is linked to facets of our everyday lives, such as making investment decisions, career decisions and product choices.⁶ Reputations relay information to corporate audiences about how a firm’s products, jobs, strategies and prospects compare to those of competing firms. It helps to distinguish themselves and crystallize their status within an industrial social system.⁷ If a reputation is considered to be favorable it can generate excess returns for firms by inhibiting their rivals’ mobility in an industry along with enabling firms to charge premium prices, attract better applicants,

² Grahame Dowling, *Creating Corporate Reputations: Identity, Image, and Performance*. (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2001), 1-2.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Charles Fombrun, *Reputation: Realizing Value from the Corporate Image*. (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1996), 5-6.

⁵ Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia, online ed., “litigation public relations”

⁶ Charles J. Fombrun and Mark Shanley, “What’s in a Name? Reputation Building and Corporate Strategy,” *Academy of Management Journal* 3 (1990): 233.

⁷ Ibid.

enhance access to capital markets and attract investors.⁸ Clearly, there is a plethora of positive properties about reputation management's role as a business function.

This research study builds upon crisis communications and analyzes the related concepts of reputation management and image including their applications within public relations. It helps suggestion the origins of reputation management research within the academic community and then explores it specifically via mass media publications about a public figure (i.e. celebrity, politician).

The goal of this research is to see if there is an influence on media tone when reputation management techniques are employed. Media coverage has been shown to influence perceptions of reputation, which has then influenced stock values for companies or opinions towards public figures. When certain strategies are employed at the time of a crisis they potentially influence the overall reputation of the person or organization being observed through the media. Knowing which strategies are appropriate for a crisis or an intense amount of media exposure can help lessen the damage to an organization's or a person's reputation, which can help preserve company or shareholder wealth. This two-part study examines the recent media coverage of well-known South Carolina Senator John Edwards and former New York Governor Eliot Spitzer in regards to their recent connections to each of their own sex scandals and ascertains if reputation management techniques or lack thereof had an influence on their perceptions as held by the public which is measured by the resultant media tone.

⁸ Charles J. Fombrun and Mark Shanley, "What's in a Name? Reputation Building and Corporate Strategy," *Academy of Management Journal* 3 (1990): 233.

Literature Review

In the recent academic literature concerning image and reputation management, multiple views have been presented about how to assess and define reputation. There has been a crossroads of converging disciplines in the race to discover knowledge about corporate and personal reputation. The academic disciplines of economics, strategy, marketing, organization, sociology and accounting have all made their own contributions to the theory of reputation but surprisingly, these divergent opinions about this concept have not led toward an integrated view of corporate reputation.⁹ In addition, a number of communication theories, including persuasion and attribution, apply to these concepts.

Reputation. From an economic perspective, reputations are viewed as traits or signals that distinguish among “types” of firms and can explain their strategic behavior.¹⁰ To strategists, reputations are both assets and mobility barriers for firms when competing in a market.¹¹ The discipline of marketing focuses on the nature of information processing, resulting in images of external subjects, attributing cognitive and affective meanings to cues received about an object they were directly or indirectly confronted with.¹² Sociologists contend that corporate reputations are representations of aggregated assessments of a firm’s status and describe a social system structure surrounding firms and industries.¹³ Fombrun and Van Riel indicate the modern integrative view of reputation is made from these following dynamics:

-Reputations are derivative [secondary] characteristics of an industrial system that secures the embryonic status of firms in an organization field.

⁹ Charles Fombrun and Cees Van Riel, “The Reputational Landscape,” *Corporate Reputation Review* 1, no. 1-2 (1997), 5-10.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 9.

- Reputations are the external reflection of a company's internal identity.
- Reputations develop from a firm's prior resource allocations, histories and constitute mobility barriers that constrain firms' own actions and rivals' reactions.
- Reputations summarize assessments of past performance by multiple evaluators who assess firms' ability and potential to satisfy diverse criteria.
- Reputations derive from multiple but related images of firms among all of firms' stakeholders, and inform about their overall attractiveness to employees.
- Reputation is also derived from an estimation of firms' economic performance and their success in fulfilling social responsibilities.¹⁴

For our purposes, a transitive definition of reputation is that it is a phenomenon composed of a generalization of characteristics or properties about something, whether it is someone or some organizational entity. Reputations (public images) are formed not only about people but also about other things such as organizations (corporate images) and commercial products and services (brand images).¹⁵ One characteristic of reputation is that a person or thing may have multiple reputations because what is generally said or believed about a person or entity in one group may not coincide with what is said or believed in another.¹⁶

Social evaluation is another facet of reputation management because a person's reputation can represent the esteem that they have in their main social groups.¹⁷ A reputation can be described metaphorically, which usually is expressed as a value judgment along the dimensions good to bad.¹⁸ Value judgments play a crucial role in the organizations of social activities and relationships, and attributes such as intelligence and

¹⁴ Charles Fombrun and Cees Van Riel, "The Reputational Landscape," *Corporate Reputation Review* 1, no. 1-2 (1997), 5-10.

¹⁵ Dennis Bromley, *Reputation, Image, and Impression Management*. (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 1993), 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Dennis Bromley, *Reputation, Image, and Impression Management*. (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 1993), 2.

extraversion are socially evaluated.¹⁹ Over time reputations can change by becoming larger or smaller, better or worse, or showing any amount of deviation from what it consisted of before.²⁰ The relationship between reputation and corporate image [reputation] is that large entities have a set of sub-reputations, the reputations of its constituent parts, which is similar to the concept of how personal reputation is constructed by certain attitudes [value judgments].²¹ Whenever one wants to change a reputation it is essential to understand the components of reputation.

Drawing upon these aforementioned characteristics, corporate reputation can be thought of as being a collective representation of a firm's past actions and results that describe the firm's ability to deliver valued outcomes to multiple stakeholders. It measures a firm's relative standing, both internally with employees and externally with its stakeholders, in both its competitive and institutional environments.²² Another important characteristic of reputation theory is the halo effect model. The halo effect model seeks to explain how attitudes are formed by pre-existing reputations [perceptions] held by someone else about an entity. It is extremely common for members of the public to form perceptions of people, products, or companies based solely on opinions of something else formed by another individual.²³ The halo effect can confer status and be the amount of acceptance by a specific audience of an image derived from something, based on its relationship with something else.²⁴ This shows an aspect of perception development and how reputation can be built from a secondary source or audience.

¹⁹ Ibid., 3.

²⁰ Ibid., 4.

²¹ Ibid., 13.

²² Ibid., 10.

²³ Joe Marconi, *Reputation Marketing: Building and Sustaining Your Organization's Greatest Asset*. (Chicago: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 161.

²⁴ Ibid.

Reputation Management. Reputation Management is a fairly new concept, originating in the early 1990s. Since then there have been a number of publications that have dealt with reputation management concepts and its applications in such journals as *Public Relations Review*, *Journal of Public Relations Research* and *Corporate Reputation Review*. While reputation management is a relatively new term, much of what is involved in reputation management has been traditionally defined as “public relations,” and more recently, “corporate communication,” “corporate relations,” “corporate image” and other similar terms.²⁵

Furthermore, work has been published to address the idea that corporations’ management activities are basically traditional public relations practices redefined as reputation management.²⁶ Additionally, there is a gap between theoretical knowledge and the applications of a new discipline developed by practitioners of reputation management.²⁷

The link between the professional and scholarly views of reputation management comes when the practitioners draw upon theory by trying to measure commonly held characteristics developed, articulated from academia, about what comprises a corporate reputation. In the practitioner’s view, reputation management is a fairly new professional service provided to corporations that uses various assessments, rooted in academic

²⁵ James Hutton, ed., “Reputation Management: The New Face of Corporate Public Relations?” *Public Relations Review* 27 (2001): 248.

²⁶ Barbara Miller, “Reputation Management: A Qualitative & Quantitative Analysis of the Effective Use of Reputation Management Techniques When Faced with Crisis Situations Including the Construction and Validation of a Media Tone Index for Framing Tones in Crisis Situations” (M.S. diss., West Virginia University, 2003)

²⁷ Andrew Semons, “Reputation Management: The Shandwick Way” *Corporate Reputation Review* 1, no. 4 (1998): 381-385.

research, about a client's reputation.²⁸ Earlier in this paper it was mentioned that public relations is one of the coined terms used for much of what reputation management is today.

What constitutes reputation management in the practitioner's world varies from firm to firm. An online search for the term "reputation management" yielded results stating that 41 of 71 U.S. public relations firm's websites (53 percent) offered this as a service.²⁹ The differences arrived when several firms broke their reputation management services into multiple components because each firm had its own model of assessing a corporate reputation.³⁰ The prominent public relations firm Edelman used a model consisting of two phases.³¹ The components of Phase 1 were reputation research, gap analysis/assessment, planning process, positioning, messaging while the components of Phase 2 were strategic concepts, strategic recommendations, measurement and evaluation.³²

Andrew Semons, a managing director at the Weber Shandwick Global Public Relations Firm, says his organization relies on a six-phase model called the Shandwick Wheel to examine and assess the corporate reputation of client companies.³³ The Shandwick Wheel is composed of these interrelated elements in this order: assess, develop, align, leverage, protect and measure.³⁴ This model is also circular in thought. A review of these two reputation management service descriptions indicate similarity in the

²⁸ David Deephouse, "The Term 'Reputation Management': Users, Uses and the Trademark Tradeoff," *Corporate Reputation Review* 5, no. 1 (2002): 9-18.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Andrew Semons, "Reputation Management: The Shandwick Way" *Corporate Reputation Review* 1, no. 4 (1998): 381-385.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

actual activities underlying each company's approach, and these services tended to integrate many of the pre-existing communication specialties such as public affairs, public relations, advertising and corporate identity.³⁵

Reputation management is most apt to fall under the function of public relations within the business sector. One reason is that in the current business environment characterized by rapid shifts and tougher competition, public relations practitioners are increasingly being called upon by their clients to function as strategists, not just traditional implementers.³⁶ Public relations can have more of a role in upper-management decisions because every executive should be concerned about the reputation of the company or organization.³⁷

It has been stated that personal reputation and public or corporate image can be managed.³⁸ The rules that people follow in regulating their interactions with one another must contain advice about the transmission of information.³⁹ Whether one's aim is to protect one's own self and remain part of the community of equals or to rise out of the community of equals into a position of leadership, one needs the important skill of being able to control information about one's own self and others.⁴⁰ While keeping in line with the purveying thought of reputation as an intangible asset, the outcome is reputation management, which can be considered a corporate strategic management function.

³⁵ David Deephouse, "The Term 'Reputation Management': Users, Uses and the Trademark Tradeoff," *Corporate Reputation Review* 5, no. 1 (2002): 9-18.

³⁶ Rayna Skolnik, "Portraits of The 'Most Admired' Companies: How Public Relations Helps Build Corporate Reputations," *Public Relations Journal* (May 1994): 14-18.

³⁷ Bill Patterson, "Crises Impact on Reputation Management," *Public Relations Journal* (November 1993): 48.

³⁸ Dennis Bromley, *Reputation, Image, and Impression Management*. (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 1993), 13.

³⁹ F.G. Bailey, eds., *Gifts and Poison: The Politics of Reputation*. (Bristol, England: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 283.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

A rudimentary model of the formation of corporate reputation can be conceived as the set of values or perceptions held about an organization developed from a specific time frame consisting of an image or set of images that have left impressions on their audiences. Reputation management is concerned with managing these series of corporate images to create an overall corporate identity [corporate reputation]. Prior to the emergence of the reputation management concept, research had focused more broadly on corporate image.⁴¹

Image. Gunther Haedrich states that image can be used to describe people's perceptions and that it is object-neutral, because it relates not only to specific objects not to any object on which opinions are formed.⁴² Corporations should bring their perceived self-images into accord with all publics who are relevant to the organization.⁴³ To make these images as harmonious as possible, the planning of public relations should be incorporated at the level of strategic management.⁴⁴

As early as the turn of the 20th century, several U.S. companies were beginning to realize the interdependent relationships between stakeholders and the social legitimacy of being a corporation. This corporate quest for social and moral legitimacy spurred an array of public relations initiatives focused on political, marketing and organizational goals that led to the formation of the concept of image creation. This quest for a corporate soul

⁴¹ Barbara Miller, "Reputation Management: A Qualitative & Quantitative Analysis of the Effective use of Reputation Management Techniques When Faced with Crisis Situations Including the Construction and Validation of a Media Tone Index for Framing Tones in Crisis Situation" (M.S. diss., West Virginia University, 2003)

⁴² Gunther Haedrich, "Images and Strategic Corporate and Marketing Planning." *Journal of Public Relations Research* 5 (1993): 83-93.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

[development of a corporate identity] was motivated by the need of a more favorable and distinct corporate image and more self-conscious public relations.⁴⁵

According to Mary Anne Moffit, image can be conceptualized as an opinion, attitude, or feeling about an organization at any given time, whether it be positive or negative in regards to the organization at the same time.⁴⁶ Since image can be conceptualized as an attitude about an organization, a set of attitudes (perceptions) could be the basis for constructing a reputation about a company. This is called the image and impression management model.⁴⁷

Another use of the image construct in explaining the formation of corporate reputation is Dowling's concurrence with the idea that an image is the total impression an entity makes on the minds of people and that images are a powerful influence on how people perceive objects or entities. Imagery is how people process information activating knowledge structures [perceptions].⁴⁸ To measure a corporation's images [impressions], a procedure is needed to incorporate beliefs, which affects the process of these mental image formations and representations of these overall images [corporate reputation management].⁴⁹

Another theory linking corporate image to corporate reputation is explained by Dowling. In his corporate reputation measurement model, Dowling links drivers [stakeholders] to corporate images, which serves as a catalyst in the formation of a

⁴⁵ Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 4.

⁴⁶ Mary Anne Moffit, "Collapsing and Integrating Concepts of 'Public' and 'Image' into a New Theory." *Public Relations Review* 20 (1994): 159-70.

⁴⁷ Dennis Bromley, *Reputation, Image, and Impression Management*. (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 1993), 117-25.

⁴⁸ Grahame Dowling, "Measuring Corporate Images: A Review of Alternative Approaches," *Journal of Business Research* 17, (1998): 27.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

corporate reputation. In this model corporate image consists of descriptive attributes, while corporate reputation is composed of value-based attributes [how the stakeholders feel].⁵⁰ This suggests reputation is derived from images, but the difference lies in the fact that reputation is formed by perceptions longitudinally.

Public Relations' Role. One of the functions of the public relations manager is to be externally focused, to make the company sensitive to the concerns of the external environment and to convince the external environment (the public) of the worthiness of company positions.⁵¹ Reputation has a link to external audiences because of the relationship between reputation formation and public perception. Since there is a correlation between the formations of a corporate image (corporate reputation) by external stakeholders (public audiences), the practice of public relations within an organization would seem to be professionally equipped to handle the management of a reputation.

One of the more important goals of public relations is to persuade or try to maintain the favor of a public about an issue, entity, or object. To be as persuasive as possible one must understand the fundamentals of attitude change and some persuasion theories/models. The study of message-based persuasion dealing with attitude change is primarily concerned with cognitive and affective mechanisms underlying attitude change, especially dual-mode processing models.⁵²

Persuasion Models. Two well-known and well-researched persuasion theories that are dual-mode processing models of information are the elaboration likelihood model

⁵⁰ Grahame Dowling, *Creating Corporate Reputations: Identity, Image, and Performance*. (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2001), 219.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Wendy Wood, "Attitude Change: Persuasion and Social Influence," *Annual Review of Psychology* 51 (2000): 539-570.

(ELM) and the heuristic/systematic (HSM) model. The common conceptual thread between these two models is the determinants and processes of attitude change. These two variables are dependent on people's motivation and the ability to process issue-relevant information.⁵³ The ELM and HSM have received much attention since their inception in the 1980s because these theories encompass the effects of a multitude of persuasion variables, processes, and outcomes.⁵⁴ These two theories can be considered more similar than different and usually can use the same set of empirical data interpreted differently.⁵⁵

According to Richard Petty, the ELM is the “central route (high-effort scrutiny of attitude-relevant information) and or while the peripheral route (less effortful shortcuts to evaluating attitude objects) anchor opposite ends of an elaboration likelihood continuum.”⁵⁶ Petty also notes that the central information processes increase in impact as elaboration increases and that peripheral information processes decrease in impact as elaboration increases. In essence the central route of persuasion in the ELM contends that attitude change will occur after analyzing the merits and content of the argument [information].⁵⁷

Secondly, the peripheral route of the ELM bases attitude change on cues other than argument quality.⁵⁸ An example of a peripheral cue affecting attitude change would be source credibility or the amount of information being presented in a message.

According to David Sears, the central route is more effective when dealing with attitude

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Richard Petty, “Attitudes and Attitude Change,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 48 (1997): 609-647.

⁵⁵ Richard Petty, “Attitudes and Attitude Change,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 48 (1997): 609-647.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ David Sears, “Book Review,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 52 (1988): 262-275.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 263.

change over time, for resistance to counter-propaganda and attitude behavior consistency.⁵⁹ Attitude change is also determined by both central and peripheral processes at the same time as stated in the ELM.⁶⁰ Another characteristic of the ELM is that low involved processors still centrally process a minimal amount of information, which shows that argument quality manipulation is still influential.⁶¹

Current data from ELM implies that a peripheral cue [source expertise/credibility] may be more effective than the tweaking of some central cue upon a low involved subject during message processing, which closely resembles the halo effect model.⁶² Additionally, research data shows source credibility [ethos] has an impact on both high and low processors, with a greater message acceptance through a highly involved subject.⁶³ Receiver level of involvement, source expertise, and timing of the source identification are all variables affecting the persuasiveness of the message. Source expertise is the most researched source characteristic with conflicting data results.⁶⁴ The conflicting impacts of this dimension of credibility are that high- and low-expertise sources affect attitude change positively.⁶⁵ Timing of the source identification has the least impact on the influence of a message and acquiesces depending on the receiver's level of involvement.⁶⁶

⁵⁹ Ibid., 264.

⁶⁰ Richard Petty, "Attitudes and Attitude Change," *Annual Review of Psychology* 48 (1997): 609-647.

⁶¹ Paul Miniard, "Some Central and Peripheral Thoughts on the Routes of Persuasion," *Advances in Consumer Research* 15 (1988): 204-208.

⁶² Ibid., 207.

⁶³ Jean-Charles Chebat and Pierre Filiatraut, "Limits of Credibility: The Case of Political Persuasion," *Journal of Social Psychology* 130, no. 2 (1990): 157-168.

⁶⁴ Pamela M Homer and Lynn R. Kahle, "Source Expertise, Time of Source Identification, and Involvement in Persuasion: An Elaborative Processing Perspective." *Journal of Advertising* 19, no. 1 (1990): 30-39.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 30.

When studying persuasion it is important not to overlook the power of source credibility [ethos] in messages. There has been a voluminous amount of research that has consistently indicated that credibility enhances message acceptance significantly.⁶⁷ According to most communication researchers, the values such as trustworthiness and expertness are heavily weighted dimensions of source credibility that have shown to affect attitude change instantaneously. However, most consider ethos to be dynamic multi-dimensional perceptions that are orthogonally related usually consisting of competence [expertise], character [trustworthiness], caring [goodwill] or other unproven constructs. Goodwill, or perceived caring [sincerity], is seen as a means of opening communication channels more widely.⁶⁸ Another research result about credibility that there appears to be less receiver counter-argumentation in response to a competent source than to an incompetent source.⁶⁹ Furthermore, receiver associations about ethos/source credibility can help build and maintain a reputation by keeping that awareness in the audience's collective mind from time to time.⁷⁰

This knowledge is applied through reputation management techniques by encouraging the idea that CEOs or other highly ranked corporate officers are best suited to be the message source in a crisis situation. The logic behind this is that source credibility has a powerful impact on the persuasiveness of a message, whether the receiver has a high or low amount of involvement. If you have a reputation or have

⁶⁷ Jean-Charles Chebat and Pierre Filiatraut, "Limits of Credibility: The Case of Political Persuasion," *Journal of Social Psychology* 130, no. 2 (1990): 157-168.

⁶⁸ James C. McCroskey and Jason J. Teven, "Goodwill: A Reexamination of the Construct and its Measurement," *Communication Monographs* 66 (Mar 1999): 92.

⁶⁹ Brian Sternthal, Ruby Dholakia and Clark Leavitt, "The Persuasive Effect of Source Credibility: Tests of Cognitive Response," *Journal of Consumer Research* 4 (1978): 252-260.

⁷⁰ University of Texas at Arlington Department of Communication, Ethos, www.uta.edu/faculty/mputnam/COMS4302/Files/Ethos.doc

established competency and experience with the audience, one may have a much greater change of shifting the public's attitude.⁷¹

The second and similar model of persuasion is called the HSM. The difference between these two models is that the HSM is a simplified version of ELM and seeks to explain message-processing interdependence in more depth. Like the ELM, HSM contends that attitude judgments of low involved subjects are more affected by heuristic cues [peripheral] whereas highly involved subjects are more prone to change their attitude if they gathered the information systematically.⁷² HSM also theorizes that systematic processing suppresses heuristic processing and that these two routes of persuasion can co-occur.⁷³

An assumption of this model is that systematic processing gives receivers more judgmental relevant information than heuristic processing.⁷⁴ Another assumption of HSM is that heuristic cues can often be voided in settings that promote systematic processing.⁷⁵ HSM claims that there is interdependence between the two processes because of the recognition that heuristic processing can make inferences about the validity of persuasive messages.⁷⁶ An example of this could be when Chaiken and Maheswaran say, "If a

⁷¹ University of Texas at Arlington Department of Communication, Ethos, www.uta.edu/faculty/mputnam/COMS4302/Files/Ethos.doc

⁷² Shelley Chaiken and Durairaj Maheswaran, "Heuristic Processing Can Bias Systematic Processing: Effects of Source Credibility, Argument Ambiguity, and Task Importance on Attitude Judgment," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 66, No. 3 (1994): 460-473.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 461.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

message is delivered by an expert, its arguments may be perceived as stronger and more elaborated on more positively than if the message is delivered by a non-expert.”⁷⁷

Attribution theory. Another theory that seeks to explain how perceptions develop about an object is attribution theory. This theory draws upon how perceptions are formed during a crisis. Research has shown people search for causes of an event and that judgments people make influence feelings toward an actor.⁷⁸ When people build these perceptions they are using the three causal dimensions of stability, external control and locus/personal control.⁷⁹ The explanations using the causal dimensions that actors offer for an event can affect people’s attributions in a couple of ways. The messages can shape how people perceive the three attribute dimensions as well as affect the feelings created by the attributions.⁸⁰ Communication can be used to influence someone’s attributions or the subsequent feelings attached to those attributions. Attribution theory is a useful framework for explaining the relation between a situation and the selection of public relations communication strategies.⁸¹

Practical application. Knowing that one of the goals of public relations is to persuade and change the perceptions of an audience, a plan or strategy should be drawn. According to Charles Fombrun, “Reputation management is about building a sound corporate reputation and maintaining the strength. It is a method of building and then

⁷⁷ Shelley Chaiken and Durairaj Maheswaran, “Heuristic Processing Can Bias Systematic Processing: Effects of Source Credibility, Argument Ambiguity, and Task Importance on Attitude Judgment,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 66, No. 3 (1994): 460-473.

⁷⁸ W. Timothy Coombs, “Choosing the Right Words: The Development of Guidelines for the Selection of the “Appropriate” Crisis-Response Strategies,” *Management Communication Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (1995): 447-476.

⁷⁹ W. Timothy Coombs and Sherry J. Holladay, “Communication and Attributions in a Crisis: An Experimental Study in Crisis Communications,” *Journal of Public Relations Research* 8, no. 4 (1996): 279-295.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 282.

sustaining an organization's reputation that will result in achieving strategic and financial objectives."⁸²

It has also been indicated that if a company's guiding communication philosophy uses reputation management techniques it tends to have a stronger reputation.⁸³ Bromley states that reputation management is pre-planned and strategic.⁸⁴ He also states that impression management (managing image over a span of time) at one instance can serve the wider, long-term interests of the company [reputation].⁸⁵

There is an array of strategies that are employed based upon reputation management techniques. One strategy is to have a non-economic agenda such as being socially responsible by planning philanthropic events that are beneficial to the external community to help build or preserve a good reputation. Another strategy commonly used in reputation management is controlling the amount of media exposure of a company. The strategic aspect of reputation management is to convey an impression unto others about an organization's identity during a specific point in time.⁸⁶ Fombrun contends that mass media acts as an information channel and can bias the public's constructions of firms' reputations.⁸⁷ Marconi says, "Media exposure increases awareness, and greater awareness leads to perceptions and images being formed; these, in turn, help establish a

⁸² Charles Fombrun, *Reputation: Realizing Value from the Corporate Image*. (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1996), 5-6.

⁸³ James Hutton, ed., "Reputation Management: The New Face of Corporate Public Relations?" *Public Relations Review* 27 (2001): 247-261.

⁸⁴ Dennis Bromley, *Reputation, Image, and Impression Management*. (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 1993), 110.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 111.

⁸⁷ Charles J. Fombrun and Mark Shanley, "What's in a Name? Reputation Building and Corporate Strategy," *Academy of Management Journal* 3 (1990): 239.

reputation.⁸⁸ A response to a crisis is said to bring out the true persona of a company and is the best time to assess a company's reputation in difficult times.⁸⁹ Media relations, a cornerstone of reputation management, through time has shown that there is a strong correlation between the media and reputation, especially during a crisis situation.⁹⁰

A case scenario demonstrating response tactics is that of the major investment firm Salomon Smith Barney, which was charged with 46 lawsuits consisting of fraud, price manipulation, misrepresentation and other numerous U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission violations in 1991.⁹¹ During these allegations by the SEC, negative media coverage quadrupled, which inadvertently led to a decrease in the value of the company's shares and market value.⁹² To deal with this negative publicity, SSB contracted a public relations firm to handle the crisis, which in turn implemented a variety of reputation management techniques.

With the advice from the PR firm, SSB employed a number of defensive response tactics by accepting responsibility, apologizing for their infractions, and suspending those responsible for the scandal.⁹³ A salient tactic the financial behemoth used to restore its tarnished image was replacing esteemed leaders in place of the suspended conspirators as

⁸⁸ Joe Marconi, *Reputation Marketing: Building and Sustaining Your Organization's Greatest Asset*. (Chicago: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 118.

⁸⁹ Lisa Lyon and Glen Cameron, "Fess Up or Stonewall? An Experiment of Prior Reputation and Response Style in the Face of Negative News Coverage." *Web Journal of Mass Communication Research* 1 (1998): 1.

⁹⁰ Gary Davies and Louella Miles, "Reputation Management: Theory vs. Practice," *Corporate Reputation Review* 2, No. 1 (1998): 16-27.

⁹¹ Charles Fombrun, *Reputation: Realizing Value from the Corporate Image*. (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1996), 362-365.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 371-375.

⁹³ Barbara Miller, "Reputation Management: A Qualitative & Quantitative Analysis of the Effective Use of Reputation Management Techniques When Faced with Crisis Situations Including the Construction and Validation of a Media Index Tone Index for Framing Tones in Crisis Situations" (M.S. diss., West Virginia University, 2003)

an attempt to enhance the credibility of the organization.⁹⁴ Additionally, SSB proved their sincerity by demonstrating a high amount of transparency and cooperation while dealing with SEC regulators by making changes in personnel, pay and financial systems and paying the punitive fines and civil damages.⁹⁵ Furthermore, the PR firm enhanced public confidence and trust by using key customers to demonstrate their trust with SSB to help garner previous and potential customers.⁹⁶ These response tactics were used to play to the credibility of the organization; afterwards, SSB's earnings hit an all-time high a year later.⁹⁷

Hence, an esteemed, charismatic and credible leader supported by public relations efforts (media coverage) may help sustain a favorable image for a failing organization; such was the case for the SSB investment firm.⁹⁸ The reliance on source credibility may be explained by the fact that information about an organization is sometimes difficult for people to understand. The information presented could be too voluminous and too technical or deliberately withheld to hinder one's judgment of a firm based on performance criteria.⁹⁹

Marketers have held the belief that a credible source is more influential than a non-credible source on receiver attitudes.¹⁰⁰ Attitude change can serve as a good measure

⁹⁴ Barbara Miller, "Reputation Management: A Qualitative & Quantitative Analysis of the Effective Use of Reputation Management Techniques When Faced with Crisis Situations Including the Construction and Validation of a Media Index Tone Index for Framing Tones in Crisis Situations" (M.S. diss., West Virginia University, 2003)

⁹⁵ Ibid., 17-18.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 17.

⁹⁷ Charles Fombrun, *Reputation: Realizing Value from the Corporate Image*. (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1996), 375-385.

⁹⁸ Dennis Bromley, *Reputation, Image, and Impression Management*. (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 1993), 120.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Mitch Griffin, Barry Babin, and Jill Attaway, "An Empirical Investigation of the Impact of Negative Public Publicity on Consumer Attitudes and Intentions," *Advances in Consumer Research* 18 (1991): 334-341.

to document changes in opinions about something. Attitude research implies that changing an individual's attitude happens from exposure to a persuasive message, which then alters one's attitude or opinions. Mitch Griffin et al. stated, "Source credibility is a central variable to the formulation of such a [persuasive] message."¹⁰¹

Drawing upon attribution theory, the receiver of a message tries to decipher the reason for a particular message by using source credibility, which is a variable affecting the receiver's inference.¹⁰² When using the credibility variable, attitude change is dependent upon the degree of the credibility of the sender of the message. A highly credible source yields a significant impact on a receiver's attitude by making stronger attributions, whereas a source in low credibility has the opposite effects.¹⁰³ Studies also suggest how someone processes source credibility can alter the rate at which attitude can change.¹⁰⁴ Source credibility of a message can significantly affect attitude change and has an impact on how a message is accepted, regardless of the amount of the receiver's involvement.¹⁰⁵

James Hutton suggests that reputation is a meaningful concept only as it applies to specific publics and that there is no generally accepted measurement of reputation. The measurement of reputation cannot be valid for all stakeholders as well.¹⁰⁶ Reputation is formed from several different variables and stakeholders with no definitive way of measurement. In a holistic view, corporate and personal reputation is formed by the perceptions of its audiences. If attitude is the foundation of a perception, it can be

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 335.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Jean-Charles Chebat and Pierre Filiatraut, "Limits of Credibility: The Case of Political Persuasion," *Journal of Social Psychology* 130, no. 2 (1990): 157-168.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ James Hutton, ed., "Reputation Management: The New Face of Corporate Public Relations?" *Public Relations Review* 27 (2001): 248.

inferred that any deviation from a prior attitude changes the perception about something, such as one's reputation. The amount of attitude change can be dependent on how persuasive a message is. Source credibility of a message during a crisis situation could possibly alter one's attitude (perception) towards a company. Therefore, source credibility as a crisis response tactic could affect the amount of attitude change in a public.

News organizations have also chosen the Internet as a method of disseminating their produced information on various topics. The advent of the Internet as a communications medium has bolstered the audience reach of news companies simply because it is the latest medium that can be used to communicate to mass audiences. Some people still turn to news organizations as a source of information but the Internet has influenced changes in news readership behavior. Recent trends have shown there is a steady increase in the amount of users who turn to the Internet for their daily news instead of traditional print media.¹⁰⁷ Some reasons for these changes in news readership behavior include the relative ease of access of the Internet and the capacity to hold immense amounts of data on almost any subject anyone would want to reference.

Online journalism is defined as the reporting of facts and distributed via the Internet.¹⁰⁸ Although this is a fairly new style of journalism, some more traditional mass media theories such as agenda setting and media framing, could be applicable. Much of the news content being produced online still uses the traditional methods of reporting when constructing an article; it is just that the news that is being reported is coming through a different communications medium. News content that is marketed via the

¹⁰⁷ Nielsen Online, "Web traffic to top 10 online newspapers grows 16 percent year-over-year in December, according to Nielsen Online," http://www.nielsen-online.com/pr/pr_090127.pdf

¹⁰⁸ Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia, online ed., under "online journalism"

Internet still comes from people, implying information or facts that still might not be totally accurate or representative of the subject being reported on; there might be room for human error or biasness. In conclusion, the theory of media framing could still be applied and debated for news content that is published on the Internet.

Introduction to Hypothesis

Media framing is the deliberate decision by journalists to direct an audience's attention away from portions of the information and towards certain aspects of information according to Barbara Miller.¹⁰⁹ Media frame may also be called giving a story a 'spin' by taking into account personal judgments, organizational and modality constraints, and judgments about an audience.¹¹⁰ Framing involves the selection of some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more significant than others; frames call attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements leading audiences to have different reactions.¹¹¹

One research framework for evaluating the effective use of reputation management is the resulting media frame directed towards the company in crisis.¹¹² Media framing is used by the media to convey messages which can influence the public's reaction to an organization or person and ultimately their reputation.¹¹³ However, there is

¹⁰⁹ Barbara Miller, "Reputation Management: A Qualitative & Quantitative Analysis of the Effective Use of Reputation Management Techniques When Faced with Crisis Situations Including the Construction and Validation of a Media Tone Index for Framing Tones in Crisis Situations" (M.S. diss., West Virginia University, 2003)

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 21.

¹¹¹ Barbara Miller, "Reputation Management: A Qualitative & Quantitative Analysis of the Effective Use of Reputation Management Techniques When Faced with Crisis Situations Including the Construction and Validation of a Media Tone Index for Framing Tones in Crisis Situations" (M.S. diss., West Virginia University, 2003)

¹¹² Ibid., 20.

¹¹³ Ibid.

not a general consensus about how media framing should be measured. Some people claim it is a combination of variables such as exposure, author, coders and finding trends in information that all need to be taken into account.¹¹⁴ These coders could be particular signature elements for a given frame such as adjectives, metaphors, catchphrases or other symbolic devices.¹¹⁵

Hypotheses

H1: Based on the literature review of reputation management theory and tactics, it is hypothesized that reputation management techniques when faced with a crisis can be applicable to political reputations.

H2: Based on the literature review of reputation management theory and tactics, it is hypothesized that reputation management techniques used for political crises will improve the resultant media framing tone.

Methodology

The methodology used in the following qualitative research is a content analysis of online news coverage of the sex scandals involving North Carolina Senator John Edwards and New York Governor Eliot Spitzer. The research sample is comprised of all of the print news articles published on the Internet from current news outlets MSNBC Digital Network, CNN Digital Network, FOX News, Washington Post, Washington Times and NY Times because this sample has an influential impact to audiences in

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 22.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

regards to media frame relative to other news distribution channels. The research attempts to determine the general media framing tone towards Edwards and Spitzer in response to their crises.

In order to determine an overall initial media frame, as well as a media frame over time, this research was limited to articles over a two-week span pertaining to Edwards and Spitzer immediately following the announcement of the scandal. The Edwards sample begins on August 8, 2008 and ends August 21, 2008. The interval for the Spitzer sample runs from March 10, 2008 to March 23, 2008. The reputation management techniques analyzed are but not limited to an acceptance of responsibility for the event, a clear demonstration of concern for the impacted community and effective corrective action. The effectiveness of the reputation management techniques are measured by finding instances of adjectives (See Appendix), metaphors, catchphrases and other symbolic devices used to measure framing tones towards their respective personas and actions. The index is built from qualifying adjectives as they relate to personality. Tone is measured through tabulating the total count of positive or negative adjectives. The selection of Edwards and Spitzer is based on the fact while both received widespread media coverage for their sex scandals the responses by both were different; Edwards did not immediately institute the aforementioned reputation management techniques while Spitzer did.

Discussion

This study seeks to explore known reputation management techniques in terms of their application to the Edwards/Spitzer sex scandals. The media coverage of

Edwards/Spitzer sample was chosen because these two individuals are high-profile public figures. In order to document the media tone of the different newspapers one needs to conduct a longitudinal study examining the timeline of important events pertaining to these political scandals. Furthermore, this research suggests an immediate incorporation of these techniques by the person whom the crisis centers upon yields a more positive media framing tone while a slow, ineffective incorporation of these techniques resulted in a more negative media framing tone.

John Edwards

John Edwards is an American politician who served as a U.S. Senator from North Carolina and was a candidate for the 2004 and 2008 Democratic presidential nomination. He was considered to be the poster child for the Democratic Party when it came to representing the blue-collared workingman coupled with a vigilant desire to reduce poverty in the United States. Edwards built a strong political reputation based upon repeated legal victories as a trial lawyer and his tenure as a Senator from 1998 to his retirement of the Senate seat in 2004. Edwards had a “golden” political reputation but during the 2008 Democratic presidential nominee campaign things were starting to go awry. A serious downturn for the Senator took hold when allegations of a sex scandal started surfacing due to the investigative reporting of the National Enquirer, a tabloid newspaper.

During the 2008 presidential campaign Edwards announced an early withdrawal from the race for the Democratic presidential nomination considered by some political analysts as premature and oddly mysterious. Prior to the first day of media coverage of

the Edwards scandal the National Enquirer had been publishing news stories for months about Edwards being involved in a suspected extra-marital affair with a woman named Rielle Hunter, an Edwards presidential campaign worker; all of which he had repeatedly denied since the Enquirer started reporting on it a year earlier.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, the personal crisis developing for Edwards would get even more complicated because of a potential love child fathered by Edwards with Hunter.¹¹⁷ “On December 19, 2007 the tabloid reported Hunter was six months pregnant with Edwards’ child but no solid evidence of their relationship had been confirmed and an Edwards’ aide took responsibility for the baby’s paternity”, said Judson Berger, reporter for FOX News.¹¹⁸

The tone of the media on the first day of coverage was negative based upon the suspicions of the sincerity and the factuality of the rebuttals Edwards was offering to the public. On the first day of the coverage of the affair he had issued a written statement dealing with this personal crisis in hopes of diffusing and mollifying this event within the media. Edwards opening statement read as follows:

In 2006, I made a serious error in judgment and conducted myself in a way that was disloyal to my family and to my core beliefs. I recognize my mistake and I told my wife that I had a liaison with another woman, and I asked for her forgiveness. Although I was honest in every painful detail with my family, I did not tell the public. When a supermarket tabloid told a version of the story, I used the fact that the story contained many falsities to deny it. But being 99 percent honest is no longer enough. I was and am ashamed of my conduct and choices, and I had hoped that it would never become public. With my family, I took responsibility for my actions in 2006 and today I take full responsibility publicly. But that misconduct took place for a short period in 2006. It ended then. I am and have been willing to take any test necessary to establish the fact that I am not the father of any baby, and I am truly hopeful that a test will be done so this fact can be definitively established. I only know that the apparent father

¹¹⁶ Judson Berger, “Tabloid Reporter Gives Story Behind Edwards Story,” Politics, *FOXNews.com*, August 8, 2008 <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,400642,00.html> [accessed April 25, 2010].

¹¹⁷ Judson Berger, “Tabloid Reporter Gives Story Behind Edwards Story,” Politics, *FOXNews.com*, August 8, 2008 <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,400642,00.html> [accessed April 25, 2010].

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

[Andrew Young, a former Edward's campaign aide who is married], has said publicly that he is the father of the baby. I also have not been engaged in any activity of any description that requested, agreed to or supported payments of any kind to the woman or to the apparent father of the baby. It is inadequate to say to the people who believed in me that I am sorry, as it is inadequate to say to the people who love me that I am sorry. In the course of several campaigns, I started to believe that I was special and become increasingly egocentric and narcissistic. If you want to beat me up—feel free. You cannot beat me up more than I have already beaten myself. I have been stripped bare and will now work with everything I have to help my family and others who need my help. I have given a complete interview on this matter and having done so, will have nothing more to say.¹¹⁹

When one takes a look at his statement it seems Edwards had addressed the matter completely except for the fact that he was still lying as evidenced through a later admission that the child was indeed his. It seemed he accepted responsibility for his actions and explained why the matter was kept secret and ended with a “helpful” attitude.

Another article published on the first day conveys sarcasm through the use of quotation marks around the word “real” suggesting some negative tone by mentioning the Edwards had his mistress film a series of ‘webisodes’ (web documentaries) portraying the “real” John Edwards.¹²⁰ The irony of the story is in the timing of the release and when the author mentions a total of three personal statements from the ‘Webisodes’ filmed by Hunter; it insinuates Edwards is talking about the nature of his personality or who he is as a person rather than a politician amidst the scandal. For instance, “I’ve come to the personal conclusion I actually want the country to see who I am, who I really am, but I don’t know what the result of that is,” said Edwards, “For me personally, I’d rather be successful or unsuccessful based on who I really am, not based on some plastic Ken doll

¹¹⁹ FOXNews.com, “Raw Data: John Edwards’ Statement on His Affair,” Politics, *FOXNews.com*, August 8, 2008, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,400661,00.html> [accessed April 25, 2010].

¹²⁰ FOXNews.com, “‘Webisodes’ Show Work Mistress Did for Edwards’ Campaign,” Politics, *FOXNews.com*, August 8, 2008, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,400682,00.html> [accessed April 25, 2010].

you put out in front of audiences.”¹²¹ The article intuitively implies maybe the public will get a chance to see the “real” John Edwards during and after this personal crisis rather than what perceptions were formed about him prior to this event. Howard Kurtz and Lois Romano, Washington Post staff writers, provide more negative frame by mentioning his disingenuous nature, “The first video shows Edwards flirtatiously joking with Hunter about his effort to come across as authentic.”¹²²

Another scenario Edwards was involved in was an encounter with a team of National Enquirer reporters who staked out the Beverly Hilton in Beverly Hills, California; described as a “cloak-and-dagger” operation straight out of a movie.¹²³ Described in the article as a debacle for Edwards, the stakeout and how he handled it illustrated a clear example of the lack of concern for his publics. The tip for the Enquirer was that Edwards was supposedly going to see his mistress in this hotel. When reporters spotted him coming to the top of a set of stairs in the hotel they bombarded him with a series of questions and allegations of his relationship with Hunter. Furthermore, the lack of concern was demonstrated on how Edwards reacted to the questioning by what he said and how he behaved when approached.

“Why are you at this hotel? Does Elizabeth Edwards know? Are you visiting your love child? He had this, you know, [expression] like the world just passed in front of his face – he quickly did an about face, went downstairs and ran into the men’s restroom. Edwards barricaded himself in the bathroom as reporters chased after him. He hasn’t said a word and we were asking him questions,” said Alan Butterfield, reporter for the

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Howard Kurtz and Lois Romano, “Edwards Admits He Had an Affair; Ex-Candidate Says he Didn’t Father Baby with Campaign Worker,” *Washington Post*, August 9, 2008.

¹²³ Judson Berger, “Tabloid Reporter Gives Story behind Edwards Story,” Politics, *FOXNews.com*, August 8, 2008 <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,400642,00.html> [accessed April 25, 2010]

National Enquirer, who told FOXNews.com the story was always rock solid.¹²⁴ Edwards' counterclaims to this incident were prior refutations of the Enquirer's allegations and his written statement on the matter which contradicted his earlier statement of denial by saying "he refuses to even talk about these tabloids. Tabloid trash is full of lies."¹²⁵ In essence, he was caught lying to the public by denying earlier allegations from a tabloid newspaper which he later admitted were true except for the fathering of the child.

CNN reporters were questioning his sincerity about resolving the paternity of the child through the usage of quotation marks around being 'truly hopeful' within the following statement. "Edwards said he has not taken a paternity test but the timing of the affair rules out the possibility he could be the father of Hunter's 5-month-old-child. Edwards said Friday night he is "truly hopeful" a paternity test will be done to squelch the rumors," said Ed Hornick, Scott Bronstein, Drew Griffin, Matt Smith and Paul Vercammen, CNN contributors and reporters.¹²⁶ Moreover, this appears to be a sham since Hunter's attorney states her decision to receive no such paternity test on the grounds of the invasion of her privacy.¹²⁷ Hunter's decision means the issue will remain

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Judson Berger, "Tabloid Reporter Gives Story behind Edwards Story," Politics, *FOXNews.com*, August 8, 2008 <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,400642,00.html> [accessed April 25, 2010]

¹²⁶ CNN.com, "Edwards Admits to Extramarital Affair," *CNN.com*, August 11, 2008, <http://cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/08/08/edwards.affair/index.html?iref=allsearch> [accessed April 11, 2010].

¹²⁷ CNN.com, "Edwards' Ex-mistress Won't Seek Paternity Test," *CNN.com*, August 9, 2008, http://articles.cnn.com/2008-08-09/politics/edwards.paternity_1_paternity-test-edwards-campaign-aide-rielle-hunter?s=PM:POLITICS [accessed April 11, 2010].

an open question.¹²⁸ And still there is no father's name given on the California birth certificate.¹²⁹

Another example of a lack of concern is when CNN mentioned, "Edwards was contacted through a former aide by CNN on Thursday and refused to comment on the reports. He also dodged reporters at a recent event in Washington. In a July 24, 2008, appearance in New Orleans, Louisiana, he would not answer a reporter's question about whether he had provided financial support to Hunter or Andrew Young, an Edwards assistant."¹³⁰ Later in the article, some light was shed on Edwards' future political role when Don Fowler, a former Democratic Party chairman said, "I think the longer these allegations go unanswered and unresponded to, the more difficult it is for the people producing the convention to give him a prominent spot and I would expect he would not speak or have any role in the Denver convention unless this is cleared up."¹³¹ This is further evidence Edwards mishandled the crisis by not being timely about confronting the matter and bringing full disclosure when questions were being asked.

On the second day of the mainstream media coverage of the Edwards crisis the tone became more negative because the media started to grow pessimistic about his explanations. In an article, there are recycled excerpts from an interview by Bob Woodruff for ABC's Nightline used from the previous night concerning his political

¹²⁸ MSNBC.com, "Edwards' Ex-mistress Rejects Paternity Test," Politics, *MSNBC.com*, August 9, 2008, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/26112505/print/1/displaymode/1098/> [accessed April 11, 2010].

¹²⁹ Stephen Dinan, "Edwards Admits Affair with Worker; Blames his Narcissism; Denies Fathering Girl," *Washington Times*, 9 August 2008.

¹³⁰ CNN.com, "Edwards Admits to Extramarital Affair," *CNN.com*, August 11, 2008, <http://cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/08/08/edwards.affair/index.html?iref=allsearch> [accessed April 11, 2010].

¹³¹ Ibid.

future and a specific question concerning payments of monies to his mistress.¹³² Edwards countered, “I never paid a dime of money, never asked anybody to pay a dime of money. Nothing has been done at my request.”¹³³ In addition, Edwards stated, “I also have not been engaged in any activity of any description that requested, agreed to or supported payments of any kind to the woman or to the apparent father of the baby.”¹³⁴ However, Edwards alluded to others who might have made payments to Hunter on his behalf without his knowledge.¹³⁵

The use of quotations infers suspicions when Fred Baron, a longtime financial backer of Edwards’ campaigns told The Dallas Morning News on Friday he had made payments to Hunter to get her “out of North Carolina” and “into a stable place.”¹³⁶ Additionally, David Perel, editor of Enquirer, said on CNN that money was also “being funneled” to a former aide to Edwards named Andrew Young; who mentioned him living in a \$5.4 million house in Santa Barbara, California “with no visible means of support.”¹³⁷ Furthermore, the use of quotations as a mnemonic device to draw further pessimism towards Edwards’ claims within the article read that Baron in a statement to ABC said he made the payments “of my own volition” and they were “offered and accepted without condition.”¹³⁸

¹³² Associated Press, “Edwards: Affair was Result of Egotism, Narcissism,” *FOXNews.com*, April 9, 2008, Politics, <http://www.foxnews.com/wires/2008Aug09/0.4670.EdwardsInterviewExcerpts.00.html> [accessed April 25, 2010].

¹³³ Associated Press, “Edwards: Affair was Result of Egotism, Narcissism,” *FOXNews.com*, April 9, 2008, Politics, <http://www.foxnews.com/wires/2008Aug09/0.4670.EdwardsInterviewExcerpts.00.html> [accessed April 25, 2010].

¹³⁴ Katharine Q. Seelye, “Edwards Admits to Affair in 2006,” *New York Times*, 9 August 2008.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

Also noted was the timing of these revelations or lack thereof only dependent on the mounting pressure from the media and fellow politicians to explain the “real” nature of the relationship between Edwards and his mistress. The timing was seen as artificial by using an intense public relations effort to contain the story through the use of minimization when Edwards referred to the affair as “a liaison”.¹³⁹ Other suspicions arose due to the fact Edwards’ admission coincided with the start of the Olympics followed up with calls to friendly reporters about the issue.¹⁴⁰ Lastly, the admission was released only because Edwards was being “dogged by the tabloids” adamantly until he addressed the matter.¹⁴¹

After the announcement of the extra-marital scandal Edwards did not speak at the Democratic National Convention. It is customary for all defeated candidates to have a speaking role. Edwards’ absence as a speaker could have damaged his political reputation as it relates to the variable of exposure. He did not have an opportunity to manage much less build a political image.

Moreover, Edwards contradicts himself again illustrated by Seelye. She punches skepticism in his personal statements by mentioning, “Edwards claimed he had carried the affair for a “short period” in 2006 and it ended before he could have fathered the baby, who was born Feb. 27. But financial records show Edwards’ political action committee, One America, made payments to Hunter’s production company into 2007. The committee paid Hunter’s company; Midline Groove Productions based in South Orange, N.J., a total of \$114,000 in 2006 and 2007.”¹⁴² Seelye ended the article with

¹³⁹ Katharine Q. Seelye, “Edwards Admits to Affair in 2006,” *New York Times*, 9 August 2008.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

negative tone by casting Edwards as an unreliable liar through quoting Edwards' campaign manager David Bonoir, former congressman from Michigan. "I'm just very disappointed and angry about all of this; our staff put their faith and confidence in him and let them down. We believed him and he lied. We thought it was 'tabloid trash' as John put it"¹⁴³ said Bonoir, "You can't lie in politics and expect to have people's confidence."¹⁴⁴ Clearly, there will be negative feedback when you demonstrate a lack of concern towards your publics by lying about any crisis; it can negatively impact your reputation, in this case it would be a political one.

This impact can be so strong on a political reputation it may force serious doubt about the future of one's role in politics. In one article the emboldened headline reads, 'Edwards could face political free fall from affair'; just mentioning the worst-case scenario with bold type for emphasis in the headline might be considered negative tone.¹⁴⁵

James Carville, democratic strategist stated, "Certainly his political career is in shambles. It's not going to come back."¹⁴⁶ Gloria Borger, a CNN political analyst, concurred with Carville and said, "Obviously, lying like this, brazenly, is going to put an end to his political career and could affect whether he gets any role if Barack Obama were to win the presidency."¹⁴⁷ Other political analysts within the article even declared Edwards' mishap to be a good thing; suggesting it could have been a lot worse by limiting a chance to seat a member from the Democratic Party in the White House. Paul Begala,

¹⁴³ Katharine Q. Seelye, "Edwards Admits to Affair in 2006," *New York Times*, 9 August 2008.

¹⁴⁴ Associated Press, "Edwards Admits to Extramarital Affair," MSNBC.com, August 9, 2008, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/26095810/print/1/displaymode/1098/> [accessed April 11, 2010].

¹⁴⁵ Ed Hornick, "Edwards Could Face Political Free Fall from Affair," *CNN.com*, August 9, 2008, http://articles.cnn.com/2008-08-09/politics/edwards.affair_1_elizabeth-edwards-john-edwards-political-career?_s=PM:POLITICS [accessed April 11, 2010].

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

CNN contributor/Democratic strategist said, “Edwards’ affair will result in a larger loss of faith in institutions.”¹⁴⁸ This might implicate that reputation management strategies could be doubly effective in handling crises; especially political ones because the crisis and its management could affect secondary stakeholders such as corporations and institutions as aforementioned.

The reason there is no corrective action in the Edwards case could be due to the fact that if you get caught lying, you lose people’s faith almost immediately and even corrective action might seem phony afterwards. Edwards did not even have a chance to demonstrate corrective action.

Another instance of negative tone was the use of bold type for the lead sentence in a FOXNEWS.com article emphasizing him as liar. It read, “John Edwards lied when he denied his affair. Now he’s asking the nation to take his word that he’s revealed everything.”¹⁴⁹ The lack of concern for one’s publics is further compounded when media sources frame Edwards not only as a liar but also as being hypocritical. “As a candidate, Edwards often talked about the importance of morality and family as he campaigned with Elizabeth, who has an incurable form of breast cancer,” said The Washington Post.¹⁵⁰ Not to mention, his wife was cancer stricken throughout this personal challenge.

¹⁴⁸ Ed Hornick, “Edwards Could Face Political Free Fall from Affair,” *CNN.com*, August 9, 2008, http://articles.cnn.com/2008-08-09/politics/edwards.affair_1_elizabeth-edwards-john-edwards-political-career?s=PM:POLITICS [accessed April 11, 2010].

¹⁴⁹ Associated Press, “Strange Behavior Leaves Many Unanswered Questions in Edwards Affair,” *FOXNews.com*, August 9, 2008, Politics, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,401001,00.html> [accessed April 25, 2010].

¹⁵⁰ Howard Kurtz and Lois Romano, “Edwards Admits He Had an Affair; Ex-Candidate Says he Didn’t Father Baby with Campaign Worker,” *Washington Post*, 9 August 2008.

In one article it says Diane Helbig, 47, a business development coach from Lakewood, Ohio was in no mood to forgive.¹⁵¹ “I think it’s the meanest thing that could have ever happened to her, meaner than getting cancer which is not controllable; betrayal on top of illness, it’s like adding garbage to garbage, I just don’t understand how someone who professes to love someone can do this,” said Diane Helbig.¹⁵² Helbig describes Edwards’ actions as one of the meanest things you could do to people. Furthermore, the metaphorical use of garbage as it relates to Edwards within the quote could be seen as a negative framing tone.

On the third day of coverage media tone remained negative for Edwards. Headlines on two articles read ‘Tarnish on a Golden Boy’ and ‘True or False: Everyone Looks 10 Pounds Guiltier on TV’ instead of the majority of headlines with the previous coverage only making references to his admission of the affair and inconsistencies between reports and his statements; they are negative descriptors of Edwards’ personality.¹⁵³ ¹⁵⁴ Again, inconsistencies between Edwards’ claims and newly reported information only served to damage his credibility and ultimately his political reputation as well. Reports of Edwards’ denial of fathering the child not being true due to conflicting testimonials became more frequent points of interest within the press. “The associate who asked not to be identified, said Young had privately made conflicting statements about the extent of his relationship with Hunter and whether he is the child’s

¹⁵¹ Associated Press, “Outpouring of Support Greets Elizabeth Edwards Following Admission of Affair,” Politics, *FOXNews.com*, August 9, 2008, www.foxnews.com/story/2008/0,2933,400889,00.html [accessed April 25, 2010].

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Eugene Robinson, “Tarnish on a Golden Boy,” *Washington Post*, August 10 2008.

¹⁵⁴ Alessandra Stanley, “True or False: Everyone Looks Ten Pounds Guiltier on TV,” *New York Times*, August 10 2008.

father,” said Mike McIntire and Serge F. Kovalski, staff writers for The New York Times.¹⁵⁵

A salient example depicting Edwards negatively is when an entire article questioned the motivations about why he would go on national television and conduct an interview about the affair on ABC Nightline. The author likened the interview as an attempt to win over his audience like the atypical politician. Alessandra Stanley, staff writer for The New York Times mentioned, “He said the sin of hubris drove him to have an affair telling Mr. Woodruff he strayed because political campaigns “fed a self-focus, an egotism, a narcissism”, leading you to believe you can do whatever you want.”¹⁵⁶ Stanley retorted by saying, “Narcissism doesn’t lead politicians to believe they can have an affair and get away with it. It leads them to believe they can go to television and dispel it.” The columnist makes a mockery of Edwards by using the retort describing him as a hyper-narcissist as the kicker within the article.¹⁵⁷

Another lead sentence demonstrating negative tone suggests Edwards as an outlier in being successful in ruining his political image due to the hypocritical nature of his extra-marital affair. Eugene Robinson, staff writer for The Washington Post wrote, “There is some sincerity and some “snake oil” in every politician but John Edwards exudes both in almost freakish measure.”¹⁵⁸ Robinson uses the cryptographic metaphor of “snake oil” to describe Edwards and his political image.

¹⁵⁵ Mike McIntire and Serge F. Kovalski, “Woman in Edwards Affair Will Not Allow DNA Test,” *New York Times*, August 10 2008.

¹⁵⁶ Alessandra Stanley, “True or False: Everyone Looks Ten Pounds Guiltier on TV,” *New York Times*, August 10 2008.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Eugene Robinson, “Tarnish on a Golden Boy,” *Washington Post*, August 10 2008.

The severity of Edwards' mishap and hypocrisy is also shown when members of his own political party start doubting his political future again. National Review writer, Byron York said, "The fallout from Edwards' affair may not hurt Obama (presidential candidate at the time), but it leaves Edwards' future in doubt. Obama has such a squeaky-clean family image. But it's not over. I don't think anybody in political circles, including Democrats, believes....Edwards' claim that he is not the father of this child."¹⁵⁹ York provided more negative tone through contrasting Obama as having a squeaky-clean family image while Edwards is the latter; insinuating that his image is not desirable. Once again it seems Edwards' credibility, a key component in building a good and trustworthy reputation in politics was eroded.

On the fourth day of coverage concerning the Edwards' affair the media coverage was not as intense. Most of the articles pertaining to this issue dealt with the lack of coverage from different news organizations blaming each other of agenda setting for political affiliations. However, there were a couple of articles discussing the future of Edwards' political career as taking a nosedive stemming from this crisis.

"The question is not how much does it damage Edwards because his political career is over. The question is how much it damages the Democratic brand?" said Bill Sammon, Senior White House Correspondent, The Washington Examiner.¹⁶⁰ "It's really a terrible story and I agree Edwards' political future is nil because of this; and heaven

¹⁵⁹ FOXNews.com, "Democrats Shrug off Edwards' Affair, Paternity Questions," Politics, *FOXNews.com*, August 10, 2008, <http://foxnews.com/story/0,2933,401127.00.html> [accessed April 25, 2010].

¹⁶⁰ Brit Hume, "Panel Analyzes How John Edwards' Affair Will Impact His Political Career and Conflict Between Russia and Georgia," *FOXNews.com*, August 11, 2008, under "Interview Archive," <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,401703.00.html> [accessed April 25, 2010].

forbid he is lying about the paternity of her child,” said Jeff Birnbaum, a columnist at The Washington Post.¹⁶¹

Lastly, one article consisting solely of reader submissions listed a reader’s statement about Edwards’ political career being permanently over. “It just makes his political career nonexistent,” Cubby Squires of Charlotte, North Carolina, iReport contributor said. “I really don’t think he can get into politics again.”¹⁶² Obviously many people describe Edwards’ career as being over inferring more negative framing tones.

The next day news organizations touched on the fact that there was no full disclosure from Edwards. In his personal statement he mentions no need to fully admit to the allegations based on the fact news reports were not completely accurate on reporting the story; he was being ‘99 percent honest’.¹⁶³ If Edwards was responsible he would have confessed initially to all of these allegations. He would have completed the first step towards managing a more positive outcome in regards to reputation; instead he denied everything and then later confessed. Not bringing full disclosure in a timely manner during a crisis has the potential to create irreparable damage to one’s image. “Discrepancies between his story and the unraveling timeline of events raise more questions about whether Edwards’ attempts to come clean are in fact just more lies and

¹⁶¹ Brit Hume, “Panel Analyzes How John Edwards’ Affair Will Impact His Political Career and Conflict Between Russia and Georgia,” *FOXNews.com*, August 11, 2008, under “Interview Archive,” <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,401703,00.html> [accessed April 25, 2010].

¹⁶² IReporters, “CNN.com Readers React to Edwards Scandal,” *CNN.com*, August 11, 2008, <http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/08/11/edwards.reax.irpt/index.html?iref=allsearch> [accessed April 11, 2010]

¹⁶³ FOXNews.com, “Raw Data: John Edwards’ Statement on His Affair,” Politics, *FOXNews.com*, August 8, 2008, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,400661,00.html> [accessed April 25, 2010].

half-truths,” said FOXNews.com¹⁶⁴ The catchphrase of “coming clean” is used to illustrate the fact that Edwards is not capable of telling the whole truth.

One author made a mockery of Edwards using a metaphor involving soap. “Presidential candidate John Edwards with his own distinctive concept: 99 percent honesty; now it turns out we’re talking Ivory soap, 99 and 44/100ths percent pure,” said Ruth Marcus, writer for The Washington Post, “And, to continue the soap metaphor, if there’s anyone out there who believes Edwards is coming entirely clean now, I’ve got a job for you in the Edwards 2012 presidential campaign; plenty of openings there.”¹⁶⁵ Marcus used excerpts from Edwards chastising former President Bill Clinton for the infamous Monica Lewinsky affair and calling for the importance of peoples’ morals in their personal lives to be used as a compass to gauge one’s leadership ability to help further illustrate Edwards’ hypocritical personality traits.

A noticeable negative media tone is still steady and apparent from published reader comments passed along as news articles. Reader attitudes are a good qualitative measure for a reputation and most of the reader comments pertaining to Edwards were not savory. Some examples are:

- 1.) Call it egotism, narcissism, ambition or a combination of all three, the couple misled the voting public by promoting a flawed candidate who had the potential of harming the Democrats’ chances of winning the presidency in 2008.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ FOXNews.com, “Inconsistencies Raise Concerns Edwards May Still Be Lying About Affair,” Politics, *FOXNews.com*, August 12, 2008, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,401462,00.html> [accessed April 25, 2010]

¹⁶⁵ Ruth Marcus, “A Tad Short of 99%,” *Washington Post*, August 12, 2008.

¹⁶⁶ Susan Bienen Johnson, letter to the editor, under “Ways of Seeing the Edwards Scandal,” *New York Times*, August 12, 2008.

- 2.) John Edwards claims that he became increasingly egocentric and narcissistic, and that is what enabled him to have an extramarital affair. Perhaps he should search his unconscious a bit more to uncover an even deeper truth: His narcissism is so strong he thought he could become president of the United States and keep his secret.¹⁶⁷
- 3.) John Edward's statement "but being 99 percent honest is no longer enough" speaks volumes about his notions about honesty. One cannot be a little bit dishonest. Being 99 percent honest should never be enough. That 1 percent of dishonesty could represent the most devastating lie of all.¹⁶⁸
- 4.) Mrs. Edwards said that her husband made a "mistake." He did not just make a mistake. He is the mistake.¹⁶⁹

From the reader comments Edwards was described as being egotistical, narcissistic and dishonest; all negative dimensions of one's persona or reputation. After almost one week's worth of media coverage the negative media tone remained while the volume of stories written about Edwards slowed to a lethargic pace. Additionally, another contradictory testimonial surfaced in regards to the accuracy of the timeline of events on the length of the affair; along with some foreknowledge as to how this crisis may have affected Edwards' political reputation negatively. Pigeon O'Brien, former friend of

¹⁶⁷ Margaret M. Kennedy, letter to the editor, under "Ways of Seeing the Edwards Scandal," *New York Times*, August 12, 2008.

¹⁶⁸ Elisha Hoffman Abrams, letter to the editor, under "Ways of Seeing the Edwards Scandal," *New York Times*, August 12, 2008.

¹⁶⁹ Donna Carey, "The Costs of Philandering," *Washington Post*, August 12 2008.

Hunter said, “The relationship began shortly after the two met in a New York City hotel in late February or early March 2006.”¹⁷⁰

Contrary to Edwards’ claim that the affair began only after Hunter was hired in July 2006 to film a series of campaign-related documentaries for the Internet.¹⁷¹ In politics, constituent attitude and perceptions are paramount, especially when trying to get elected to public office and the role of character is always a factor in voter decisions.

“In light of Edwards’ clumsy admission to an extramarital affair with a campaign worker, the magazine’s editors have re-released the survey from October. It shows that 35 percent of female respondents, regardless of party affiliation, said their opinion of the happiness of a presidential candidate’s marriage will influence their vote,” said Adrienne Washington, writer for The Washington Times.¹⁷² The negative media tone still remained strong evidenced by an entire article showing the parabolic relationship between Edwards and villainy in classic literature. The author Suzanne Fields, a syndicated columnist, sets negative tone through the use of a metaphor within classic literature in the lead sentence by saying, “What fools these politicians be. Like Dorian Gray, Edwards had a painting of himself in the attic, absorbing all the wrinkles from his dissolute life, freeing him to campaign for the presidency fresh, perfectly coiffed, and without a trace of a care on his brow. Like “the two Americas” he discovered and deplored, he’s a divided self, one for

¹⁷⁰ FOXNews.com, “Former Friend of Edwards’ Mistress Says Hunter Is Being Demonized,” *FOXNews.com*, August 13, 2008, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,402245.00.html> [accessed April 25, 2010]

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Adrienne T. Washington, “Female Voters Heed Character Issue,” *The Washington Times*, August 13, 2008.

public consumption and the other for private indulgence. His political career was destroyed in the collision of his two lives.”¹⁷³

The last segment of the initial two weeks’ worth of media coverage surrounding the crisis ended with further speculation about the extent of his involvement with a probable cover-up of the affair. Mostly noted when headlines of the articles read, ‘Is Edwards’ former aide covering for him?’, ‘Lawyers’ Ties in Edwards Case Suggest Extent of Hiding Affair’ and ‘Edwards ally details payment to mistress’. As aforementioned, both of the lawyers issued statements that seemed to exonerate Edwards during the beginning of the scandal; Hunter’s attorney, Robert J. Gordon of New York said his client was not carrying Edwards’ child while Young’s attorney, Pamela J. Marple of Washington D.C. claimed her client was the father. Apparently, the two lawyers had worked with Baron, the former finance chairman for the Edwards campaign on past lawsuits suggesting the two were part of an orchestrated effort to protect Edwards.¹⁷⁴

“After initially saying he did not know how the lawyers were chosen to represent Hunter and Young, Baron acknowledged he might have played a role. The revelations of ties among the lawyers emerged through public records and interviews with people close to Edwards and Hunter suggesting their affair went on longer than he admitted and the effort to conceal it by Edwards’ inner circle was much more extensive than reported,” said Serge F. Kovalski and Mike McIntire, writers for The New York Times.¹⁷⁵ This is

¹⁷³ Suzanne Fields, “Lessons from Literature; The Picture of ‘Dorian’ Edwards,” *Washington Times*, August 14, 2008.

¹⁷⁴ Serge F. Kovalski and Mike McIntire, “Lawyers Ties in Edwards Case Suggest Extent of Hiding Affair,” *New York Times*, August 15, 2008.

¹⁷⁵ Serge F. Kovalski and Mike McIntire, “Lawyers Ties in Edwards Case Suggest Extent of Hiding Affair,” *New York Times*, August 15, 2008.

yet another example of a lack of concern towards one's publics by not being honest and forthcoming with information as it pertains to the crisis.

Other smaller details discovered with this scandal were the suspicious transfers of monies being paid to Hunter. When asked about the payments, Edwards' associates widened the gap even farther with the public's trust by not even providing any kind of answer. "Baron didn't return a phone call or respond to an email from the AP on Friday; Edwards' advisors would not discuss the purpose of the payment on record," said MSNBC.com¹⁷⁶

The construct of trust within the relationship between Edwards and the American public is almost non-existent thus far into the crisis. "The media and a large chunk of the public including some of Edwards' supporters still question whether he's told the whole truth," said MSNBC.com¹⁷⁷ Violating the public's trust almost spells certain doom to one's political reputation and career. "He has violated the public trust in a serious way and we may well continue to entertain doubts about his ability to provide significant political leadership," said Richard J. Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary.¹⁷⁸ Edwards has been labeled as untrustworthy, not credible and inept as a politician thus far.

¹⁷⁶ Associated Press, "Edwards Ally Details Payment to Mistress," MSNBC.com, August 15, 2008, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/26216035/print/1/displaymode/1098/> [accessed April 11, 2010]

¹⁷⁷ Associated Press, "Is Edwards' Former Aide Covering for Him?," Politics, MSNBC.com, August 15, 2008, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/26229037/print/1/displaymode/1098/> [accessed April 11, 2010]

¹⁷⁸ Richard J. Mouw, "Forgiveness, A Politician, And Public Trust," *Washington Post*, August 16, 2008.

Eliot Spitzer

Not shifting liabilities around, answering doubts, being forthcoming and honest about information pertinent to a crisis are hallmarks of effective media management. Spitzer found himself entwined with a prostitution scandal during his tenure as New York's governor. The Spitzer case beginning on March 10, 2008 is a prime example of what to do during a crisis and will be used as a comparative analysis against how Edwards handled his crisis. These swift and honest actions did not minimize negative framing tones in the media but these reputation management techniques could be a catalyst for positive media tone at times. The resultant tone remained negative throughout the media coverage of this scandal.

Spitzer, 48, born in New York City, married to Silda Wall Spitzer, lived a dichotomous lifestyle after factoring in this crisis. Accomplished before the age of 50 and often referencing himself as a "political steamroller";¹⁷⁹ Spitzer, an Ivy League graduate worked various New York state government legal positions such as the state's attorney general before becoming the governor of New York, elected with a historic 69 percent of the vote.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Allan Chernoff, "Behind the Scenes: Spitzer's Resignation," *CNN.com*, March 13, 2008, <http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/03/13/btsc.chernoff.spitzer/index.html?iref=allsearch> [accessed April 11, 2010]

¹⁸⁰ Associated Press, "NY Gov. Eliot Spitzer Bio," *FOXNews.com*, March 10, 2008, http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_wires/2008Mar10/0,4675,SpitzerBioBox,00.html [accessed April 23, 2010]

On the first day of coverage of his sex scandal Spitzer released a personal statement in response to reports on the New York Times website linking him to being a client of a prostitution ring.¹⁸¹ Spitzer said,

Good afternoon. For the past nine years, eight years as attorney general, and one as governor, I have tried to uphold a vision of progressive politics that would rebuild New York and create opportunity for all. We sought to bring real change to New York and that will continue. Today I want to briefly address a private matter. I have acted in a way that violates my obligations to my family and violates my, or any, sense of right and wrong. I apologize first and most importantly to my family. I apologize to the public, whom I promised better. I do not believe that politics in the long run is about individuals. It is about ideas, the public good, and doing what is best for the state of New York. But I have disappointed and failed to live up to the standard I expected of myself. I must now dedicate some time to regain the trust of my family. I will not be taking any questions. Thank you very much. I will report back to you in short order. Thank you very much.¹⁸²

This crisis for Spitzer developed because of a deposit made for a rendezvous with a prostitute in a Washington, D.C. hotel room via a wiretap during a federal investigation of a Web-based prostitution service operating in New York, Washington, Los Angeles, Miami, London and Paris under the name Emperors Club V.I.P.¹⁸³ According to the Justice Department, the investigation into the call girl service began when a bank

¹⁸¹ Danny Hakim and William K. Rashbaum, "Spitzer Said to Be Weighing Resignation," *New York Times*, March 11, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/11/nyregion/11spitzer.html?pagewanted=print> [accessed April 3, 2010]

¹⁸² Associated Press, "NY Gov. Eliot Spitzer's Statement," *FOXNews.com*, March 10, 2008, <http://www.foxnews.com/wires/2008Mar10/0.4670.SpitzerProstitutionStatement.00.html> [accessed April 23, 2010], *FOXNews.com*, "Sources: Spitzer to Resign Following Reports of 'Involvement' With Prostitution Ring," *FOXNews.com*, March 10, 2008, http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_story/0.3566.336493.00.html [accessed April 23, 2010]

¹⁸³ Kelli Arena and John King, "Source: Spitzer Investigated for Link to Prostitution Ring," *CNN.com*, March 10, 2008, <http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/03/10/spitzer/index.html?iref=storysearch> [accessed April 11, 2010], Danny Hakim and William K. Rashbaum, "Spitzer Is Linked to Prostitution Ring," *New York Times*, March 10, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/10/nyregion/10cnd-spitzer.html> [accessed April 11, 2010]; Don Van Natta Jr. and Jo Becker, "Bank Reports, Then Wiretapping, Led to Unraveling of Ring and Its Client 9," *New York Times*, March 13, 2008.

reported suspicious financial activities; i.e. money laundering which lead the Internal Revenue Service to uncover wire transfers showing up on transaction records as QAT consulting whose business involved foreign accounts and shell companies.¹⁸⁴ It also appeared to be vaguely related to pornography websites.¹⁸⁵ Furthermore, QAT and Emperors Club had the same address listing in New York.¹⁸⁶ Media tone in response to the Spitzer crisis and his personal statement was negative on the first day but the majority of the news articles did not touch on his character. Instead, the media described the turning of events of Spitzer's involvement and concentrated on the future of his political career.

Most of the articles interests were in writing the details of the arrangement between Spitzer and the call girl. NBC News actually obtained an FBI affidavit, summarized it and released it as a news article, duly noting the identification of Spitzer as 'Client 9' and the prostitute as 'Kristen'.¹⁸⁷ Immediately, calls for his resignation from political foes and unsympathetic citizens from financial communities were heard. These people were at odds with him prior to this scandal because of his financial-reformist role as the state's attorney and as governor of New York.

"The corruption-fighting politician once known as "Mr. Clean" is accused of paying for sex with a high-priced called girl drawing immediate calls for the Democrat to

¹⁸⁴ William K. Rashbaum, "Revelations Began in Routine Tax Inquiry," *New York Times*, March 11, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/11/nyregion/11inquire.html?pagewanted=print> [accessed April 3, 2010]

¹⁸⁵ David Johnston and Stephen Labaton, "The Reports That Drew Federal Eyes to Spitzer," *New York Times*, March 12, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/12/nyregion/12legal.html> [accessed April 3, 2010]

¹⁸⁶ Chad Pergram and The Associated Press, "Money Laundering, Cross-Border Prostitution at Heart of Spitzer Allegations," *FOXNews.com*, March 10, 2008, http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_story/0,3566,336632,00.html [accessed April 23, 2010]

¹⁸⁷ Michael Kosnar, "FBI Affidavit Cites 'Client 9' and 'Kristen'," *MSNBC.com*, March 10, 2008, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/23562995/ns/politics/> [accessed April 11, 2010]

step down. At a news conference before about 100 reporters, a glassy-eyed Spitzer, his wife at his side, apologized to his family and the people of New York,” stated MSNBC.

¹⁸⁸ Political rival Nick Ayers, executive director of the Republican Governors Association said, “The American people are tired of corrupt and hypocritical politicians. The governor of New York is just another in the long list of politicians that have failed their constituents. The governor of New York should immediately resign from office and allow the people of New York to pursue honest leadership.”¹⁸⁹ However, this quote labeling Spitzer as corrupt and hypocritical was offset when Jeffrey Toobin, a CNN senior legal analyst, who went to law school with Spitzer used a hyperbole to describe him in a positive light as the “the straightest arrow I know.”¹⁹⁰

On the first day of coverage Spitzer confronted the crisis fastidiously and took full responsibility for his actions. He showed a high amount of concern by apologizing publicly on national television to all concerned publics; mainly his family and the public for his misdeeds. “He and his wife got up onstage, they stood close, he took responsibility, he took no questions,” commented Libby Copeland, Washington Post Staff Writer.¹⁹¹ So far Spitzer had completed the first two steps towards effective reputation management of a crisis on the first day by accepting responsibility and showing concern (sincerity) for one’s publics. The only negative character remarks

¹⁸⁸ Associated Press, “Governor Apologizes after Prostitution Link,” *MSNBC.com*, March 10, 2008, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/23561606/ns/politics/> [accessed April 11, 2010]

¹⁸⁹ FOXNews.com, “Other Politicians Show Little Sympathy for Gov. Spitzer Amid Prostitution Allegations,” *FOXNews.com*, March 10, 2008, http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_story/0,3566,336591,00.html [accessed April 23, 2010]

¹⁹⁰ Danny Hakim and William K. Rashbaum, “Spitzer Is Linked to Prostitution Ring,” *New York Times*, March 10, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/10/nyregion/10cnd-spitzer.html> [accessed April 11, 2010]

¹⁹¹ Libby Copeland, “Ritual of Repentance; The Post-Scandal Litany of New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer Has Familiar Echoes,” *Washington Post*, March 11, 2008.

towards Spitzer are of him being hypocritical; however, the sources of the remarks are from people or communities who already had a history of differing political biasness/agenda towards him. Spitzer was also known as the “Sheriff of Wall Street”, Time magazine named him “Crusader of the Year” and the tabloids proclaimed him “Eliot Ness”.¹⁹²

Fortunately for Spitzer, no charges were ever filed against him during the crisis. However, there was intense debate among pundits into any possible legal and political ramifications he might face. Carl Tobias, a law professor at the University of Richmond, noted prostitution customers are often not charged and said charges against him might be unlikely.¹⁹³ “Especially if he resigns, he may just be left alone. It may be that that public is satisfied by his resignation as governor,” Tobias said.¹⁹⁴

Political analyst Steven Cohen was wary of trying to draw any conclusions about the corrupting influence of power in regards as to why Spitzer would engage into this kind of irrational behavior.¹⁹⁵ Political advisers were split over whether Spitzer had any political future at all.¹⁹⁶ Even with a rocky first year as governor and the sex scandal Spitzer seemed to have a good chance of saving his political reputation. “It’s not as though it’s hitting him at a moment of strength,” Brooke Masters, author of a 2006

¹⁹² Amy Westfeldt, “Scandal Puts Spitzer’s Career in Danger,” *FOXNews.com*, March 10, 2008, http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_wires/2008Mar10/0,4675,SpitzerProstitution,00.html [accessed April 23, 2010]

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Associated Press, “Analysts Dissect Spitzer Prostitution Mess,” *MSNBC.com*, March 10, 2008, <http://today.msnbc.msn.com/id/23566308/ns/politics> [accessed April 11, 2010]

¹⁹⁶ CNN.com, “Is Scandal Enough to Sink Spitzer for Good?,” *CNN.com*, March 10, 2008, <http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/03/10/spitzer.political.survival/index.html?iref=allsearch> [accessed April 11, 2010]

Spitzer biography said of the prostitution allegations. “It is too early to write off Spitzer’s political career but this is not a good time,” said Masters.¹⁹⁷

On the second day of coverage the amount of articles published concerning Spitzer almost doubled but most of the content were just rehashed topics, additional facts and further extensions of the debates about legal/political consequences concerning the scandal from the day before. Negative media tone still remained and was at its highest point on this day. Further details of the scandal, especially about financial transactions were unveiled throughout the published media.

“Authorities believe Spitzer may have spent tens of thousands of dollars, apparently transferring only personal funds, not campaign contributions or state taxpayer dollars between accounts to pay for the prostitute service according to a law enforcement official who spoke on condition of anonymity,” said Samantha Gross and Devlin Barrett, Associated Press writers, “Another official said the amount could be as much as \$80,000.”¹⁹⁸ One headline plainly read ‘Spitzer May Have Spent Tens of Thousands’.¹⁹⁹

Other details of the scandal emerged such as the location of the rendezvous with ‘Kristen’ at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C.²⁰⁰ and reports of tourists snapping

¹⁹⁷ CNN.com, “Future of Spitzer, Dubbed ‘Eliot Ness,’ Suddenly Cloudy,” *CNN.com*, March 10, 2008, <http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/03/10/spitzer.bio/index.html?iref=storysearch> [accessed April 11, 2010]

¹⁹⁸ Samantha Gross and Devlin Barrett, “Spitzer Tripped Up on Laws He Enforced,” *FOXNews.com*, March 11, 2008, <http://www.foxnews.com/wires/2008Mar11/0.4670.SpitzerTheMoneyTrail.00.html> [accessed April 23, 2010]

¹⁹⁹ Michael Gormley, “Spitzer May Have Spent Tens of Thousands,” *FOXNews.com*, March 11, 2008, http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_wires/2008Mar11/0.4675.SpitzerProstitution.00.html [accessed April 23, 2010]

²⁰⁰ Sara Bonisteel, “‘Hollywood Madam’ Heidi Fleiss: Client 9 Is an Arrogant Jerk,” *FOXNews.com*, March 11, 2008, http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_story/0.3566.336909.00.html [accessed April 23, 2010]

pictures of the city's latest iconoclastic monument to scandal.²⁰¹ Additional details discussed what led to the governor to getting caught but it was still unclear whether Spitzer was a target from the start or if agents came across his name by accident while amassing evidence.²⁰² Sources familiar with the investigation said Spitzer's troubles began with a federal money-laundering probe due to suspicious bank transactions.²⁰³ Another law enforcement official said Spitzer's payments to the Emperors Club began sometime in the middle of 2007.²⁰⁴ Prosecutors compiled statements from a confidential source and an undercover detective.²⁰⁵ Then they examined more than 5,000 telephone calls, text messages and more than 6,000 e-mails; as well as bank, travel and hotel records.²⁰⁶

Despite the salacious details uncovered about Spitzer's tryst, the now ex-governor was already showing hints of the last phase of effective reputation management of a crisis on the second day of media coverage: corrective action. One articles' lead sentence read, "Aides to Spitzer and the state's lieutenant governor have begun planning for a possible

²⁰¹ Keith B. Richburg, "Spitzer Linked to Prostitution Ring by Wiretap; N.Y. Governor Apologizes for 'Private Matter,' Does Not Resign," *Washington Post*, March 11, 2008.

²⁰² Associated Press, "IRS Money Laundering Probe Led to Spitzer Revelation," *FOXNews.com*, March 11, 2008, http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_story/0,3566,336631,00.html [accessed April 23, 2010]

²⁰³ Kelli Arena, "Sources: Money Transfers Spurred Spitzer probe," *CNN.com*, March 11, 2008, <http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/03/11/spitzer.money/index.html?iref=allsearch> [accessed April 11, 2010]

²⁰⁴ William K. Rashbaum, "The Method of Payment May Decide Any Charges," *New York Times*, March 11, 2008.

²⁰⁵ Associated Press, "N.Y. Governor Spitzer Resignation Expected After Sex Allegations," *FOXNews.com*, March 11, 2008, http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_story/0,3566,336649,00.html [accessed April 23, 2010]

²⁰⁶ Associated Press, "N.Y. Governor Spitzer Resignation Expected After Sex Allegations," *FOXNews.com*, March 11, 2008, http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_story/0,3566,336649,00.html [accessed April 23, 2010]

transition after federal prosecutors linked Spitzer to a high-end prostitution ring, a top legislative staffer said.”²⁰⁷

On the first day, critics of Spitzer called for his resignation and by the second day information already leaked to the media about his transition out of office. However, the incorporation of these media management techniques already served Spitzer glowingly because no news outlets had any substantive material to write about besides information obtained from affidavits, law enforcement officials and the occasional article trying to offer psychological insight to the matter.

One article showed partial sympathy for Spitzer by suggesting he might not have been able to control his self because of the influence of power might have gripped him. “Research shows people consumed with power experience an adrenaline rush and people with power are usually overly optimistic, likelier to take risks and more likely to pursue their own personal needs for satisfaction,” said Dr. Yvonne K. Fulbright, sex educator and FOXNews.com contributor.²⁰⁸ At the worst Spitzer is described as an optimistic risk taker, not a criminal.

Coverage on the second day March 11, 2008 was filled with reader feedback and interviewee opinions. These responses can be used as a gauge to help understand reader attitudes and media tone towards Spitzer; and as a signifier of reputational damage.

According to the majority of the articles published on the second day it appeared many

²⁰⁷ John King, Kelli Arena, Kevin Bohn and Dana Garrett, “Source: Spitzer Working on Resignation Plan,” *CNN.com*, March 11, 2008, <http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/03/11/spitzer/index.html?iref=allsearch> [accessed April 11, 2010]

²⁰⁸ Yvonne K. Fulbright, “Power and Prostitutes: Why Powerful Men Can’t Help Themselves,” *FOXNews.com*, March 11, 2008, http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_story/0,3566,336837,00.html [accessed April 23, 2010]

people were complacent about the scandal, didn't really care about the fact the governor had a tryst with a prostitute and were even making jokes about the situation.²⁰⁹

“Senate Republicans spent much of the morning in conference discussing the budget and when news of the allegations against Spitzer broke, many thought it was a practical joke.” Senator George H. Winner, Jr., an upstate N.Y. Republican said.²¹⁰ There was even an entire article dedicated to transcripts of jokes from late-night talk shows at Spitzer's expense, however, none of these articles displayed any negative tone towards him.²¹¹ This might suggest minimal severity of the whole matter; a natural minimization of the crisis through the use of metaphorical humor. Even the call girl ‘Kristin’ described Spitzer as a good guy saying, “I actually liked the client and did not think he was difficult.”²¹²

Further public sentiment of a sense of complacency regarding this crisis is when Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz told CNN, “This is really private sexual misconduct and that Thomas Jefferson, John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson are examples of people who could govern well during the day while acting as children and adolescents in the evening.”²¹³ One articles' kicker sentence showed empathy for the governor by selecting a quote from Charles Ross, a Republican criminal defense attorney.

²⁰⁹ Amy Argetsinger and Roxanne Roberts, “The Reliable Source,” *Washington Post*, March 12, 2008.

²¹⁰ Nicholas Confessore, “I Apologize to the Public, to Whom I Promised Better,” *New York Times*, March 11, 2008.

²¹¹ Associated Press, “Spitzer Scandal a Dream for Late-night Comics,” *MSNBC.com*, March 11, 2008, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/23583275/print/1/displaymode/1098/> [accessed April 11, 2010], David Bauder, “Spitzer's Troubles Ready-Made for Jokes,” *FOXNews.com*, March 12, 2008, http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_wires/2008Mar12/0,4675,SpitzerComics,00.html [accessed April 23, 2010]

²¹² Joseph Curl, “Call-girl Ring Trips Up Spitzer; FBI Probe Threatens Future of Governor,” *Washington Times*, March 11, 2008.

²¹³ Kelli Arena, “Experts: Spitzer's Potential Troubles May Include Prison,” *CNN.com*, March 11, 2008, <http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/03/11/spitzer.legal.woes/index.html?iref=allsearch> [accessed April 11, 2010]

“I think he’s a hard-working public servant,” Ross said. “From the time he was a Manhattan DA, I’ve always admired him. He can sometimes go overboard but he’s tried to do the right thing.”²¹⁴

On the third day of coverage Spitzer’s office announced his official resignation on Monday, March 17, 2008 and that he would make another personal statement regarding his involvement in the prostitution scandal at 11:30 a.m. ET.²¹⁵ With this resignation Spitzer was the first New York Governor to leave office amid scandal in nearly a century and Lieutenant Governor David Patterson was sworn in to replace him.²¹⁶ During his next media appearance Spitzer said,

In the past few days, I’ve begun to atone for my private failings with my wife, Silda, my children and my entire family. The remorse I feel will always be with me. From those to whom much is given, much is expected. I have been given much: the love of my family, the faith and trust of the people of New York and a chance to lead this state. I am deeply sorry that I did not live up to what was expected of me. To every New Yorker and to all those who believed in what I tried to stand for, I sincerely apologize. As a public servant, I, and the remarkable people with whom I worked have accomplished a great deal. I cannot allow my private failings to disrupt the people’s work. Over the course of my public life, I’ve insisted, I think correctly, that people regardless of their position in power take responsibility for their conduct. I can and will ask no less of myself. I will try once again outside of politics to serve the common good. For this reason, I am resigning from the office of governor. As human beings our greatest glory consists not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall. Thank you very much.²¹⁷

²¹⁴ Tomoeh Murakami Tse, “Shock and Smirks on Wall Street as Longtime Foe Spitzer Squirms,” *Washington Post*, March 11, 2008.

²¹⁵ Associated Press, “AP: New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer to Resign Effective Monday,” *FOXNews.com*, March 12, 2008, http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_story/0.3566,336688,00.html [accessed April 23, 2010]

²¹⁶ Michael M. Grynbaum, “Spitzer Resigns as New York Governor Amid Sex Scandal,” *New York Times*, March 12, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/12/world/americas/12iht-york.4.11005470.html> [accessed April 3, 2010]

²¹⁷ Joseph Curl, “Spitzer Out; No Deal on Prostitutes; D.C. Officials Weigh Charges on Hotel Tryst,” *Washington Times*, March 13, 2008.; David Kocieniewski and Danny Hakim, “Felled by Scandal, Spitzer Says Focus Is on His Family,” *New York Times*, March 13, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/13/nyregion/13spitzer.html> [accessed April 3, 2010]; Michael Grynbaum, “Sex Scandal Puts a Stunning End to a Crusading Career,” *New York Times*, March 13, 2008

From this quote Spitzer had described himself as sincere and responsible; the first two of the three constructs of effective reputation management techniques being analyzed. More mundane details emerged to the public describing the logistics of the encounters;²¹⁸ his use of the service at least eight times during the investigation²¹⁹ and any interactions the governor had with ‘Kristin’ identified on this day as Ashley Alexandra Dupre, a 22-year old aspiring singer.²²⁰ Articles revealed more information about aliases Spitzer used for his interactions with the prostitution ring such as signing into the Mayflower Hotel as a George Fox, the name of one of his close friends.²²¹ There was an overwhelming response and at times a sympathetic tone for the governor through

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/13/world/americas/13iht-12cndresign.11018659.html> [accessed April 3, 2010]; Danny Hakim and Anahad O’Connor, “Spitzer to Resign Soon; Paterson Set as Successor,” *New York Times*, March 12, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/12/nyregion/12cnd-spitzer.html> [accessed April 3, 2010], Associated Press, “New York Governor Eliot Spitzer Resigns Effective Monday Amid Links to Prostitution Ring,” *FOXNews.com*, March 12, 2008, http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_story/0.3566.337108.00.html [accessed April 23, 2010], Verena Dobnik and Michael Gormley, “Spitzer Resigns in Disgrace Over Scandal,” *FOXNews.com*, March 12, 2008, <http://www.foxnews.com/wires/2008Mar12/0.4670.SpitzerProstitution.00.html> [accessed April 23, 2010], Kelli Arena, Heidi Collins, Kevin Bohn, Jason Carroll, Dana Garrett and John King, “‘Deeply sorry,’ Spitzer to Step Down By Monday,” *CNN.com*, March 12, 2008, <http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/03/12/spitzer/index.html?iref=allsearch> [accessed April 11, 2010], Associated Press, “Spitzer Resigns, Capping Stunning Fall,” *MSNBC.com*, March 12, 2008, <http://today.msnbc.msn.com/id/23572671/ns/politics/print/1/displaymode/1098/> [accessed April 11, 2010], Michael M. Grynbaum, “Spitzer Resigns, Citing Personal Failings,” *New York Times*, March 12, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/12/nyregion/12cnd-resign.html> [accessed April 3, 2010], Associated Press, “Spitzer’s Longest Days,” *FOXNews.com*, March 12, 2008, http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_wires/2008Mar12/0.4675.SpitzerTimeline.00.html [accessed April 23, 2010]

²¹⁸ David Kocieniewski, “Despite Constant Security, Politicians Still Find Trouble,” *New York Times*, March 12, 2008.

²¹⁹ Kevin Bohn, “Sources: Spitzer Used Call-girl Service at Least 8 Times,” *CNN.com*, March 12, 2008, http://articles.cnn.com/2008-03-12/politics/spitzer.investigation_1_emperors-club-vip-ashley-youmans-ashley-alexandra-dupre?_s=PM:POLITICS [accessed April 11, 2010]

²²⁰ Associated Press, “Spitzer Call Girl Reportedly Identified,” *FOXNews.com*, March 12, 2008, http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_wires/2008Mar12/0.4675.SpitzerCallGirl.00.html [accessed April 24, 2010]; Marcus Franklin, “Report: Spitzer Call Girl Identified,” *FOXNews.com*, March 13, 2008, http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_wires/2008Mar13/0.4675.SpitzerCallGirl.00.html [accessed April 24, 2010]

²²¹ Danny Hakim and Ian Urbina, “Spitzer Wrestles Over Response, Paralyzing Albany,” *New York Times*, March 12, 2008.

articles featuring celebrity and politician testimonials,²²² perspectives of the scandal based upon gender²²³ and reader letters.²²⁴

Any damage to Spitzer's reputation seemed minimal albeit negative tone still remained because nearly all of the articles dealt mostly with facts rather than personality issues. A few articles had positive tones especially when referencing the recent resignation, a form of corrective action by Spitzer. The empathetic tone towards Spitzer surfaced in articles suggesting Spitzer had already prepared to weather through this crisis to keep his family intact²²⁵ and not have this sex scandal ruin his long-term political career/reputation.²²⁶ The empathetic/sympathetic/positive tone continued and was demonstrated when one article went as far as to place the blame for Spitzer's infidelity on his wife Silda.

Within the article, Dr. Laura in an interview with Today Show's Meredith Vieira said, "I hold women accountable for tossing out perfectly good men by not treating them with the love, kindness, respect and attention they need."²²⁷ Even Paterson communicated an empathetic tone towards Spitzer when he said, "Like all New Yorkers I am saddened by what we have learned over the past several days. On a personal level Gov. Spitzer and

²²² Mike Celizic, "Jim Cramer on Pal Spitzer: 'Eliot Screwed Up'," *MSNBC.com*, March 12, 2008, <http://today.msnbc.msn.com/id/23591111/> [accessed April 11, 2010]; Associated Press, "Clinton 'Saddened' by Spitzer's Fall," *FOXNews.com*, March 12, 2008, http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_wires/2008Mar12/0.4675.SpitzerClinton.00.html [accessed April 24, 2008]

²²³ Melissa Farley and Victor Malarek, "The Myth of the Victimless Crime," *New York Times*, March 12, 2008., Maureen Dowd, "Ways of the Wayward," *New York Times*, March 12, 2008., Tracy Quan, "Really Dangerous Liasons," *New York Times*, March 12, 2008., Alessandra Stanley, "Mars and Venus Dissect the Spitzer Scandal on the TV Talk Shows," *New York Times*, March 12, 2008.

²²⁴ Editorial Desk, "Eliot Spitzer's Dizzying Descent," *New York Times*, March 12, 2008.

²²⁵ Eric Konigsberg, "The Public Ordeal of a Private Person," *New York Times*, March 12, 2008.

²²⁶ Ruth Marcus, "Spitzer's Tragic Flaw," *Washington Post*, March 12, 2008.

²²⁷ Susan Estrich, "Spitzer Scandal Hurts Hillary," *FOXNews.com*, March 12, 2008, http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_story/0.3566.337336.00.html [accessed April 23, 2010]

Silda have been close and steadfast friends. As an elected official the governor has worked hard for the people of New York. ...It is now time for Albany to get back to work as the people of this state expect from us.”²²⁸ Despite this shortcoming Spitzer was still described as a hard-working and good man.

On the fourth day of coverage much of the coverage praised the speediness of Spitzer’s resignation and hailed it as a good move despite the continued negative media tone.²²⁹ No more details about the rendezvous with the prostitute were illuminated except for some financially related criminal charges Spitzer may face. Charges of conspiracy, money laundering and structuring — breaking sums of money down into smaller amounts to hide the true purpose of the funds — were being pondered but the bulk of the critics considered it all a stretch; as aforementioned Spitzer never had the state bring formal charges against him.²³⁰ Reader responses and letters constituted the rest of the publications rounding out the days’ worth of media coverage pertaining to the Spitzer scandal.²³¹ On the fifth, sixth and seventh days of coverage a minugia of articles consisted of more metaphorical humor and heckling, reader comments and legal

²²⁸ Associated Press, “Reaction to Spitzer Resignation,” *FOXNews.com*, March 12, 2008, http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_wires/2008Mar12/0.4675.SpitzerQuotes.00.html [accessed April 23, 2010]

²²⁹ John Farmer, “This Defense Won’t Rest,” *New York Times*, March 13, 2008., Editorial, “After Eliot Spitzer,” *New York Times*, March 13 2008., Michael Powell and Nicholas Confessore, “4 Arrests, Then 6 Days to the End of a Career,” *New York Times*, March 13, 2008.

²³⁰ Keith B. Richburg and Carrie Johnson, “Spitzer to Step Down as N.Y. Governor; Embattled Democrat Apologizes for His ‘Private Failings’,” *Washington Post*, March 13, 2008.; Larry Neumeister and Devlin Barrett, “Legal Cloud Lingers Over Spitzer,” *FOXNews.com*, March 13, 2008, http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_wires/2008Mar13/0.4675.SpitzerProstitution.00.html [accessed April 23, 2010]; Joseph Curl, “Spitzer Under Pressure to Quit; GOP Threatens Impeachment,” *Washington Times*, March 13, 2008., Stephen Chernin, “Trouble May Not Be Over for Spitzer,” *MSNBC.com*, March 13, 2008, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/23619896/print/1/displaymode/1098/> [accessed April 11, 2010]; Associated Press, “More Woes Likely for Spitzer,” *MSNBC.com*, March 13, 2008, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/23607384/print/1/displaymode/1098> [accessed April 11, 2010]

²³¹ Letters, “Lessons From the Fall of Spitzer,” *New York Times*, March 13, 2008., Editorial Copy, “In the Matter of Eliot Spitzer,” *Washington Post*, March 13, 2008.

perspectives/opinions. Discussions on the ethics of prostitution compiled most of the media coverage pertaining to the scandal and no judgments were present about Spitzer as a person.

Throughout the second week of media coverage news outlets published a minimal amount of content about the Spitzer scandal even though negative media tone was still present; less than a quarter of what was published the previous week. In fact, during the latter weeks' worth of coverage zilch was published about Spitzer except for a couple of days consisting of only one article being published each one of those days. During this period Spitzer made no public appearances or announcements. More generic information seeped gradually into the media during the second week such as the timelines of how the events unfolded²³² and e-mails Spitzer was sending back and forth to his aides during the scandal.²³³ Again, negative framing tones were present but minimal compared to the first week maybe due to the lack of media coverage. Few instances describing Spitzer's character were available.

Another article entails how a lawyer (a Republican operative) purportedly dropped a letter to the FBI helping them realize Spitzer was using prostitutes in Florida before the scandal erupted.²³⁴ However, there was an article stating the confirmation of

²³² Associated Press, "Spitzer's Journey Toward Resignation," Politics, *MSNBC.com*, March 17, 2008, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/23651071/ns/politics/> [accessed April 11, 2010]; Associated Press, "Paterson Sworn In as New York Governor, Spitzer Resignation Final," *FOXNews.com*, March 17, 2008, http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_story/0,3566,338549,00.html [accessed April 23, 2010]

²³³ Danny Hakim and Michael Powell, "Sifting the Wreckage for the Real Eliot Spitzer," *New York Times*, March 23, 2008.

²³⁴ Associated Press, "Spitzer Nemesis Sent Letter to FBI Alleging His Use of Call Girls," *FOXNews.com*, March 23, 2008, http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_story/0,3566,340739,00.html [accessed April 23, 2010]

Spitzer not using public funds for his illicit activities.²³⁵ Furthermore, several articles mentioned little about Spitzer's statements and his political future. Any negative remarks indicative of a polarized media framing tone directed towards Spitzer and his character were almost non-existent concluding the instituted reputation management techniques might have had a profound effect on the resultant media framing tones.

Results

The Edwards coverage drew suspicions often adding to negative media frames almost whenever he spoke. Prior to this crisis, accusations circulated about Edwards involvement in an extra-marital affair with a possible love child in which he inexplicably denied. On the first day of mainstream coverage Edwards did admit to having an affair but still denied being the father of the supposed love child. He accepted responsibility for the affair but not fathering the child. Media tone was negative on the first day and by the second days' worth of coverage Edwards was met with increasingly negative framing tones; the amount of negative framing tones almost quadrupled. The second day happened to be the highest amount of published media coverage concerning Edwards' scandal as well. Articles were woven with sarcasm directed towards Edwards because of the increasing skepticism about the validity of his claims. It was mentioned earlier Edwards only spoke to media outlets because he was pressured to do so and denied further allegations of his level of involvement concerning finances related to Hunter.

²³⁵ David B. Caruso, "No Red Flags in Spitzer Expense Reports," *FOXNews.com*, March 21, 2008, http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_wires/2008Mar21/0,4675,SpitzerTravel,00.html [accessed April 23, 2010]

He demonstrated no concern for his publics and by the latter half of the first weeks' worth of coverage negative framing tones spiked again on August 12, 2008 landing on a Friday; evidenced through many inferences regarding the nature of his personality through adjectives and metaphorical analogies. Many authors and political peers did not support Edwards describing him as being egotistical, dishonest, disingenuous, hypocritical narcissist. Powerful metaphors were used to describe Edwards in a negative fashion by equating him to a "snake oil" salesman and as a villain to the likes of the story of Dorian Gray, a classical literary work. On through to the last week of coverage the negative framing tones remained and more details surfaced about how the cover-up of this crisis was more orchestrated than originally perceived. Duly noted is the fact there was no form of corrective action from Edwards throughout this entire process.

Also noted is FOX News had the highest amount of published content concerning Edwards relative to the other news distribution channels and was tied with the Washington Post for the highest amount of negative framing tones based on the tabulated adjectives. Four of the six news distributors being sampled had an overall negative tone in regards to the coverage except the CNN network and MSNBC. CNN had neither a positive or negative overall tone while MSNBC was the only news outlet to have an overall positive tone in regards to their news coverage.

Spitzer did not minimize negative media framing tones but he might have lessened the damage to his reputation. Furthermore, his career as a politician in the future did not sound as dire Edwards. On the first day of coverage beginning on Friday March 10, 2008, Spitzer took responsibility and demonstrated a concern for his constituents by

confessing to a scandal involving himself and a prostitute. During the next day's worth of coverage facts and jokes about the scandal ruled the majority of content with a negative media tone but some people described Spitzer as being non-difficult, admirable and hardworking. By the third day Spitzer gave his formal resignation statement reiterating his sense of responsibility about the matter and displaying a higher sense of sincerity through more apologies to the public. Strikingly, this also happened to be the day with the most published content about Spitzer. Any positive tones hereafter usually praised the speediness of his resignation as a form of corrective action; however, throughout the remainder of the coverage of the first week an overall negative tone still dominated but started to slope off by the weekend. Throughout the second week media tone was assumed as remaining negative because the analysis yielded no positive or negative tones from the sample until the last two days' worth of coverage. On the second to the last day there was negative tone present in an article; however, on the last day it was offset with an equally positive one. Someone could argue a neutral tone was dominant because no substantive material about the subject was present, much less any character remarks about Spitzer. Moreover, he confronted the crisis head on. Furthermore, Spitzer did not hide from the press and controlled his access to the media masterfully. But most importantly, unlike John Edwards, Spitzer showed a sincere concern for his constituents by being honest and not lying. This might be considered a false positive for Spitzer in regards to the reputation management techniques being applied.

Once again FOX News was in the lead alongside the New York Times this time for the highest amount of published content concerning Spitzer. These two news sources also had the largest and equal amount of negative framing tones relative to the other news

distributors. The other four news distribution channels in Spitzer's sample had half or less the amount of negative framing tones as compared to FOX and the NY Times. The Washington Post was the only news source to have overall positive framing tones throughout their coverage while the Washington Times had no instances of either negative or positive framing tones.

Future Research

Limitations for the Edwards/Spitzer study include sample size, each politician's sample size relative to each other, similar events and the short duration of time analyzed in the response to the crisis. Likewise, research may focus on a larger sample size longitudinally which may provide a greater understanding of media frame, further define reputation and other variables. Research may also examine the media framing of different types of reputations, from political to business to personal to see how frames are built and/or modified. Furthermore, research could focus on finding different measures of reputations and the effect crises have on them; such as using stock pricing against a company or a celebrity with their own branded goods/services as a measure of brand equity or one's reputation as an asset during a crisis. Additional research may study the elasticity of media framing tones to help see rates of changes within the tones. H1 is supported through anecdotal evidence when comparing each politician's respective sample analyses. H2 is not supported because media framing tones remained negative aggregately for both parties even when Spitzer instituted known reputation management techniques while Edwards did not.

Conclusion

Reputation management is a relatively new area of study with limited research available on this topic. There are some qualitative and quantitative analyses to support the belief that incorporation of reputation management techniques results in more positive media framing in a crisis situation. The purpose of this research was to provide a qualitative analysis of the use of effective reputation management techniques in crisis situations as applied to personal reputations within a political dimension. Not to mention, when media coverage established a positive or negative tone, that tone was carried throughout the remainder of the coverage. Therefore, this research suggests these reputation management techniques are ineffective for improving media framing tones for an individual in a crisis but can still be applied to political figures.

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Appendix

Positive Personality Adjectives

Adaptable, adorable, alert, alluring, adulterous, adventurous, affable, affectionate, agreeable, ambitious, amiable, amicable, amusing, brave, boundless, bright, brilliant, broad-minded, calm, capable, cheerful, coherent, comfortable, careful, charming, communicative, compassionate, confident, cooperative, conscientious, considerate, convivial, courageous, courteous, creative, credible, cultured, dashing, dazzling, debonair, decorous, delightful, detailed, decisive, determined, diligent, diplomatic, discreet, dynamic, easygoing, eager, ebullient, efficient, elated, eminent, enchanting, encouraging, enduring, entertaining, excellent, excited, exclusive, emotional, energetic, enthusiastic, ethical, extroverted, exuberant, fair-minded, fabulous, fine, faithful, fearless, forthright, frank, friendly, funny, generous, glorious, gentle, good, great, grateful, gregarious, hard-working, happy, harmonious, hilarious, helpful, honest, humorous, idyllic, imaginative, impartial, incorruptible, independent, industrious, instinctive, intellectual, intelligent, intuitive, inventive, jolly, joyous, kind, kind-hearted, knowledgeable, law-abiding, level, likeable, lively, loving, loyal, lucky, mature, modern, modest, neat, nice, obedient, optimistic, painstaking, passionate, patient, persistent, perfect, peaceful, pioneering, philosophical, placid, plausible, pleasant, plucky, polite, practical, pro-active, productive, protective, proud, punctual, quick-witted, quiet, rational, receptive, reflective, relieved, resolute, responsible, rhetorical, righteous, respectful, reliable, reserved, resourceful, romantic, self-confident, sedate, seemingly, selective, self-assured, self-disciplined, sensible, sensitive, shrewd, shy, sincere, skillful, smiling, splendid, steadfast, stimulating, successful, succinct, sociable, straightforward, sympathetic, talented, thoughtful, thrifty, tidy, trustworthy, unassuming, unbiased, upbeat, understanding, versatile, vigorous, virtuous, vivacious, warmhearted, willing, wise, witty, wonderful, zany, zealous

Negative Personality Adjectives

Aggressive, abrasive, abrupt, abusive, afraid, aloof, arrogant, awful, ashamed, ambiguous, angry, annoyed, anxious, audacious, bad, belligerent, bewildered, boorish, bored, big-headed, bitchy, boastful, bone-idle, boring, bossy, callous, cantankerous, careless, changeable, clinging, compulsive, combative, confused, contentious, clumsy, conservative, corrupt, cowardly, cruel, creepy, crazy, cunning, cynical, dangerous, deceitful, defeated, defective, defiant, demonic, depressed, deranged, disagreeable, disgraceful, disillusioned, disturbed, detached, dishonest, disloyal, dogmatic, domineering, draconian, egocentric, embarrassed, envious, erratic, evasive, evil, faded, fanatical, finicky, fierce, filthy, flirtatious, flippant, flashy, foolish, foolhardy, forgetful, frantic, fretful, frightened, frivolous, furtive, fussy, grave, greedy, grieving, grouchy, gruesome, grumpy, gullible, harsh, headstrong, helpless, hesitant, homeless, horrible, hungry, hurt, hypocritical, ignorant, ignominious, ill, immoral, irresolute, impatient, impolite, impulsive, inconsiderate, inconsistent, indecisive, indiscreet, inflexible, intemperate, interfering, intolerant, introverted, irresponsible, invective, jealous, jittery,

lazy, lonely, lacking, malicious, materialistic, mean, miserly, misleading, moody, mysterious, narrow-minded, narcissistic, naïve, nasty, naughty, nervous, noisy, obsessive, obstinate, overcritical, overemotional, obnoxious, outrageous, overzealous, panicky, pathetic, parsimonious, patronizing, perverse, pessimistic, pompous, possessive, pusillanimous, quarrelsome, quick-tempered, reckless, resentful, repulsive, rude, ruthless, sanctimonious, sarcastic, sad, scary, secretive, selfish, self-centered, self-destructive, self-indulgent, shaky, slow, sneaky, snobbish, sore, spendthrift, squeamish, stingy, stubborn, stupid, superficial, strange, sulky, suspicious, tactless, temperamental, tense, terrible, testy, timid, tired, threatening, tight, tiresome, troubled, touchy, thoughtless, truculent, typical, undesirable, unsuitable, unsure, upset, unethical, unfaithful, unforgiving, uptight, unkind, unpredictable, unreliable, unsuccessful, untidy, untrustworthy, vague, vain, venomous, volatile, voracious, vengeful, vulgar, wary, wasteful, weak, weary, wicked, worried, worthless, wretched