

RESEARCH PAPER: The 2008 South Ossetia war: A content analysis of image restoration strategies used by the Russian government

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This study analyzed communication efforts of the Russian government during the recent war in South Ossetia, using image restoration theory by William Benoit. Image restoration theory describes communication options available for organizations or people whose reputation is threatened.

The present study used quantitative and qualitative content analysis to investigate the use of image restoration strategies in press releases issued by the Russian Federation's Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Emergency Situation as disseminated through the official website of the Ministry of Defense. The study also analyzed how the use of these strategies changed over time during the conflict.

All occurrences of Benoit's image restoration strategies found in press releases were coded. These strategies included denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing of offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification, each of them included subcategories.

The study findings demonstrated that the Russian government relied heavily on the reducing offensiveness strategy, specifically, on such individual subcategories as attacking accuser and compensation. In the early stages of the conflict Russian officials also utilized the denial strategy, whereas during the middle stage of the conflict the Russian government emphasized corrective action. After the ceasefire agreement was signed, compensation gained in popularity.

The one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was run to examine the differences between the preferences in image restoration strategy across three stages of the conflict. It revealed statistically significant differences between the choice of image restoration strategy at different stages of the conflict.