# Image Restoration and Transitivity in BP's Press Releases during the Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill Crisis:

## A comparative study of BP's press releases before and after Barack Obama's first Oval Office address

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This thesis examines the multinational oil and gas company BP's press releases during the Gulf of Mexico oil spill crisis in 2010. The Gulf of Mexico oil spill had vast economic and environmental effects which remain visible to this day. While the crisis was ongoing, BP faced an extensive public relations crisis which threatened the company's public image. None of the parties involved in the drilling operation were ready to take responsibility for the oil spill. However, on the 15th of June 2010 Barack Obama held his first Oval Office address in which he explicitly blamed BP for the Gulf of Mexico oil spill. The importance of Obama's involvement forms the third research question of the thesis and is not to be understated.

The thesis answers three main questions: 1) what types of strategies did BP employ in their press releases to improve or defend their public image, 2) how did BP portray itself, others, and the oil spill itself within those strategies, and 3) how did those strategies change after Barack Obama explicitly placed blame and responsibility for the oil spill on to BP. The thesis employs William Benoit's Image Restoration Theory to analyze and categorize image restoration strategies used by BP. M.A.K Halliday's transitivity theory is used to reveal how BP's linguistic choices attempted to influence how the oil spill and the parties involved are perceived.

The thesis analyzed a total of 36 press releases, 18 from the time period immediately after the explosion of the Deepwater Horizon and 18 after Barack Obama's first Oval Office address. The analysis found that BP greatly emphasized the use of *bolstering*, *compensation* and *corrective action* as image restoration strategies. The transitivity analysis revealed that BP emphasized portraying itself as the *actor*, taking concrete actions towards fixing the issue at hand. The transitivity analysis also revealed the importance of the grammatically optional *circumstances*, meaning adverbial groups or prepositional phrases providing additional information, in fulfilling or strengthening the image restoration strategies used by BP. In addition, the comparative analysis revealed that Barack Obama's involvement had a direct effect on BP's use of image restoration strategies within the press releases. After Obama assigned blame to BP, BP's use of *compensation* increased significantly while *excuses*, *denials* and *shifting blame* decreased.

Further research could be conducted on how other important events, for example the release of an official government report on the oil spill, affected BP's choices of image restoration strategies. In addition, the importance of the optional *circumstance* in enabling and fulfilling image restoration strategies opens possible new avenues for research.

Key words:

Image Restoration Theory, transitivity, BP, Gulf of Mexico oil spill, press release, public relations, public relations crisis

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# 1  Introduction

On the 20th of April in 2010, in the Gulf of Mexico, an explosion that took eleven lives led to an oil spill that would ultimately become what is believed to be the oil industry's worst marine oil spill in history. The explosion happened on the BP-operated Macondo prospect, an exploration well drilling deep into the ocean floor in search of oil. While the states, communities and locals of the Gulf coast faced the environmental and economic effects of the disaster, BP, formerly known as British Petroleum, faced an immense public relations challenge as they scrambled to respond to the disaster and the accusations and attacks made against them. One of the most public accusations toward BP occurred on the 15th of June when the President of the United States at that time, Barack Obama, gave his first Oval Office address in which he explicitly assigned blame for the oil spill to BP.

BP tackled the public relations crisis on many fronts, frequently employing press releases, Facebook posts, Twitter tweets, Flickr images, YouTube videos, and television commercials. Although BP used several different platforms to attempt to work on their public image, this thesis will concentrate solely on press releases as they hold a somewhat official status and are heavily relied upon by journalists when writing news material (Catenaccio 2008: 9). As such, press releases offer a possible way to influence or attempt to influence how something is reported about, which ultimately affects how people come to perceive reality.

This thesis sets out to answer the following questions:

1. What types of strategies are employed by BP in their press releases to positively influence their public image?
2. What types of linguistic choices did BP make within those strategies to attempt to influence how the oil spill and the parties involved were portrayed?
3. After Barack Obama publically assigned blame for the oil spill to BP, how did BP's strategies for improving their public image and the linguistic choices within those strategies change?

To answer the first research question, this thesis employs William Benoit's Image Restoration Theory to recognize and categorize the various different types of image restoration strategies, which are strategies that can be employed in a situation where image and reputation has been damaged, found within BP's press releases during the oil spill. Image Restoration Theory and the different image restoration strategies are discussed in detail in sections 4.1 and 4.2. In addition to Benoit's Image Restoration framework, transitivity analysis, which refers to the analysis of different process, participant and circumstance types, is employed to further examine and analyze the linguistic choices made within the occurrences of image restoration strategies that were used by BP. Detailed discussion of transitivity can be found in section 4.3. The analysis of this thesis will reveal what types of image restoration strategies were used by BP, and how BP's linguistic choices within those strategies attempted to influence how BP itself, the oil spill, and other parties involved were portrayed.

In addition to identifying the image restoration strategies and transitivity constructs within those strategies, this thesis sets out to determine if Barack Obama's first Oval Office address, and the public assignment of blame on BP within it, had an impact on BP's image restoration strategies and the transitivity choices made within those image restoration strategies. Obama's Oval Office address was chosen as a pivotal point in BP's public relations crisis because of the position of authority Obama held as President, as well as the immense amount of people who were reached by the Oval Office address. The involvement and statements made by Obama are not to be underestimated, and thus the hypothesis for the third research question is that Obama's involvement had an effect on what types of image restoration strategies and transitivity constructs BP used in their press releases.

This thesis will first introduce the relevant background of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill and this thesis in section 2. The background introduces BP as a company, the disaster itself, as well as press releases as a genre. The theoretical frameworks of Image Restoration Theory and transitivity are then examined in detail in section 3 before discussing the data and methodology of the analysis in sections 4 and 5. Section 6 will present the findings and results of the analyses, starting from the results of the image restoration analysis

followed by the results of the transitivity analysis. Lastly, the results of the comparative analysis conducted between BP's press releases from immediately after the explosion before Obama's Oval Office address and those press releases published after Obama's Oval Office address are examined and discussed. The results of the analysis are then viewed and discussed in relation to previous research in section 7. Section 8 briefly discusses the limitations of this study before concluding the thesis in section 9.

# 2 Background

This section will provide the necessary context and background for the thesis. First, BP and the Gulf of Mexico oil spill are discussed. Second, the environmental and economic effects of the oil spill are briefly examined, after which the importance of Obama's first Oval Office address in assigning blame of the crisis is discussed. Lastly, the features, functions and role of press releases as a genre are considered.

## 2.1 BP and the Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill

BP, which formerly went by the name British Petroleum, was founded in 1908 following the discovery of oil in Persia. For decades the company focused on crude oil from Iran and nearby Middle Eastern countries. However, by the 1990's BP had been excluded from the Middle East and had begun to concentrate on the Gulf of Mexico (National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling 2011: 45). Advances in drilling technology made it possible for BP to explore prospects in deeper waters than before. In March 2008, BP bought an exclusive lease for $34 million from the Minerals Management Service to drill in the Mississippi Canyon block 252 in the Gulf of Mexico. BP's plan was to drill their first well, Macondo, to 6157 meters to discover more about the geology of the area and because BP believed that it might find an oil or gas reservoir. Two years later, BP, along with its partners and contractors, would be facing liability for the blowout of the Macondo well which resulted in the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill on April 20 in 2010 (National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling 2011: 45).

The National Commission found that a number of separate risk factors, oversights, and mistakes combined together and overwhelmed the safety and security measures that were in place to prevent such an event from happening. However, the report by the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling states that most of the mistakes and oversights at the Macondo well can be traced back to an underlying failure of management (2011: 90). The Commission's report states that better

management by BP, Halliburton and Transocean would most likely have prevented the Macondo well blowout and the subsequent environmental disaster (2011: 90).

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, multiple parties were involved in the operation of the Macondo well and it is important to establish their respective roles. BP became the operator of all activities on block 252 after having purchased the right to drill in that particular block. BP did not own the drilling rigs nor did BP operate them in the sense that the physical act of drilling was done by contractors from Transocean, a common industry practice (National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling 2011: 92). BP designed the well and specified in detail how it should be drilled while Transocean provided BP with a rig and a crew to run it. Two BP site leaders would remain on site and manage the crew and contractors while remaining in contact with BP engineers onshore. Although other companies and partners were involved in the operation, the key contractors were Transocean and Halliburton. In addition, Anadarko Petroleum owned a 25% non-operating minority interest and was thus also affected by the oil spill (National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling 2011: 92). In light of the National Commission's report, it can be stated that BP, in its operating role, was responsible for the Gulf of Mexico oil spill. Next, the causes and consequences of the Macondo well blowout and the ensuing oil spill are discussed.

At 9:49 pm on April 20 in 2010, mud and gas overwhelmed the drilling and security systems in place on the Deepwater Horizon by building up pressure a Transocean representative described as "a 550-ton freight train hitting the rig floor" which ultimately led to ignition and an explosion that killed 11 rig employees (National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling 2011: 114). Although several factors combined led to the explosion, the immediate cause for the well blowout and explosion was determined to be the failure to contain hydrocarbon pressures in the well. Three things could or should have prevented the pressure from rising to such an extent: the cement at the bottom of the well, the blowout preventer, and mud in the well. Each of these potential safeguards were compromised by mistakes and the failure to appreciate the risks involved with drilling (National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling 2011: 115).

Once the initial explosion took place, marking the beginning of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill crisis, so did BP's media crisis begin. The amount of press releases issued by BP exploded compared to the amount of press releases made during the same year prior to the disaster. Despite the immense increase of press releases, the media crisis BP faced was spread across many different platforms, each playing an important role in BP's public image response to the natural disaster and media crisis. Studies concerning BP's response on other media platforms, for example on Twitter and Facebook, are further discussed in section 7.

## 2.2 Environmental and Economic Impact of the Oil Spill

The initial environmental impact of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill was disastrous. The spill resulted in oil ultimately covering more than 112 000 square kilometers on the ocean's surface, leading to oil on 211 kilometers of shoreline spread across five different states (Beyer et al. 2016: 45). The oil was toxic to various organisms and caused multiple negative effects such as disease, reduced growth, impaired reproduction, impaired physiological health, and mortality. Both oil exposure as well as the spill response actions caused injuries to a wide range of species, habitats and ecological functions (Beyer et al. 2016: 45). Shorebirds, sea turtles, dolphins, deep-sea corals, deep ocean-bottom habitats, salt marsh ecosystems, nearshore seagrass areas, nearshore fish, as well as shoreline sediments and beach sand habitats all suffered greatly from the Gulf of Meixoc oil spill (Beyer et al. 2016: 45). Almost half (48%) of all Gulf Coast residents felt that the environmental damage was the most serious result of the oil spill (Ulrich 2011: 1). In 2018, a comprehensive study of the effect of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill on microbiomes found that at sites closer to the oil spill, there were fewer microbes and less biodiversity (Hamdan et al. 2018). The results of the study conducted by Hamdan et al. reveal how the effects of the oil spill remain visible to this day. It is also worth noting, that the severity of the situation is not restricted solely to areas in proximity of the oil spill site as microbes act to regulate carbon in the atmosphere.

The devastation caused by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill was not limited to the environment. It is estimated that the commercial fishing industry of the Gulf of Mexico lost $247 million due to fisheries closing after the oil spill (Natural Resources Defense Council

2015: 2). The overall impact of lost or weakened fisheries in the Gulf was projected to add up to $8.7 billion by the year 2020 with the possible loss of 22,000 jobs over the same period of time. By the end of 2013, the loss of tourism dollars for the Gulf coast economy was estimated at $22.7 billion (Natural Resources Defense Council 2015: 2).

The consequences of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill were so serious that they caused Barack Obama to take further measures by signing an executive order, making comprehensive reforms to offshore oil and gas regulation in attempt to promote the environmental conservation of oceans and lakes. Since June 2018, the executive order put forth by Barack Obama has been revoked and replaced by President Donald Trump, effectively destroying all Obama's attempts to transition to a perspective and reality where environment comes first, business second. For the purposes of this study, however, Obama's involvement in the form of his first Oval Office address is of more importance.

## 2.3   Barack Obama's First Oval Office Address

The significance of Barack Obama's first Oval Office Address cannot be overstated in the assigning of blame and responsibility for the Gulf of Mexico oil spill crisis. The Oval Office address is a speech made by the active President of the United States from the White House. Typically an Oval Office address is made only during times of national emergency, to announce a new major policy or initiative, or when a President steps down from office. As such, the Oval Office address is considered a serious matter. When Barack Obama made his first Oval Office address, he effectively established the Gulf of Mexico oil spill crisis as a matter of national emergency. The importance of Barack Obama's first Oval Office address is heightened because it is rare for the President to give an Oval Office address as early into their presidency as Barack Obama did.

Obama's first Oval Office address marks a significant shift or moment concerning where responsibility and blame for the Gulf of Mexico oil spill lay. As perhaps the highest authority figure of the United States, during primetime television through one of the most highly televised events, Obama explicitly laid blame for the Gulf of Mexico oil spill on BP (The Obama White House 2010). Obama's assignment of blame to BP can be seen in the following quote:

"But make no mistake: We will fight this spill with everything we've got for as long as it takes. We will make BP pay for the damage their company has caused. And we will do whatever's necessary to help the Gulf Coast and its people recover from this tragedy." – Barack Obama 2010

Barack Obama's statement about making BP pay is not only an explicit but somewhat aggressive attack against BP and BP's public image. As stated in the third research question, this thesis sets out to compare the strategies and linguistic choices employed by BP in the press releases immediately after the oil spill but prior to Obama's address and the press releases made after Obama assigned blame to BP. The hypothesis for that particular research question is that Obama's first Oval Office address would have been impactful enough to cause BP to change or shift their use of image restoration strategies in response or as a result of Obama's address.

## 2.4   Press Releases as a Genre

First, the features, role and importance of press releases are discussed, after which the press releases that were analyzed for the purposes of this thesis are discuss. Press releases combine informative and promotional aspects to perform both informative and promotional functions. The combination of informative and promotional aspects in the press release was addressed by Fairclough (as cited in Catenaccio 2008: 13) when he referred to press releases as a "hybrid genre". The hybridity of press releases refers to the fact that in order to fulfill their function and be successful, press releases need to be informative enough to not be viewed as strictly promotional, but promotional enough to have a positive influence on public image. As such, press releases must strike a balance between informational and promotional components. They are relatively short texts which are targeted at the general public through different media outlets. Press releases generally follow a somewhat standardized textual form and attempt to transfer positively connoted corporate or institutional information through the press, to the general public (Catenaccio 2008: 13). Because the most common goal of press releases is to be published as news, press releases must contain enough information to be seen as news while still promoting the "self" without being conspicuously promotional. The entire concept of press releases is based on the idea that third-party support and advocacy is

the best form of publicity (Catenaccio 2008:11). Although some journalists might view press releases as badly written promotional material, press releases remain heavily relied upon and remain an important source of information for news outlets (Catenaccio 2008: 9).

The role of press releases in today's world is sometimes under fire, some considering press releases to be old fashioned and less prevalent during the era of the internet and various different media and social media platforms. However, even press releases can come in different forms. Although the traditional press release found in a newspaper might be rare, press releases through company websites are still prevalent, and as Catenaccio mentioned, heavily relied upon when writing news material (Catenaccio 2008: 9). It is also worth mentioning, that the case of BP's Gulf of Mexico oil spill differs greatly from normal, day to day public relations because of the possible repercussions and the sheer amount and speed of events unfolding after the well blowout. The choice of press releases as valuable data is further justified by a study conducted by Kleinnijenhuis et al. in 2015. Kleinnijenhuis et al. analyzed the amount of news, BP's press releases, trade volume, share price, and public awareness in relation to each other during the Gulf of Mexico oil spill crisis. The study found that the amount of daily U.S news coverage about BP followed BP's press releases, trade volume and share price. Trade volume and share price were in turn affected by BP's press releases (Kleinnijenhuis et al 2015: 422-423).

Although the press releases analyzed in this thesis are from the time of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill crisis, it is worth mentioning the frequency and nature of BP's press releases prior to the crisis. From the beginning of January 2010 up until the Gulf of Mexico crisis on the 20th of April during the same year, BP had issued only nine press releases. The scarcity of press releases prior to the oil spill only highlights the role of press releases during the crisis. The topics of the press releases prior to the oil spill during the same year ranged from plans to improve financial performance to new operations in Brazil to new Board members. It is worth noting that prior to the well blowout in the Gulf of Mexico, not a single press release made during 2010 was concerned with the operation in the Gulf of Mexico.

# 3  Theoretical Framework

This section will begin by introducing the framework of William Benoit's Image Restoration Theory which is used as the first layer of the analysis. First, the foundations and key assumptions of Image Restoration Theory are introduced, after which the typologies of image restoration strategies are discussed in section 3.2. Section 3.3 introduces and discusses the transitivity framework which forms the basis for the second layer of the analysis.

## 3.1  Image Restoration Theory

Image Restoration Theory is William Benoit's theoretical framework for understanding and describing image restoration situations. Benoit originally outlined the theory in 1995 in his book titled Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: A Theory of Image Restoration Strategies. In 2014, Benoit published a second edition of the book titled Accounts, Excuses and Apologies: Image restoration Theories and Research. According to Benoit (2014), an image restoration situation emerges when a person, organization, or institution accuses another of wrongdoing, and the accused party reacts to the accusation and attempts to produce a message to repair that image (Benoit 2014: 13). Although the basic premise of an image restoration situation is simple, they may become more complex in various ways. The image restoration situation may become more complicated when, for example, multiple alleged offenders are involved in the situation. It is also possible that the alleged victim is not the attacker in an image restoration situation (Benoit 2014: 13). An example of such a case is when the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids employed newspaper advertisements to attack the entire tobacco industry instead of a certain tobacco company (Benoit & Harhcock 2009). In this situation, the alleged victims are not acting as the accusers and the accusations are directed toward an entire industry, and as such toward multiple companies. In some situations, a person or organization might defend another. Benoit refers to this as third party image restoration (Benoit 2014: 13). Benoit also notes that sometimes image restoration is motivated by suspicions rather than outright accusations. Thus, image restoration discourse can also be used preemptively in an attempt to prevent accusations (Benoit 2014: 13).

The foundation of image restoration theory is grounded in two key assumptions. The first key assumption is that communication is a goal-driven activity, an assumption that can also be found in Halliday's work *Explorations in the Functions of Language* (1973). Benoit acknowledges that this is quite a broad assumption and notes that communicators might have multiple goals which might not be completely compatible with each other. Motives, purpose and intent can also be unclear, even to the communicator themselves. Even if a communicator's goals are clear, the goal may not be apparent or easily identified by others (Benoit 2014: 16). Regarding the first assumption, Benoit concludes that communication should be thought of as an instrumental activity and that communicative acts are used to achieve the goals of the communicator (2014: 16). Benoit does add, however, that people do not always apply the same amount of attention or energy to every communicative event or utterance, and that some behavior is more automatic than controlled (2014: 16). Image Restoration Theory's first key assumption, that communication is a goal-driven activity, can be connected to the goal-driven nature of the press release as a genre. Although the press release is a mix of informational and promotional, the informational aspect could be seen as a component that enables the goal which is the promotional aspect. Thus, we can see image restoration strategies as functioning towards fulfilling the promotional aspect and function of press releases. It is important to note, that like press releases, image restoration strategies may also use the informational function to fulfill or strengthen the promotional function.

The second key assumption of image restoration theory is that one of the central goals of communication is maintaining a positive reputation and image (Benoit 2014: 14). The need for discourse designed to enhance our positive image is the result of human beings unavoidably engaging in behavior that makes us vulnerable or open to attack (Benoit 2014: 17). This type of behavior or event is inevitable because of finite resources, external events, human error and conflicting interests. When these conflicts, mistakes or misdeeds occur, actors worry that others will think less of them. It is thought that this threat to image is increased as responsibility increases (Benoit 2014: 18). Being vulnerable to criticism eventually leads to guilt and outside threats to our face. As Erving Goffman (1967: 27) explains, "When a face has been threatened, face-work must be done." Reputation or face is a crucial commodity because it is vital in maintaining a positive self-image.

Shlenker (1980) explains the variety of undesirable consequences of problematic events and threats to face: "The more severe a predicament is, the greater the negative repercussions for the actor. The actor should experience greater internal distress such as anxiety and guilt, receive greater sanctions from audiences, and produce greater damage to his or her identity—thereby adversely affecting relationships with the audience (Shlenker 1980: 131).

Another reason the speaker's prior reputation and credibility is important is that it influences the effectiveness of discourse. People are more inclined to listen to or believe someone with a good reputation. As such, reputation and face are critical in facilitating persuasiveness (Benoit 2014: 19). The importance of one's face, image or reputation results in explanations, apologies, justifications, defenses, rationalizations, or excuses in situations where our reputation is being threatened (Benoit 2014: 19). Because blame and criticism occurs in all human society, this need to maintain one's reputation through discourse occurs in all our lives, both private and public (Benoit 2014: 19-20).

Image restoration messages and discourse focus particularly on repairing one's reputation. However, repairing one's reputation might not always be the only goal, or even the most important goal for a specific organization or person in a particular situation (Benoit 2014: 20). For example, a corporation accused of wrongdoing might be more concerned with avoiding criminal charges or a lawsuit, in which case they might opt to not apologize and thus attempt to avoid responsibility. Pomerantz (1978) explains the two elements that an attack on one's image or reputation is comprised of:

1. An act occurred that is undesirable
2. You are responsible for that action

The reputation of the accused is under threat only if both conditions 1 and 2 are perceived to be true by the audience. Also, the accused itself must perceive that the audience believes the two conditions to be true. Only then is the accused likely to employ image restoration discourse (Benoit 2014: 20). It is important to note the importance of perceptions. Whether or not the accused is actually responsible for an offensive act is not as important as if the relevant audience thinks that an offensive act has occurred and that the accused should be blamed for it (Benoit 2014: 20). Responsibility for an act can take

several different forms. One may have performed an action, allowed an action to be performed, encouraged others to act or aided an action (Benoit 2014: 21-22). Similar to how the undesirability of an action exists on a continuum, blame is not always be a simple true or false proposition. If more than one party contributed to an undesirable action or event we might distribute blame among them. Furthermore, Benoit adds that people usually hold others more accountable for actions that were intended and less responsible for events or effects that were either accidental or unexpected (Benoit 2014: 22).

Benoit's Image Restoration Theory has been employed for the analysis of image restoration strategies used by corporations, institutions and individuals. Benoit himself, for example, has employed Image Restoration Theory to analyze image restoration strategies used by the Dow Corning Chemical Company, USAir, and the oil and gas company Texaco. Although Image Restoration Theory has been commonly employed to analyze the image restoration strategies used by companies, Benoit has also employed the framework to analyze the actor Hugh Grant's image repair discourse as well as the controversy around Tonya Harding, a former competitive figure skater whose ex-husband hired two men to assault Harding's teammate. Although Image Restoration Theory has been successfully employed for the analysis of a variety of different situations, the emphasis of its use has been on corporate discourse, which further substantiates its suitability for the purposes of this thesis.

Benoit's Image Restoration Theory has been criticized and built upon by Timothy Coombs (1995), who established his own crisis communication theory named Situational Crisis Communication Theory. However, Benoit's Image Restoration Theory is more suitable for the purposes of this thesis for the exact reasons it is criticized by Coombs (1995) and Situational Crisis Communication Theory. Where Image Restoration Theory simply defines and describes image restoration strategies, Situational Crisis Communication Theory aims to prescribe appropriate image restoration strategies for certain situations, as is visible from the title of Coombs's work "Choosing the Right Words: The Development of Guidelines for the Selection of Appropriate Crisis-Response Strategies" from 1995. Situational Crisis Communication Theory provides guidelines as to what image restoration strategy would be most appropriate for each kind of crisis situation (Coombs

1995: 454-455). As this thesis sets out to examine and describe in detail what types of image restoration strategies are used, instead of determining what strategies should be used, Benoit's framework is more suitable for the purposes of this thesis.

## 3.2   Typology of Image Restoration Strategies

Benoit (2014) organizes image restoration strategies into five categories: *denial*, *evasion of responsibility*, *reducing offensiveness*, *corrective action* and *mortification*. Of these five image restoration categories, all but *corrective action* contain variants or subtypes. This section will now proceed to introduce each category of image restoration strategies, including their subtypes.

Any person, group or company has several options when forced to defend themselves. A strategy of *denial* is for the speaker to simply deny the undesirable action. *Simple denial* can be supplemented with explanations or lack of supporting evidence (Benoit 2014: 22). However, when using *simple denial*, others might then start to wonder "if you didn't do it, then who did?" *Shifting blame* addresses this problem and is considered a variation of *denial* because if someone else committed a desirable act, it could not have been the accused (Benoit 2014: 22). *Shifting blame* provides a new target for any negative feelings the relevant audience might have, thus reflecting and *shifting blame* away from the accused.

If the accused is unable to deny performing an act, they might try to evade responsibility or reduce their apparent responsibility for the act. Benoit presents four variants of *evasion of responsibility*. *Provocation* suggests that the act was carried out in response to another wrongful act which provoked the accused's offensive act in question. If the audience believes the actor was justifiably provoked, responsibility and blame is at least partly placed on the provocateur (Benoit 2014: 23).

A second strategy for *evading responsibility* is *defeasibility*, arguing or pleading lack of knowledge or control over the act. Rather than denying the act, the accused suggests that lack of information or inability to act means that the accused should not be held entirely responsible (Benoit 2014: 23). For example, if a student was late with an essay submission because of his or her computer breaking down, the teacher of the course

might not hold the student completely responsible. If successful, this strategy can reduce the perceived responsibility of the accused (Benoit 2014: 23).

Third, the accused can *make an excuse based on accidents*. Similar to *defeasibility*, making an *excuse based on accidents* does not deny the action, but attempts to reduce perceived responsibility by providing information that may reduce perceived responsibility by persuading the audience that the action was an accident (Benoit 2014: 23). A fourth alternative for *evading responsibility* is suggesting that the wrongful act was *justified and done with good intentions*. People who do something bad while they were trying to dosomething good are usually blamed less than those who intended to do bad all along (Benoit 2014: 23).

Through *reducing offensiveness*, a person, company or institution accused of wrongdoing may attempt to reduce the negative feelings the audience has towards them. This approach to image restoration has six variants: *bolstering*, *minimization*, *differentiation*, *transcendence*, *attacking one's accuser(s)*, and *compensation* (Benoit 2014: 23). Through *bolstering* the accused attempts to mitigate negative effects by strengthening the audience's positive idea or image of the accused. The accused might bring forth positive attributes they possess or positive actions or deeds done in the past. By using *bolstering*, the accused attempts to build new positive feelings in the audience or remind them of earlier, forgotten beliefs (Benoit 2014: 23). Although the guilt from the accusation remains unchanged, increasing the audience's positive feelings in other ways may reduce perceived offensiveness (Benoit 2014: 23). With such a broad definition and goal, *bolstering* can manifest itself in many different ways.

Second, the accused may try to reduce the perceived offensiveness of the act through *minimization*. If the accused is successful in convincing the audience that the act is not as offensive or 'bad' as it might first seem, the amount of negative feeling toward the act is reduced (Benoit 2014: 24). A third possible strategy for *reducing the offensiveness* of an act is *differentiation*. Through *differentiation* the actor attempts to differentiate the act that has been performed from other more offensive acts. In comparison, the act may appear less offensive which in turn might reduce the negative feelings that the relevant audience has toward the act and the actor (Benoit 2014: 24).

Fourth, the actor may use *transcendence. Transcendence* functions by placing the act in a broader, less offensive context. It can also be used to simply suggest a different frame of reference (Benoit 2014: 25). Benoit provides the tale of Robin Hood as an example. When accused of thieving, Robin Hood might say that he acted in order to help the poor (2014: 25). Similarly to the example of Robin Hood, the accused can attempt to justify their wrongdoing by placing it in a more positive context, directing attention to allegedly higher values (Benoit 2014: 25).

Fifth, the accused can choose to *attack their accusers* by attempting to reduce their credibility and trustworthiness. If successful in undermining the source of the accusations, the accusations from that source are also undermined and diminished. The strategy of *attacking accuser* may also divert negative feelings and attention away from the original accusation (Benoit 2014: 25).

The sixth and final strategy of *reducing offensiveness* is *compensation*. With *compensation* the accused offers to compensate their actions to those negatively affected by their act. This may take place in the form of monetary reimbursement or valued goods or services (Benoit 2014: 25). For example, a restaurant might choose to not to bill a customer's dinner as compensation for bad service the customer has experienced. In essence, *compensation* acts in the same way as bribery. If the offered compensation is sufficient, the undesirable act may be outweighed and reputation repaired (Benoit 2014: 25). None of these six strategies of *reducing offensiveness* attempt to deny that the actor has committed a wrongful act, but only seek to diminish the actor's responsibility for the act in question (Benoit 2014: 26).

If using the image restoration strategy of *corrective action*, the accused promises to fix whatever problem or damage the accused's action has caused. This can mean returning a situation to its previous state of affairs or promising to make a change to prevent the recurrence of a similar act. Assurances made by the accused that changes will prevent such an act from happening again could be viewed as a possible component of an apology. However, *corrective action* may be taken without admitting guilt (Benoit 2014: 26). It is important to differentiate between *compensation* and *corrective action*.

*Corrective action* explicitly addresses the actual source of damage while *compensation* attempts to counterbalance rather than correct the damage (Benoit 2014: 26).

Through *mortification* the accused also has the possibility of *taking full responsibility* and apologizing or asking forgiveness for an act. If the relevant audience finds the apology sincere, they may choose to forgive the accused or view the accused more favorably than before the act of apologizing (Benoit 2014: 26). *Mortification* is a complex image restoration strategy because there is no universal agreement as to what exactly an apology must include (Benoit 2014: 26). Apologies themselves are worthy of close inspection. Robin Lakoff (2001), for example, examines what apologies consist of and how they differ from excuses, justifications, and explanations in her work "*Nine ways of looking at apologies: The necessity for interdisciplinary theory and method in discourse analysis"* (2001: 205). The scope of this thesis, however, prevents the analysis from going into such detail regarding apologies.

When considering *mortification*, it is worth noting, that admitting blame risks further damage to reputation because forgiveness from the audience is not certain (Benoit 2014: 26). Because of the built-in risk of accepting blame, many persuaders use ambiguity in language to gain forgiveness without explicitly accepting blame (Benoit 2014: 27). Consider the following apology from a death row inmate convicted of raping a woman and murdering her husband: "*Ms. Connie Hilton, I'm sorry for what happened to you."* (Texas Department of Criminal Justice). This apology might not even be an apology depending on how it is interpreted. In some situations a similar apology might be considered an expression of empathy for what has happened to the victim.

For the purposes of this thesis, and to achieve a level of greater detail in the analysis, an addition has been made to *mortification*. *Taking full responsibility* and explicitly apologizing is a very strong and clear communicative act, one that might not be easily fulfilled, and thus leave many weaker variations of blame acceptance ignored. The accused might, for example, explicitly state that they share or *take some responsibility* for an act. This type of communication act is also important to differentiate from the image restoration strategies belonging to *evasion of responsibility* because, unlike in *evasion of responsibility*, the actor explicitly takes some, though not all, responsibility for the act in

question. The addition of the subtype *takes some responsibility* to *mortification* enables a more detailed and thorough analysis of cases where blame or responsibility might be accepted to some degree.

To conclude this section, there are various different image restoration strategies that can be employed when facing blame or criticism for an offensive act or event. Although the numerous strategies of image restoration function differently, their goal is always the same: to positively influence public image. This is also the overall goal of press releases, and like press releases, image restoration strategies are sometimes covered by a veil of informational aspects. It must also be said, that some sentences have the ability to function as more than one image restoration strategy (see example 1). Next, section 3.3 will present the transitivity framework.

## 3.3 Transitivity

According to Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), grammar has four different metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, textual, and logical (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014: 85). The ideational metafunction includes two metafunctions, the experiential and the logical. The logical metafunction refers to whether clauses are treated as having equal status or one is considered dependent on the other. The logical metafunction also refers to the meanings that join clauses together. Halliday & Matthiessen group the experiential and logical metafunctions together under ideational metafunction because of their close relation. The experiential metafunction refers to grammatical choices that are made to portray and make meaning of the world. According to SFG, through the experiential metafunction grammar takes an active role in constructing or shaping reality. The interpersonal metafunction refers to the idea that people are always talking with others or to others, not solely about something. Thus, the interpersonal metafunction refers to the interpersonal and communicative nature of the use of language. The textual metafunction differs from the experiential and interpersonal metafunctions in the sense that the object of the textual metafunction is language itself. The textual metafunction contains all the grammatical systems that enable language to create meaning. The textual metafunction creates relevance to the context while the logical metafunction constructs logical relations (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014: 85).

It is worth noting, that the metafunctions are merely technical terms, all of which have their own corresponding status in a clause. For the purposes of this thesis, the experiential metafunction is the only metafunction that is used in the analysis of the data. From the experiential perspective, our experiences of reality are revealed through processes or "goings on" such as doing, sensing, happening, being, and having (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014: 211-215). With the processes of representation as a grammatical basis, people build mental pictures of reality through language. This means that people may use language to project their own perception or image of reality in an attempt to influence how other people perceive reality. This goal or attempt to shape or build reality can be connected to the goal-oriented image restoration strategies as well as the promotional aspect and function of press releases. By analyzing the image restoration strategies used by BP from the experiential perspective, we can reveal the linguistic choices BP made in attempt to shape and build reality into a reality that is beneficial to them and their public image. As such, transitivity analysis enables a more detailed analysis of the image restoration strategies used by BP. Transitivity analysis forms the second layer of analysis and reveals the answer to the second research question: what linguistic choices did BP make within the image restoration strategies they employed? Halliday and Matthiessen provide a framework with three components that set up the transitivity of a clause:

1. The process itself (verbal group)
2. Participants in the process (nominal groups)
3. Circumstances that are associated with the process (adverbial group or prepositional phrase).

Processes manifest themselves as verbs or verbal groups and have participants directly involved with them. The amount and type of participants a process can have depends on what type of process it is. In addition, there may also be optional circumstances of, for example, time, space and manner. These processes constitute the transitivity system of language. Speakers and writers make choices within the transitivity system and these linguistic choices, whether conscious or subconscious, reflect their perception or projected image of the world and events taking place around them.

Through transitivity analysis one can explore how language is used to build and shape the world around us. While every clause and process inherently has at least one but up to three participants, circumstantial elements are almost always optional. However, depending on the language there are exceptions. Meteorological processes such as raining and snowing are examples of exceptions of processes that do not require participants in the English language (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014: 219-220). Circumstantial elements, although optional, play an important role in fulfilling the informational function and aspect in a press release.

Halliday further divides processes into six categories based on semantic meaning (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014: 213-220). Explanations for each process type contain an example in which the process can be found underlined.

1. *Material processes*: Refer to processes of action and doing and have an actor and possibly another *material participant*. For example: "BP is assisting Transocean."
2. *Mental processes*: Refer to processes of sensing (perception, affection or cognition). *Mental processes* always have either a human or a personified participant. For example: We expect we will pay […]"
3. *Relational processes*: Refer to processes of being. For example: "Our action plan is safety-focused […]"
4. *Verbal processes*: Refer to processes of saying. For example: "I reiterated my commitment to the White House […]"
5. *Existential processes*: Refer to processes of existing. For example: "There were multiple control mechanisms […]"
6. *Behavioral processes*: Refer to processes of physiological and psychological behavior. For example: "We will not rest […]). *Behavioral processes* are a hybrid process between *material* and *mental processes*, and as such some cases could be understood to be either a *material* or *mental process* depending on the interpreter.

Participant types are also divided further into subtypes. For the most part the subtypes of participants are self-explanatory and their terms reveal their meaning, but brief explanations have been added to those subtypes whose meaning is not evident from the

name. The results of the transitivity analysis in section 6.2 will provide a more detailed account of the participant types.

1. *Material participant*: *Actor*, *goal* (that which is affected by the action), *scope* (that which remains unaffected), *client* (for whom the action occurs), *recipient*.
2. *Mental participant*: *Sensor*, *phenomenon*.
3. *Relational participant*: *Carrier*, *attribute*, *beneficiary*, *token* (the identified subject), *value* (the complement or that which identifies the *token*).
4. *Verbal participants*: *Sayer*, *receiver*, *verbiage* (that which is said).
5. *Existential participant*: *Existent*.
6. *Behavioral participant*: *Behaver*, *behavior*.

*Circumstance* types have been further divided into 11 subtypes. Although Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) include subtypes for these subtypes, the scope and aim of this thesis does not warrant such a multilayered analysis of *circumstance* types. However, a small modification has been made to Halliday's and Matthiessen's (2014) *circumstance* categories in order to accommodate excluding most of the subtypes of the subtypes. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) include *purpose* and *behalf* as separate subtypes for *cause* (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014: 313 – 314). For the aim of this study, *purpose* and *behalf* have been assigned their own categories as subtypes of *circumstance*. They were assigned their own categories because they are different enough in meaning and function to warrant being taken into consideration, while other subtypes of the different *circumstance* types did not contain such a significant variation in meaning and function. Despite this slight alteration of categories, it must be noted that the criteria for *purpose* and *behalf* remain the exactly same as it is outlined by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014). The different *circumstance* types are introduced below (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014: 313 – 314).

1. *Extent*: Gives information about distance, duration and/or frequency.
2. *Location*: Answers the questions when and where. Tells the time and/or place.
3. *Manner*: Answers the question how? Tells about the means, quality, comparison and degree.
4. *Cause*: Answers the question why? Provides a reason.

5. *Contingency*: A condition or concession.

6. *Accompaniment*: Answers the questions who/what with and/or Who/what else?

7. *Role*: Answers the question as what?

8. *Matter*: Answers the question what about?

9. *Purpose*: Answers the question what for?

10. *Behalf*: Answers the question who for?

11. *Angle*: Tells about the source or viewpoint.

To conclude this section, when expressing events, speakers and writers make choices between various processes and participants. Speakers and writers must choose what actions are taken, who is acting and who is being acted upon. In addition to choosing from various types of processes and participants, speakers or writers might also provide optional additional information in the form of circumstances. These linguistic choices are significant because they can signify different ways of perceiving reality or different points of view, either conscious or unconscious (Figueiredo 1999: 101). Because reality or perceived reality can be built or shaped by linguistic choices, these linguistic choices are a tool that can be used to attempt to influence others by portraying matters in a certain way. By incorporating transitivity analysis, this thesis reveals the linguistic choices BP made within the image restoration strategies they used in their press releases during the time of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill crisis.

# 4 Data

During the Gulf of Mexico oil spill crisis BP was active on multiple different media platforms. In addition to relying heavily on press releases, BP employed commercials and was also active on Twitter, Facebook, Flickr and YouTube. Muralidharan, Dillistone and Shin (2011), for example, have analyzed BP's use of image restoration strategies on various social media platforms during the oil spill crisis. Although social media platforms enable faster access to the public, press releases still hold somewhat of an official status and are not limited by character limits such as on Twitter. Press releases are also often directed more towards shareholders and news outlets, attempting to influence how a matter is ultimately reported by the news to the public. As such, the strategies used and linguistic choices made in press releases could have an impact, for better or worse, on how an event is portrayed. How an event is portrayed, in turn, ultimately has an effect on the public's experience and view of the situation.

This thesis analyzed BP's press releases from the months following the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010. The press releases were selected from two different time periods, the first being immediately after the well blowout on April 20 2010 and the second being after former President Barack Obama's first Oval Office address on June 15 2010. The group of press releases that occurred immediately after the explosion will be referred to as the immediate aftermath -group while the group containing press releases from the time period following former President Barack Obama's first Oval Office address will be referred to as post-Obama address -group. The reasoning behind selecting Barack Obama's Oval Office address as a turning point is the effect it had on public awareness and media attention. Kleinnijenhuis et al. (2015) found that Obama's involvement during the crisis directly increased public awareness, as demonstrated by an increase in Google searches for BP (Kleinnijenhuis et al. 2015: 422). In addition, Barack Obama spoke from a position of authority, perhaps the highest possible position of authority in the United States. As such the impact or effect of his words on the general public should not be underestimated.

In total 36 press releases, 18 from both time periods, were analyzed for the purposes of this thesis. The total amount of words analyzed was 13 632, of which 6142 words were from the immediate aftermath -group and 7490 words from the post-Obama address - group. The press releases were chosen by release date, moving in chronological order from the starting dates of both time periods. Press releases that were not related to the events in the Gulf of Mexico as well as mere status updates were, however, not included in the analysis for this thesis. Status updates were ignored because they were very technical by nature, considerably shorter, and repeated or simply added to information given in some of the more substantial press releases. There was no ambiguity in determining which press releases were simply status updates as they were titled "Update on Gulf of Mexico oil spill" while more substantial press releases always had their own titles. Next, section 5 will present the methodology of the analysis.

# 5 Methods

This section will describe the methods and process of the analysis in more detail. First, I established the two time periods from which I examined BP's press releases. The two points in time that came to determine the time frames that were chosen were the explosion of the Macondo well on the April 20 2010 and Barack Obama's first Oval Office address on June 15 2010. These two points in time were chosen because the explosion marked the beginning of the oil spill crisis while Obama's address was pivotal in terms of publicly assigning blame and responsibility of the oil spill to BP.

After having established the two time periods that were to be analyzed, I accessed BP's archives through their website and, in chronological order, selected the first 18 press releases that fulfilled the criteria of this thesis from both time periods. The reasoning behind choosing the first 18 press releases is their chronological proximity to the relevant events. For example the 18 press releases immediately after the explosion took place remain chronologically close to that event, while the 18 press releases after Obama's first Oval Office address are chronologically close to Obama's address. This chronological proximity enables a more clear comparison between the press releases of the two different time periods.

Each press release was saved as a separate text file after which they were incorporated into the UAM CorpusTool (Mick O'Donnel) where they remained separate from each other to create my own corpus. The UAM CorpusTool was chosen over other corpus tools because of its built in ability for the user to create their own, separate layers. Within the UAM CorpusTool, I created layers for the two different time periods (immediate aftermath and post-Obama –address), as well as the Image Restoration Theory framework and the transitivity framework. The separate layers for image restoration strategies and transitivity were created in order to easily extract the image restoration strategies used by BP and to further analyze only those image restoration strategies with the transitivity framework. I began the analysis by first coding the press releases to the appropriate time period, after which I manually annotated each press release for image restoration strategies according to the Image Restoration Theory framework. After having completed the annotation of

image restoration strategies within both time periods, I continued to manually annotate the image restoration strategies that had been found with the transitivity scheme. First, the verbs or verbal groups were matched with their corresponding process type, after which the participants and possible circumstances were annotated. In order to overcome and minimize the possibility of error, a second round of annotations was conducted. To see a sample of the annotations, see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

The transitivity analysis was conducted solely on the image restoration strategies that were found in order to narrow and focus the analysis to image restoration strategies and BP's attempts to influence their public image. Although a transitivity analysis of the press releases in their entirety could be beneficial, the results would mostly reveal features of the press release as a genre because emphasis would be placed on the structure of the entire press release. By narrowing the focus of the transitivity analysis to only the image restoration strategies that were found, emphasis is placed on how BP used transitivity within the image restoration strategies that they used in an attempt to positively influence their public image. This thesis examines transitivity within the image restoration strategies used as a whole, not transitivity within each subtype of image restoration strategy. Because all of the image restoration strategies have the same goal and objective, to positively influence BP's public image, there is no reason to compare transitivity within each subtype of image restoration separately.

It is important to note that many press releases contained significant amounts of quoted text which would be classified as verbiage through the transitivity scheme. For this reason, the contents of *verbiage* that were found inside quotation marks have been further annotated according to the transitivity scheme instead of being disregarded and left merely as *verbiage*. By doing so, a considerable amount of text and image restoration strategies used within quoted *verbiage* were taken into account.

After having completed the annotations of the image restoration strategies and transitivity, I continued to compare and contrast results from the two different time periods through the UAM CorpusTool. The UAM CorpusTool presents comparative results of the annotations through the use of Chi-squared statistics in order to measure the statistical significance of those results. The UAM CorpusTool thus helps reveal the statistical

significance of the changes or shifts in BP's use of image restoration strategies and the transitivity choices made within those strategies between the two time periods. By establishing levels of significance, the Chi-squared test substantiates the results and aids in establishing repeatability of the analysis. The next section will present the results and findings of the analysis.

# 6 Results and Analysis

This section presents the findings and results of the analysis conducted with the aid of the UAM Corpus Tool. First, the results from the analysis of image restoration strategies will be presented followed by the results of the transitivity analysis that was conducted on the image restoration strategies that were found. After having presented the findings of both the image restoration analysis as well as the transitivity analysis, the results of the comparative analysis of both image restoration strategies as well as transitivity between the two time periods are examined. The comparison will determine how BP's discourse strategies shifted and changed after former president Barack Obama explicitly assigned blame and responsibility for the oil spill to BP in his first Oval Office address.

## 6.1 Results for the Image Restoration Analysis

In total, image restoration strategies occurred 207 times throughout the 36 press releases that were analyzed. Out of the 36 press releases 31 contained at least one case of an image restoration strategy. The five press releases that did not contain any occurrences of image restoration strategies were mostly detailed technical accounts or plans describing operations on the well. It is worth reminding, that image restoration strategies are capable of overlap, and one sentence can function, for example, as *bolstering* and *corrective action*. Table 1 displays the amount of each category of image restoration strategies that were used by BP in their press releases during the oil spill crisis.
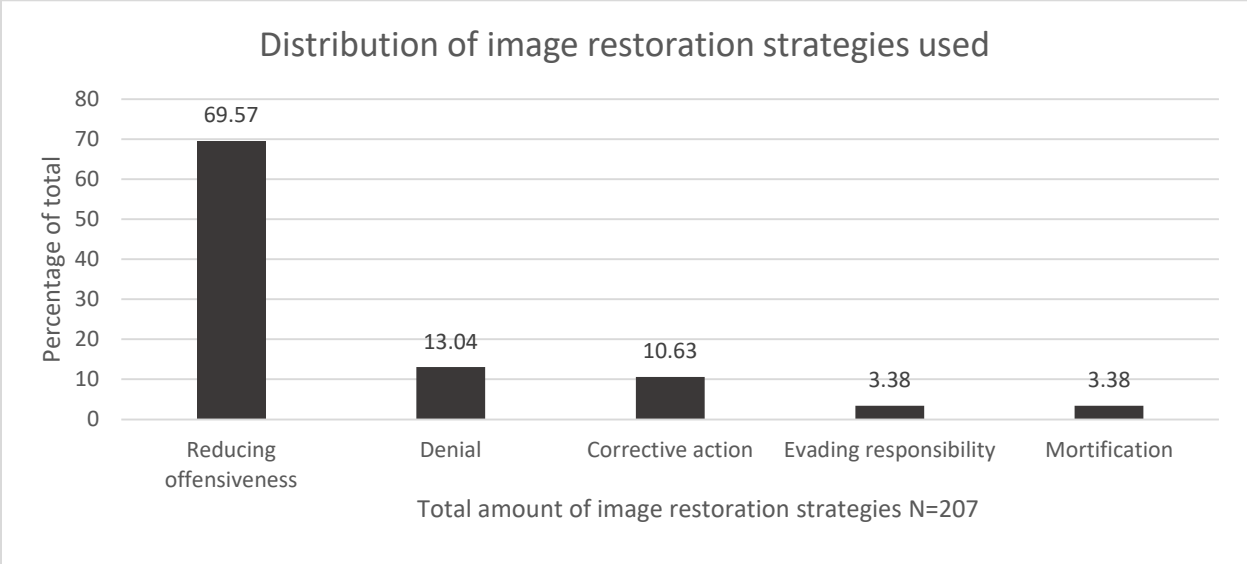
**Table 1** Distribution of image restoration strategies used.

As displayed by table 1, *reducing offensiveness* was overwhelmingly the most frequently used image restoration strategy at 69.57% of all image restoration strategies used. *Denial* and *corrective action* were somewhat frequent at 13.04% and 10.63% respectively. Both *evading responsibility* and *mortification* amounted to only 3.38% of the image restoration strategies used by BP. This section will now continue to examine the use of each image restoration strategy and their subtypes in descending order, starting from *reducing offensiveness*, which was BP's most frequently used image restoration strategy.

### 6.1.1  Reducing Offensiveness

*Reducing offensiveness* was, at 144 occurrences and 69.57%, BP's most used image restoration strategy. Despite being the most used image restoration strategy, *reducing offensiveness* did not contain much variation in the use of its subtypes. The distribution of the use of the different subtypes of *reducing offensiveness* are visualized in table 2.

**Table 2** Distribution of reducing offensiveness –strategies used.

As seen in Table 2, from the 144 cases of *reducing offensiveness*, *bolstering* amounted to 79.86%, *compensation* to 15.97%, *minimi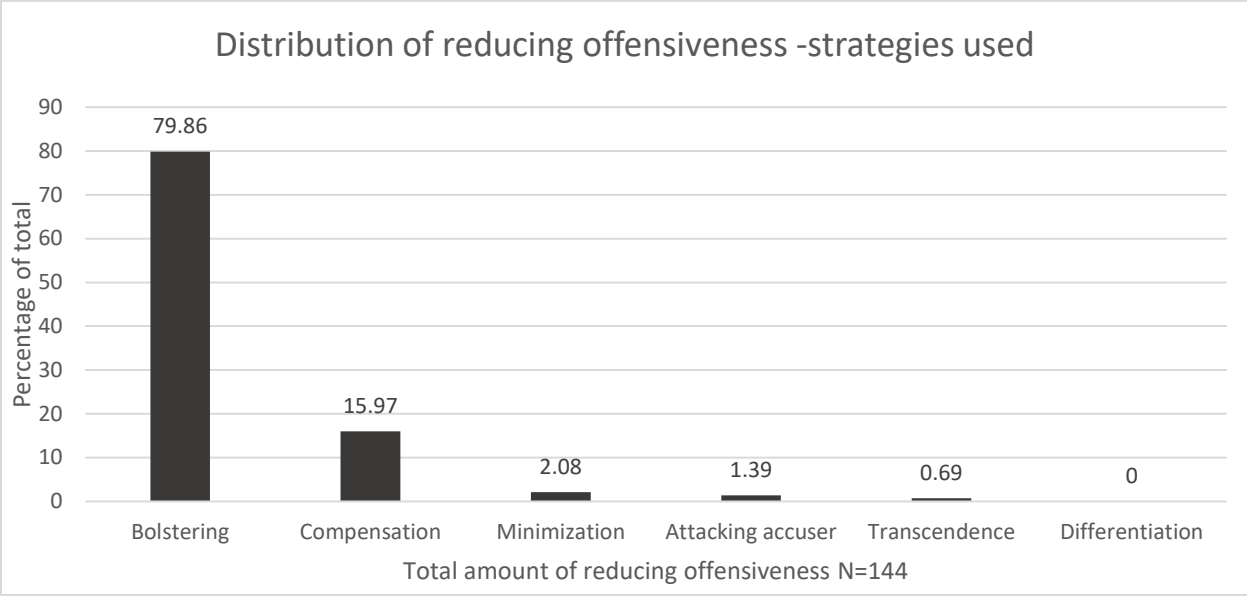zation* to 2.08%, *attacking accuser* to 1.39% occurred *transcendence* to 0.69% of the occurrences of *reducing offensiveness*. *Differentiation* as an image restoration strategy did not occur at all. Considering the nature of the oil spill and the evident severity of such events, it could be considered logical that cases of *minimization* were rare. *Bolstering*, on the other hand, was used extremely frequently as a way for BP to attempt to build a positive image without having to downplay the severity of the oil spill. In addition to *bolstering*, *compensation* in the form of offering payments to those who were economically affected by the oil spill was a common image restoration strategy. Example 1 displays a clear case of *bolstering* while also containing *compensation* toward those who have suffered a loss of income as a result of the oil spill. In addition, by referring to making things right, BP is also employing *corrective action* as an image restoration strategy.

(1) "We will be here for as long as it takes to make things right, and that means providing these advance monthly payments for loss of income to fishermen, crabbers, shrimpers and many others."

In example 1, by stating that they will be present for as long as needed to make things right, BP is promoting a loyal, trustworthy and dependable image of a company that wants

to fix the issue at hand. By promising to make things right, BP is also employing *corrective action*. The *compensation* is found in the form of advanced monthly payments to those who have suffered losses of income. The example also includes the act of *compensation* as one of the things that BP must do to 'make things right' or achieve *corrective action*.

At only three occurrences, minimization amounted to 2.08% of the occurrences of reducing offensiveness, and as such BP's use of *minimization* as an image restoration strategy was rare. One of the three occurrences of *minimization* can be seen in example 2.

> (2) "This, combined with the light, thin oil we are dealing with has further increased our confidence that we can tackle this spill offshore."

In example 2 the quality of the oil is described as light and thin to minimize the perceived threat from the spill and to imply that the issue is not as bad as it might seem to the public. It is worth noting, however, that example 2 was from a press release released only five days after the initial well blowout. It is possible that the severity of the situation was still unknown when the statement was made. If the severity was known it was simply played down through the use of *minimization*.

*Attacking accuser* was infrequent as an image restoration strategy, occurring twice throughout the press releases, adding up to only 1.39% of the occurrences of *reducing offensiveness*. Example 3 displays one of the two occurrences where *attacking the accuser* was used as an image restoration strategy.

> (3) "Anadarko Petroleum Corporation has announced it is refusing to accept responsibility for oil spill removal costs and damages, claiming that, under an exception to a joint operating agreement's cost and liability sharing provisions, BP Exploration & Production Inc. (BPXP) was "grossly negligent" or engaged in "willful misconduct" as operator for Mississippi Canyon, Block 252 (MC252)."

In example 3, Anadarko Petroleum Corporation has made allegations that BP was "grossly negligent" or engaged in "willful misconduct". BP responds to these allegations by attacking back and phrasing Anadarko Corporation's refusal to take any responsibility

for the oil spill costs and damages in a way that shows Anadarko Petroleum Corporation in a negative context. The negativity of the context is somewhat created by the use of the words "refusing" and "claiming". Public arguments between the two parties were most likely harmful, or at the very least not beneficial for either party in terms of creating or strengthening a positive public image. In example 3 Anadarko Petroleum Corporation is the party that has, at least from BP's perspective, initiated the dispute.

At 0.69%, *transcendence* was the most infrequent strategy of reducing offensiveness used by BP in the press releases concerning the oil spill. BP used *transcendence* as an image restoration strategy only once and this sole occurrence is shown in example 4.

> (4) "The platform was successfully maintained through the course of two major hurricanes in 2008."

*Transcendence* meant placing the event, or in this particular case the drilling platform itself, in a different, often less offensive context or time frame. *Transcendence* is used by BP in example 4 to place the platform itself two years back in time into the context of the platform being successfully maintained through two major hurricanes. Through the use of *transcendence*, BP implies that if the platform was able to endure two major hurricanes earlier, the platform is not at fault for the oil spill.

### 6.1.2  Denial

*Denial* occurred a total of 21 times and amounted to 13.04% of all image restoration strategies used by BP. Within the occurrences of *denial*, 77.78% sought to *shift blame* to another party in some way while 22.22% consisted of a *simple denial*. *Shifting blame* was used as an image restoration strategy in various ways, although often by including or connecting other parties to the incident, or by including BP as a responsible party, thus implying there are several responsible parties. Examples 5 and 6 show how BP attempted to *shift blame*.

> (5) "A number of companies are involved, including BP, and it is simply too early – and not up to us – to say who is at fault."
> (6) "BP offers full support to Transocean after drilling rig fire"

In example 5, BP explicitly states that multiple parties, including themselves, are involved in the disaster. By including themselves in the group of parties responsible, BP *shifts blame* and attempts to spread the responsibility among other parties. Example 5 also portrays the assigning of blame as a complicated and ambiguous issue that is difficult to determine. In example 6 on the other hand, BP heavily implies that Transocean is a responsible party by offering them their support. By offering support, BP takes the role of a benefactor and a company willing to help, shining a positive light on themselves. By taking the role of benefactor, BP simultaneously implies that the disaster happened to Transocean as they are the party in need of help. It could be argued, that by offering support, BP is connecting itself with the restoration effort while Transocean is connected to the explosion and fire. By doing so, BP attempts to distance themselves from the explosion which led to the oil spill.

The second subtype of *denial*, *simple denial*, occurred six times and always responded to allegations made against BP as showcased in example 7 and 8.

(7)    "BP today rebutted allegations that its Atlantis platform in the Gulf of Mexico operated with incomplete and inaccurate engineering documents".

(8)    "It is completely erroneous to suggest that the minor internal process issue we identified and immediately amended last year on the Atlantis platform suggests anything different."

In example 7, BP denies the allegations that they operated with incomplete and inaccurate engineering documents. Example 7 is interesting, however, in the sense that the reader cannot be completely sure what is meant by the word choice "rebutted". It could simply mean that BP disagreed with or denied the allegations, or that BP has disproved or refuted the allegations by evidence or argument. In example 8, it can be deduced from the context, that some party has made the allegation that a prior internal process issue might have played a role in what ultimately led to the disaster. BP uses *simple denial* by stating that this suggestion is completely erroneous.

### 6.1.3 Corrective Action

At 22 occurrences, *corrective action* amounted to 10.63% of all occurrences of image restoration strategies and was thus BP's third most used image restoration strategy in the press releases. Despite coming third in terms of frequency, *corrective action* was relatively infrequent in comparison to *reducing offensiveness*. It is worth reminding that *corrective action* as an image restoration strategy and category does not contain any subtypes. In the context of BP's press releases concerning the Gulf of Mexico oil spill, cases of *corrective action* did not contain much variation. Examples 9 and 10 display how BP used *corrective action* as an image restoration strategy.

> (9)  "'We are determined to do everything in our power to contain this oil spill and resolve the situation as rapidly, safely and effectively as possible', said group executive Tony Hayward".
>
> (10)  "As an industry, we must participate fully in these investigations and not rest until the causes of this tragedy are known and measures are taken to see that it never happens again."

Example 9 is a prime example of what *corrective action* as an image restoration strategy looked like in BP's press releases. In example 9, the *corrective action* itself would be BP doing everything in their power to resolve the situation. In example 10, the *corrective action* would be participating in the investigations and taking measures to make sure a similar disaster never happens again. All cases of *corrective action* found followed similar trends and concentrated on resolving the issue at hand by stopping the flow of oil and preventing or repairing damage done to the environment. Two occurrences of *corrective action*, including example 10, discussed making sure something similar would never happen again.

### 6.1.4 Evading Responsibility

*Evading responsibility* amounted to only 3.38% of the total of the 207 occurrences of image restoration strategies found throughout the press releases. *Evading responsibility* was not a varied category, all of the occurrences of *evading responsibility* were *excuses based on accidents*. *Provocation* as an image restoration strategy, meaning claiming the

act was in response to another offensive act, was absent in BP's press releases. The absence of *provocation* is not surprising considering that the well blowout and following oil spill were results of several actions or inactions but was not an act in itself. Additionally, there was also no real provocateur in the scenario to enable the use of provocation. *Defeasibility*, on the other hand, could have been used in the situation but was not. One could argue that pleading lack of knowledge in such a situation would result in BP's expertise and knowledge coming under attack and viewed as insufficient or unprofessional. This could possibly result in *defeasibility* doing more harm than good to the public image of the company, and thus explain its absence. Examples 11 and 12 display two occurrences of *excuses based on accidents*, the only subtype of *evading responsibility* that was used by BP.

> (11) "Since the Deepwater Horizon accident, the flow rate estimate has been established by the Unified Command."
> (12) "There were multiple control mechanisms— procedures and equipment—in place that should have prevented this accident or reduced the impact of the oil spill."

Example 11 shows a simple use of an *excuse based on accidents*. Although no excuse is explicitly being made, referring to the incident as an accident is portraying the event as just that, an accident. Example 12 mentions mechanisms, procedures and equipment that should have prevented the explosion and subsequent oil spill. Stating that there were multiple mechanisms in place to prevent such a disaster is an excuse, especially considering that they all failed. In addition, example 12 shows BP, again, referring to the incident as an accident.

### 6.1.5 Mortification

At seven occurrences, *mortification* added up to 3.38% of the total 207 image restoration strategies used by BP. Somewhat conflictingly and contradictorily to the majority of BP's press releases, one press release contained an occurrence of *taking full responsibility* which shown in example 13.

(13) "Hayward added: 'BP is fully committed to taking all possible steps to contain the spread of the oil spill. We are taking full responsibility for the oil spill and we will clean it up, and where people present legitimate claims we will honor them.'"

The acceptance of full responsibility shown in example 13 was found in a press release dated April 30 2010. It was the first case of *mortification* used by BP, and as such it is possible that 10 days after the initial well blowout the extent and severity of the oil spill was still unknown to the parties involved. The resulting damage and future damages might have been underestimated at that point. As it is much easier to accept blame for something less serious, it is possible that BP initially took full responsibility for the accident but began to take measures to shift blame when the true severity of the oil spill became evident. After the single case of *taking full responsibility* shown in example 13, BP only used *mortification* in the form of *taking some responsibility*. *Taking some responsibility* was used by BP a total of six times, two of which can be seen in examples 14 and 15.

(14) "Following a meeting with the President of the United States, the BP Board announces an agreed package of measures to meet its obligations as a responsible party arising from the Deepwater Horizon spill".

(15) "Hayward said: 'The Gulf of Mexico explosion was a terrible tragedy for which - as the man in charge of BP when it happened - I will always feel a deep responsibility, regardless of where blame is ultimately found to lie.'"

Example 14 states that BP has come to an official agreement concerning measures to meet its obligations as a responsible party. In this example, BP takes some responsibility for the oil spill while announcing future measures. Because of the use of the words "a responsible party" instead of "the responsible party", it is implied that there are additional parties that are responsible. Similarly, in example 15 Hayward only states having a feeling of responsibility which is not contingent on where blame is ultimately assigned. Hayward's statement makes the implication that it remains unknown who is at fault and that blame could still be placed on another party or various different parties involved.

### 6.1.6 Summary of the Results of the Image Restoration Analysis

The results of the image restoration analysis reveal that at 55.56% of all image restoration strategies, *bolstering* was BP's preferred image restoration strategy by a large margin. This indicates that BP's emphasis in the press releases was to reinforce or build a positive public image by portraying itself in a positive light in various different ways. At 23 occurrences and 11.11% of the total 207 occurrences of image restoration strategies used, *compensation* was BP's second most used image restoration strategy. *Corrective action* occurred 22 times throughout the press releases analyzed and amounted to 10.63% of all image restoration strategies used.

Table 3 visualizes BP's strong preference for using *bolstering* as an image restoration strategy and further illustrates the frequency and use of the other subtypes of image restoration strategies used by BP in their press releases concerning the oil spill. *Corrective action* is included among the subtypes because, as a category of its own, it does not contain subtypes.
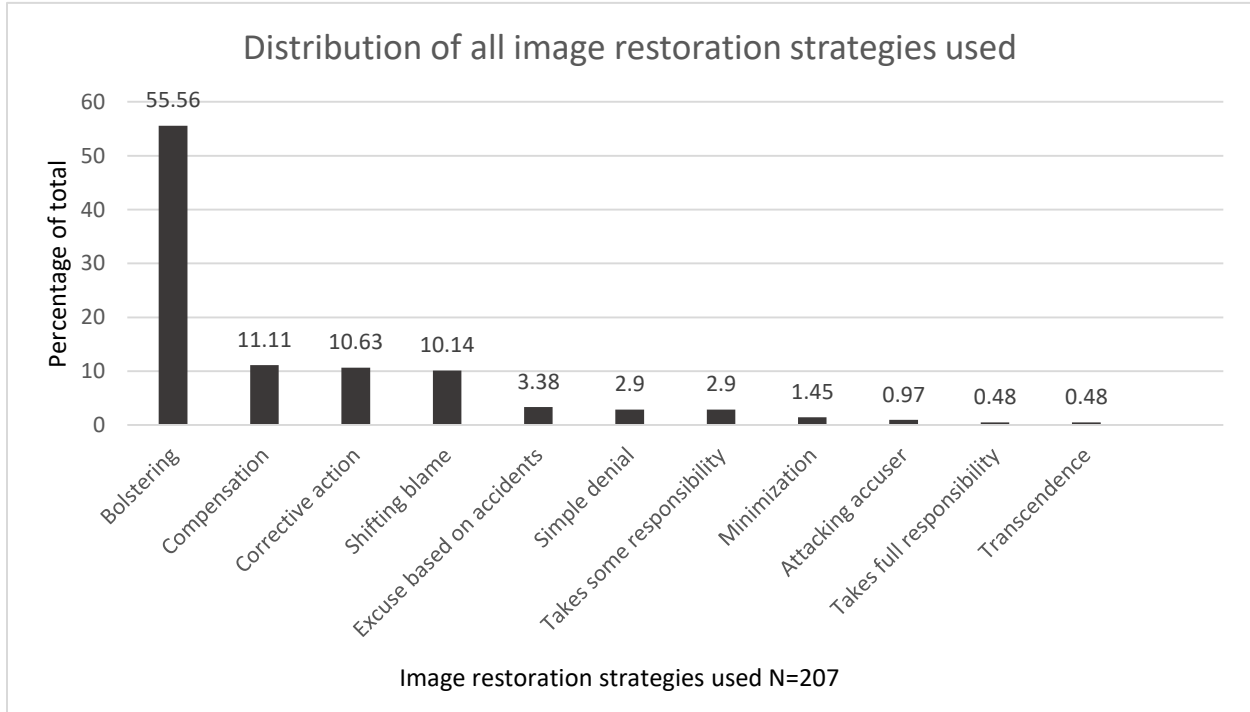


**Table 3** Distribution of all image restoration strategies used.

As visualized by table 3, in addition to promoting a positive image of BP through *bolstering*, *compensation* and *corrective action* were also key image restoration strategies used in BP's press releases. With the somewhat frequent use of *compensation*, BP targeted those states and people who were economically affected by the oil spill and promised financial compensation for their losses. Through the use of *corrective action*, BP assured that they would fix the situation and restore matters to as they were before. The immediate economic impact of the oil spill alone was substantial enough that without immediate discussion and implementation of *compensation,* many people might have found themselves in a dire situation financially. Failure to effectively initiate methods and channels of *compensation* would have likely resulted in an even worse public relations crisis than what BP was already facing.

At 10.14% of the total amount of image restoration strategies used, BP quite frequently worked to share, redirect or redistribute blame for the oil spill through the use of *shifting blame* to other parties involved. As seen in table 3, the frequency of the use of the different types of image restoration strategies taper off after *shifting blame*. *Excuses based on accidents* added up to 3.38% of all image restoration strategies while *simple denial* and *taking some responsibility* amounted to 2.9% each. The remaining image restoration strategies that were used by BP were extremely infrequent compared to BP's preferred strategies: *Minimization* amounted to 1.45%, *attacking accuser* to 0.97%, and *taking full responsibility* and *transcendence* to 0.48% each.

To conclude the findings of this section, the analysis found that BP had a clear preference in their choice of image restoration strategies used within the press releases analyzed. BP heavily emphasized *bolstering* while also employing *compensation*, *corrective action* and *shifting blame* to a high degree. These four image restoration strategies formed the basis of BP's image restoration work and reveal the direction they took to attempt to positively influence their public image during the period of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill crisis.

## 6.2   Results for the Transitivity Analysis of Image Restoration Strategies

This section will present the findings of the transitivity analysis conducted on the image restoration strategies that were found in BP's press releases. This section will discuss each process type and the participant types associated with the process type in question. Participant types are not viewed on their own as they are ultimately fixed to the use and frequency of process types. The total amount of *material processes*, for example, dictates the possible amount of *material participants*. *Circumstances*, however, are examined in their own subsection because of their optionality. Because circumstances are not tied to process types and are optional by nature, they are worth viewing as their own entity.

### 6.2.1   Process Types and their Participants

In total 217 processes were found within the image restoration strategies used by BP in the press releases that were analyzed. The analysis found that BP preferred the use of *material processes* followed by the use of *verbal processes*. The frequency of the remaining process types drops significantly after *verbal processes*. Table 4 displays the distribution of the different process types within the image restoration strategies used.
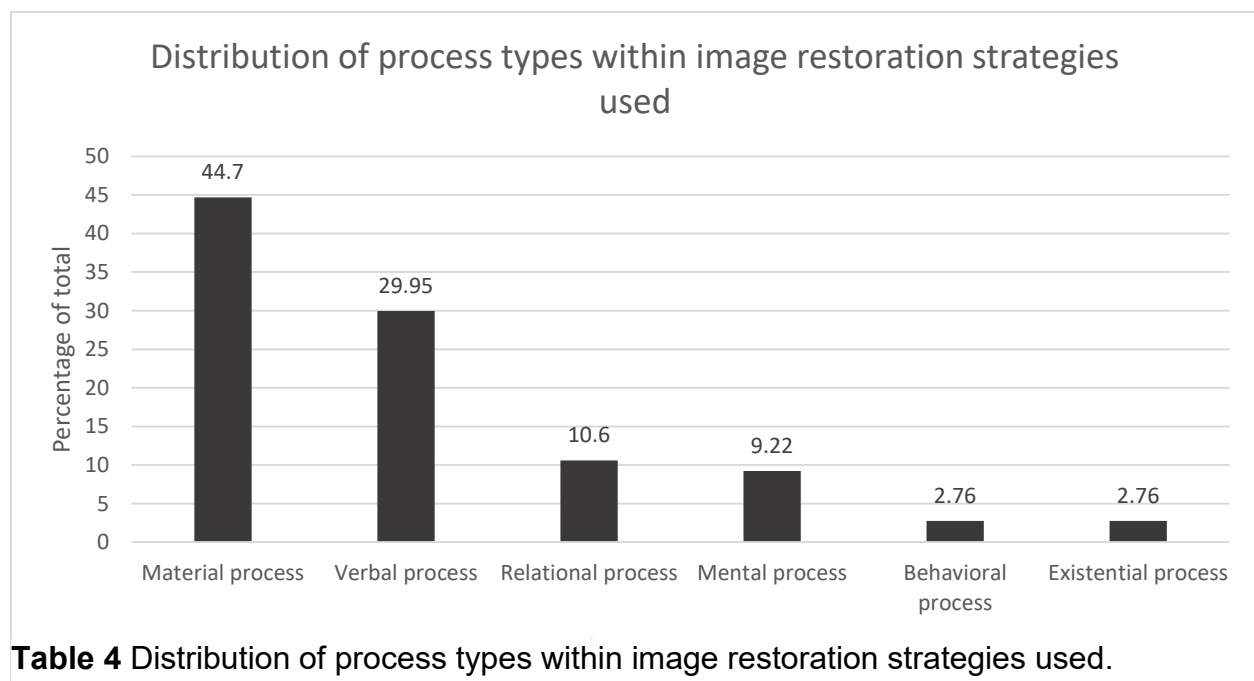


**Table 4** Distribution of process types within image restoration strategies used.

From the process types, *material processes* were most common at 44.70% of all process types followed by *verbal processes* at 29.95%, *relational processes* at 10.60, *mental processes* at 9.22% and *behavioral* and *existential processes* both at 2.76% each. Each process type and their participants will now be examined individually.

### 6.2.2  Material Processes and Participants

This subsection will examine the different types of *material processes* and *participants* found within the image restoration strategies used by BP. From the process types, *material processes* were most common at 44.70% of all process types used within the image restoration strategies. The *material processes* were a varied group and did not reveal any significant trends or reoccurring verbs or verb phrases. However, by examining the *material participants* used by BP in conjunction with BP's emphasis on *material processes*, we can see how BP attempted to portray itself as actively taking concrete actions towards fixing the situation at hand.

Of the participants for *material processes*, 75.3% of the occurrences of *actor* were either "BP" or "we". In reality, the percentage of BP as the *actor* is slightly higher as there were also other representatives of BP in the role of *actor*. Considering the emphasis on *material processes*, these results support the idea that BP attempted to portray itself in an active role in the press releases, associating itself with concrete actions toward resolving the issue at hand. It is worth noting, that another party involved in the drilling operation was not placed in the role of *actor* even once. Examples 16 and 17 display *material processes* and *participants*. The *material processes* and *participants* discussed in examples 16 and 17 are underlined.

> (16) "BP is assisting Transocean in an assessment of the well and subsea and blow out preventer with remotely operated vehicles."
>
> (17) "BP's global business has delivered another strong underlying performance, which means that the company is in robust shape to meet its responsibilities in dealing with the human tragedy and oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico."

In example 16, Transocean is the *recipient* of BP's assistance and therefore in a passive role while BP is the *actor*, and thus in an active role and portrayed as the benefactor. The statement that BP is assisting Transocean holds the implication that BP is merely helping Transocean with Transocean's issue. In example 17, "BP's global business" is the *actor* which has delivered "another strong underlying performance" which is the *goal*. Although Transocean is portrayed as the *recipient* in example 16, most occurrences of *recipient* were either the people or states affected by the oil spill who had received or were to receive aid from BP. Thus *recipient* was used by BP to direct BP's image restoration strategy of *compensation* towards a certain group or groups. In total, *recipient* amounted to 12.77% of the total amount of *material participants*

*Goal* was a highly frequent *material participant* at 31.38% of *material participants*, second only to actor. *Goal* is that which is affected by an action, and as such *goal* as a category contained considerable variation. Although *goal* does not reveal significant reoccurrences or trends, it plays an important role considering that *goal* reveals what concrete action the *actor* is taking or has taken. *Goal* is underlined in example 18.

> (18) "We have assembled and are now employing <u>world-class facilities, resources, and expertise</u>, and can call upon more if needed."

The *goal* in example 18 is "world-class facilities, resources, expertise" as they are what BP has assembled and are employing. They are considered *goal* because they have been affected by the actions of being assembled and employed. The *goal* in example 18 is connected to an occurrence of *bolstering* as an image restoration strategy. Through *goal* BP is highlighting their world-class facilities, resources, and expertise, attempting to build or reinforce a positive image. The *goal* is further strengthened by BP's ability to "call upon more if needed".

Occurrences of *scope*, meaning that which remains unaffected or unchanged, were quite frequent and amounted to 15.96% of *material participants*. A meaningful pattern or reoccurrence found within the occurrences of *scope* was that often the *scope* was related to BP's commitments, pledges, or promises of support. This would suggest that BP found it necessary to remind the public that they are still committed to the restoration work, and

fulfilling pledges and promises made to those who were affected by the oil spill. An example of *scope* can be found underlined in example 19.

> (19) "These allegations <u>will neither distract</u> the company's <u>focus on stopping the leak</u> <u>nor alter</u> <u>our commitment to restore the Gulf coast</u>."

In example 19, the *scope(s)*, meaning that which remains unchanged, are BP's focus on stopping the leak as well as BP's commitment to restore the Gulf coast. In addition to reassuring that they will not be distracted from their focus or commitment, BP brushes aside allegations and portrays itself as the morally superior party by not letting allegations affect them. Through the use of *scope,* BP is employing the image restoration strategy of *bolstering* and portrays itself as a steady and trustworthy company that will not be distracted from its mission of stopping the oil leak and restoring the Gulf coast. *Client* as a *material participant* amounted to only 1.06% and as such did not provide any meaningful data. Next, *verbal processes* and *participants* will be discussed.

### 6.2.3  Verbal Processes and Participants

*Verbal processes* were the second most used process type at 29.95% of all process types found within the image restoration strategies employed by BP. *Verbal processes* were the only process type that did not contain a high amount of variety with the verb "said" amounting to 48.44% of all *verbal processes*. This is partly due to high amount of quotations from, for example, BP representatives in the press releases

BP or persons representing BP were portrayed in an active role in *verbal processes*. From the *verbal participants*, BP or a representative of BP was the *sayer* in 90.77% of all occurrences of *sayer*. It is also worth mentioning, that the remaining 9.33% of occurrences were all participants that occurred only once in the role of *sayer*. These contained, for example, the President of the United States and the CEO of the Marine Spill Response Organization. Only twice was another party involved in the oil spill portrayed in the role of *sayer*, Transocean and Anadarko Petroleum Corporation once each. Example 20 and 21 display these two occurrences of other parties involved as active *verbal participants*. Both *verbal processes* and *participants* are underlined.

(20) "Anadarko Petroleum Corporation <u>has announced</u> <u>it refuses to accept responsibility for oil spill removal costs and damages</u>…"

(21) <u>Transocean</u> <u>reported</u> <u>the fire</u> earlier today on the rig, located approximately 41 miles offshore Louisiana on Mississippi Canyon Block 252, <u>saying that 'a substantial majority' of the 126 personnel onboard were safe, but some crew members remained unaccounted for."</u>

Example 20 shows Anadarko Petroleum as the *sayer*, "has announced" as the *verbal process*, and the refusal as the *verbiage*, meaning that which is said. It should be noted that the context in example 20 is quite negative and could be perceived as accusatory. The act of refusing to accept suggests that blame has been directed toward Anadarko Petroleum Corporation. The press release in which example 20 occurred does make explicit which party directed blame toward Anadarko Petroleum Corporation. Example 21 shows how BP portrayed Transocean as the *sayer* in order to *shift blame* and connect Transocean to the explosion and fire. By stating that Transocean reported the fire, the logical implication being made is that since Transocean reported the fire, they were likely the first to know of it. Being the first to know of the fire and explosion, in turn, implies that Transocean was closest to the event when it took place, implying that Transocean's actions ultimately led to the explosion and fire.

*Verbal processes* had a *receiver* in only six cases. This discrepancy between *sayer* and *receiver* is most likely explained by conventions of the press release as a genre. Although in reality the press release does have an audience, the *verbiage* within the press releases were often not explicitly directed at a certain party but merely stated. Examples 22 and 23 are examples of when the *verbiage* did in fact have a *receiver*. The *receiver(s)* in both examples are underlined.

(22) "BP today offered its deepest sympathy and condolences to the <u>families, friends, and colleagues of those who have been lost</u> following the fire on the Deepwater Horizon oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico this week."

(23) "I reiterated my commitment to the <u>White House</u> today…"

In example 22, the *receivers* are the families, friends and colleagues of the victims of the disaster. In example 23 the *receiver* is the White House, referring in this context to the

representatives of the White House and not the physical White House. It is worth noting, that example 22 is not a case of *mortification*. BP is not apologizing but merely expressing their sympathy and condolences for the death of the 11 crew members who died from the initial explosion. Instead of apologizing or asking for forgiveness through *mortification*, BP opted to use *bolstering* to portray itself as sympathetic but not responsible. The effect of portraying themselves as not responsible is somewhat constructed through the absence of *mortification*. If a party were responsible for 11 deaths, *mortification* would be expected and most likely demanded.

*Verbiage*, meaning that which is or was said, often came in the form of quotations of varying length. *Verbiage* amounted to 56.97% of *verbal* participants but was too varied to provide meaningful data. As such, *relational processes* and *participants* will be discussed next.

### 6.2.4  Relational Processes and Participants

*Relational processes* added up to 10.6% of all process types found within the image restoration strategies used by BP. *Relational processes* most often manifested themselves through the verb "is" which amounted to 47.83% of all *relational processes* followed by "are" at 21.74%. *Relational participants* contained the following subtypes: *carrier*, *attribute*, *token*, *value*, and *beneficiary*. If the process is attributive, the participants are the *carrier* and *attribute*. If the process is identifying, the identified is the *token* and subject while the *value* is the complement of that *token* or subject. Of the *relational participants*, BP, or someone or something representing BP (for example "we", "Bob, "our action plan", "our commitment" and "the company") amounted to 63.16% of all *carriers* found. All *carriers* that somehow represented BP had *attributes* that were positive, as shown by examples 24 and 25. Not a single negative *attribute* was connected to BP.

(24) "[…] but <u>the company</u> is <u>financially robust</u> with an enviable portfolio of assets and professional teams that are among the best in the industry."

(25) "<u>The Board</u> remains <u>strongly committed to the payment of future dividends and delivering long term value to shareholders</u>."

Both examples 24 and 25 employ *bolstering* as an image restoration strategy and seem to be targeted at shareholders, possibly in an attempt to alleviate financial concerns that might have risen during the oil spill. Example 24 shows how BP emphasizes that despite the oil spill, BP remains financially stable and among the top of their field. In example 24 "the company" is the *carrier* while "financially robust" is the *attribute*. Example 25 shows "The Board" as the *carrier* and the board's strong commitment as the *attribute*. Example 25 works to alleviate concerns shareholders might have about receiving payment of future proceeds.

The only occurrence of *carrier* referencing any of the other parties involved can be seen in example 26.

(26) "<u>Other parties beside BP</u> may be <u>responsible for costs and liabilities</u> arising from the spill, and we expect those parties to live up to their obligations."

Example 26 shows the *carrier* as "other parties beside BP" while the responsibility for costs and liabilities is the *attribute*. The *attribute* in example 26 is used as a tool to link other parties to the oil spill, effectively manifesting itself as the image restoration strategy of *shifting blame*. It is also worth noting, that although in example 26 the speaker uses hedging in the form of "may", the effect of the hedging is somewhat mitigated by stating that BP expects the other parties "to live up to their obligations." The reference to living up to obligations does not express much doubt about the responsibility of other parties involved.

Only two cases of *beneficiary* were found within the image restoration strategies, one of which was the shareholders and the second the American people. Both occurrences were straightforward and did not offer much in terms of analysis, and thus do not warrant further inspection through examples. *Token* and *value*, meaning the participants in an identifying process, were rare and did not contain much variation. Although *token* and *value* played a rather minor role in BP's image restoration strategies, they did work to identify the oil spill as an accident, resulting in an *excuse based on accidents*. *Token* and *value* are underlined in example 27.

(27) "This was a tragic accident and we need to understand the causes of it to try to ensure that nothing like it never happens again."

Example 27 shows how BP emphasized the explosion and subsequent oil spill being an accident and the fixing of the situation as their highest priority. In example 27, the *token* "this" is identified by the value "a tragic accident".

### 6.2.5  Mental Processes and Participants

*Mental processes* amounted to 9.22% of all process types used by BP within the image restoration strategies that were employed. The relatively low amount of *mental processes* highlights the emphasis BP placed on *material processes* and concrete actions. *Mental processes* would somewhat diminish the effect that *material processes* portray.

*Mental processes* can take two subtypes of *mental participants: sensor* and *phenomenon*. A considerable amount of the *sensors*, 94.7%, were BP or a representative of BP. On the other hand, results within *phenomenon* varied greatly and did not reveal any noticeable trends. However, one noteworthy case of *phenomenon* referred to responsibility of the entire disaster. This occurrence of *phenomenon* is showcased in example 28. The *mental process, sensor* and *phenomenon* are underlined.

(28) "I understand people want a simple answer about why this happened and who is to blame."

In example 28, the *sensor* "I" understands the *phenomenon* that the public wants a simple answer of how the disaster could happen and who is to blame for it. This occurrence of *phenomenon* is noteworthy because it has the built in implication that the answers to the two questions presented are neither simple nor known.

### 6.2.6  Behavioral Processes and Participants

*Behavioral processes* played a minor role in the image restoration strategies used by BP and amounted to only 2.76% of all processes used. It is worth noting, however, that 83.3% of the *behavioral processes* were within occurrences of *bolstering*. Although *behavioral processes* often have only one participant, only one such occurrence, which is seen in

example 29, was found within the image restoration strategies used by BP. All other occurrences of *behavioral processes* contained both a *behaver* and *behavior*. Example 29 also displays the hybrid nature of *behavioral processes* and how they share both material and mental properties. The *behaver* and *behavioral process* are both underlined in example 29.

(29)  "We will not rest until the job is done."

Example 29 shows "We" as the behaver and "will not rest" as the *behavioral process*, followed by *extent* "until the job is done". The example is a clear case of *bolstering*, announcing how hard BP is working and will work until the oil spill has been contained. Example 29 is also a prime example of how determining the *behavioral process* itself can be problematic as the verb "rest" contains both material and mental properties. Resting could be considered a *material process* if connected with physical rest, however resting also contains mental aspects. By acknowledging the hybrid nature of the process, we can rule out the possibility of it being a *material process*. Also, a true *mental process* would not able to answer the question "what is the *behaver* doing?", although in this example the answer to that question tells us what the *behaver* is not doing, which is behavior in itself. As it is possible to answer the question "what is the *behaver* doing?" we can determine that the process is *behavioral*. All in all, the occurrences of *behavior* found within the image restoration strategies used by BP were varied but emphasized behavior that manifested itself as *bolstering* as an image restoration strategy.

### 6.2.7  Existential Processes and Participants

Like *behavioral processes*, *existential processes* amounted to 2.76% of all processes, and as such played a relatively minor role within BP's image restoration strategies. The *existents* accompanying the *existential processes* varied and no form of *existent* occurred more than once. Existential constructs are often introduced with an empty "there" in subject position and typically use the verb "be" as seen in example 30 in which the *existential process* and *existent* are underlined.

(30) "There <u>were</u> <u>multiple control mechanisms – procedures and equipment</u> – in place that should have prevented this accident or reduced the impact of the spill…"

Example 30 begins with an empty "there" followed by the existential verb "were". The underlined part is the *existent* because those are the things that existed and "were". Example 30 shows how the *existential process* and *existents* form an occurrence of the image restoration strategy of *excuse based on accidents*. Despite example 30 being part of an *excuse based on accidents*, 66.6% of *existential processes* acted to fulfill the image restoration strategy of *bolstering*. Next, BP's use of *circumstance* and its different subtypes are examined.

### 6.2.8 Circumstance

*Circumstances* occurred a total of 172 times in the image restoration strategies found. Although commonly optional, the analysis revealed that *circumstances* played a significant role in BP's image restoration strategies. Not only did *circumstances* aid in fulfilling the informational function of the press release, often the use of *circumstance* directly enabled or fulfilled the use of an image restoration strategy. As such, *circumstance* was often vital in fulfilling the promotional aspect of the press release and the image restoration strategies that were used. Of the *circumstance* types *location* was the most common at 33.72%. As *location* includes time and place, and thus gives information on when and where something happened or will happen, the high amount of *location* in the press releases is somewhat expected due to the reporting nature of the press release. Two examples of *location* are underlined in example 31.

(31) "…to help their Governors promote tourism <u>around the shores of the Gulf of Mexico</u> <u>over the coming months</u>.

As showcased in example 31, often sentences provided information on both time and place. In example 31, the *location* "around the shores of the Gulf of Mexico" answers the question 'where?' while the *location* "over the coming months" answers the question 'when?' Although frequent, *location* merely fulfilled the informational aspect of press releases and did not contribute significantly to the promotional aspect.

The second most frequent *circumstance* type found within the image restoration strategies used by BP was *accompaniment* at 15.12%. *Accompaniment* often provided information on who BP was working with, ranging from locals, scientists, and engineers to official government entities. Only one case of *accompaniment* mentioned another party involved by name. This single occurrence can be seen in example 32 while example 33 displays another occurrence of *accompaniment*.

(32) "BP will be working closely <u>with Transocean and the authorities</u> to find out exactly what happened so lessons can be learnt to prevent something like this from happening anywhere again."

(33) "…and to protect the shoreline through a massive effort <u>together with government agencies and local communities.</u>"

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, example 32 showcases the single occurrence of *accompaniment* mentioning another party involved by its name, Transocean. In the example the authorities referred to are part of the same *accompaniment*. Example 32 could be seen as an attempt to *shift blame* by mentioning Transocean but for the most part the sentence functions as *corrective action*. The *corrective action* itself would be learning the lessons needed to prevent such a disaster from happening again. Example 33 shows how BP accompanies itself with government agencies and local communities of the Gulf coast. Although not necessary to fulfill the role of *bolstering*, the *accompaniment* underlined in example 33 strengthens BP's use of *bolstering* which emphasizes their massive effort to protect the shoreline.

*Purpose* amounted to 12.21% of the *circumstance* types used within the image restoration strategies found. Most occurrences of *purpose* supported the idea or perception that BP's actions were directed towards defending the shoreline and mitigating both the environmental and economic effects of the oil spill. In addition to being used in conjunction with concrete actions, *purpose* was often used when discussing *compensation* in the form of payments and claims. Occurrences of *purpose* can be found underlined in examples 34 and 35.

(34) "BP is working hand-in-hand with federal, state, and local governments <u>to gather data on the seabed and in the water, and to incorporate those</u>

> lessons so that we can continually improve the effectiveness of our response efforts."

(35) "These changes are designed <u>to cut through paperwork and expedite payments.</u>"

In example 34 the *purpose* for BP working hand-in-hand with federal, state, and local governments is that they can gather the data required to improve the effectiveness of response efforts. In this example *purpose* enables the sentence to work as the image restoration strategy of *corrective action*. As *purpose* commonly provided reasons for BP's actions, and those reasons were often related to *corrective action*, the conclusion can be drawn that *purpose* was vital for *corrective action* to take place. The *purpose* displayed in example 35 provides the reason for the changes that have been designed. In this case, the reasons are expedited payments which can be connected to *compensation* as an image restoration strategy.

*Extent* added up to 8.14% of the *circumstances* used by BP within the image restoration strategies found. *Extent* was mostly used in relation to how hard BP was working to fix the situation by plugging the oil leak and providing financial compensation to those affected by the oil spill. *Extent* is underlined in examples 36 and 37.

(36) "BP, as operator of the MC252 lease, continues to work <u>around the clock</u> on Transocean's subsea equipment."

(37) "Our commitment extends <u>beyond the economic claims</u>."

In example 36, "around the clock" answers the question 'at what interval?' by actually stating that there are no intervals because work is being done non-stop. Example 37 displays how BP emphasizes the extent of their commitment to the restoration effort.

*Cause* amounted to 6.98% times in the image restoration strategies that were used by BP. Although quite rare at 6.98% occurrences, a notable feature found within *cause* was that 50% contained mention of "Transocean". The mentioning of Transocean within *cause* was a way for BP to connect Transocean to the cause of the oil spill and remind which party conducted the drilling itself. The use of *cause* ultimately worked to *shift blame* to Transocean. This example of *cause* working to *shift blame* can be seen in example 38.

(38)  "BP today announced its support for and cooperation with U.S. government investigations <u>arising from the sinking of the Transocean drilling rig Horizon</u> in Mississippi Canyon block 252 (MC252) in the Gulf of Mexico."

(39)  "The honest truth is that this is a complex accident, <u>caused by an unprecedented combination of failures."</u>

In example 38, the U.S. government investigations are taking place because of the sinking of the drilling rig. BP makes sure to mention that the drilling rig in question is Transocean's. By doing so, BP attempts to connect Transocean to the cause of the oil spill, meaning the explosion and subsequent sinking of the drilling rig. The *cause* in example 38 directly enables or fulfills *shifting blame* as without the *cause*, the sentence would merely state BP's support for U.S government investigations. Example 39 is a straightforward example of *cause*, explicitly stating that the incident was "caused by an unprecedented combination of failures". Example 39 shows how *cause* acts to explain and strengthen the occurrence of the image restoration strategy of *excuse based on accidents*.

*Angle*, answering whose or which perspective, amounted to 5.23% of *circumstances* in the image restoration strategies used by BP.

(40)  "<u>According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) experts participating in the response</u>, the spill is "very thin" and consists of "97 per cent sheen.""

In example 40, the view that the oil spill is "very thin" and consists of "97 per cent sheen" is the perspective of the experts from the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration. It is worth noting, however, that example 40 is reported by BP. With such short quotes being used, it is impossible to determine if the statement reflects the entirety of the experts' true perspective. Although not necessary for the fulfillment of the image restoration strategy of *minimization*, the *angle* in example 40 certainly acts to reinforce and strengthen the *minimization* which is seen in the form of downplaying the spill as thin and consisting mostly of sheen.

Similarly to *angle*, *role* amounted to 5.23% of the total amount of *circumstances* within the image restoration strategies used. 44.4% of the occurrences of *role* stated BP's role as lease operator. Reinforcing BP's role as merely the lease operator of the drilling rig was an indirect way for BP to reduce responsibility and blame by suggesting that, as the lease operator, they were not the party performing the physical act of drilling. This idea is further supported by the sole occurrence of *role* where Transocean is mentioned by name as the owner of the drilling rig as well as the party responsible for the physical act of drilling.

(41)  "BP, <u>which operates the license on which Transocean's rig was drilling an exploration well</u>, said it was working closely with Transocean and the U.S. Coastguard, <u>which is leading the emergency response</u>, and had been offering its help – including logistical support."

Example 41 contains two occurrences of *role*. By emphasizing its role as the operator of the license on which Transocean's rig was drilling, BP not only attempts to distance themselves from the explosion but manages to state that the rig itself was Transocean's, which emphasizes the fact that the physical act of drilling was being conducted by Transocean. By doing so, BP uses *role* to *shift blame* to Transocean. The second occurrence of *role* found within example 41 simply provides information on the U.S. Coastguards role in the response effort.

*Manner* was equally frequent as *angle* and *role* and amounted to 5.23% of *circumstances* within the image restoration strategies used. *Manner* answered the question 'in what manner?' An example can be found underlined in example 42.

(42)  "We are determined to do everything in our power to contain this oil spill and to resolve the situation <u>as rapidly, safely and effectively as possible</u>."

Example 42 shows how BP used descriptors to emphasize manner in which they will resolve the situation at hand. Similar to example 42, most occurrences of *manner* acted as descriptors highlighting the speed, fairness and amount of effort BP is applying to the fixing the situation. As such, *manner* was mostly used within *bolstering* to strengthen the image restoration strategy.

*Contingency*, which either makes a concession or answers the question 'under what circumstances?' was quite rare at 4.07% of the total amount of *circumstances*. Two occurrences of *contingency* are underlined in example 43.

> (43) "Today, BP reiterated its pledge to clean up the oil and gas spill in the Gulf of Mexico and to pay all <u>legitimate</u> claims arising from the spill, <u>even though another party already is disputing its responsibility for costs associated with the Deepwater Horizon incident and the resulting spill.</u>"

In example 43, "even though" functions similarly to how the word "despite" would, meaning that BP will pay all legitimate claims, despite the fact that another party has begun to dispute its responsibility for costs that have risen from the oil spill. The word "legitimate" is underlined as *contingency* because of the possibility that not all claims are necessarily legitimate. Most likely BP is referring to claims that have no real basis, made, for example, to abuse the claims process. Nonetheless, "legitimate" has the possibility or potential of functioning as *contingency*. More significantly, the second occurrence of *contingency* within example 43 acts as the image restoration strategy of *shifting blame*.

*Behalf* was the second most infrequent *circumstance* type at only five occurrences within the image restoration strategies used by BP. In addition to being rare, occurrences of *behalf* contained little variation with three of the five occurrences referring to the Gulf States, one to the people of the Gulf Coast and one addressed on behalf of BP. The occurrence of *behalf* addressing the families and friends of the victims on behalf of BP is shown underlined in example 44.

> (44) "<u>On behalf of all of us at BP</u>, my deepest sympathies go out to the families and friends who have suffered such a terrible loss."

At only one occurrence, *matter* was the least frequent circumstance type found within the image restoration strategies used by BP. This sole occurrence is shown underlined in example 45.

> (45) "BP today rebutted allegations <u>that its Atlantis platform in the Gulf of Mexico operated with incomplete and inaccurate engineering documents</u>."

The single occurrence of matter can be found within a case of *simple denial*. The allegations that BP has operated its Atlantis platform with incomplete and inaccurate engineering documents is the *matter* that BP opposed or rebutted.

### 6.2.9 Summary of the Transitivity Analysis Results

The results of the transitivity analysis reveal that BP portrayed itself as an active participant, taking concrete actions to fix the situation at hand and restore the Gulf coast. BP emphasized this active role through the frequent use of *material processes* and placing itself into the role of *actor*, acting toward a concrete *goal*. The somewhat frequent use of *scope* was also used to reassure the public that BP's commitment to the restoration effort, and to the shareholders that BP's stability as a company, remains unchanged. Although *material processes* and *participants* were heavily relied upon, their use could have been even more frequent considering the amount of *verbiage* was extremely high within the image restoration strategies used by BP. By frequently reporting what has been said, emphasis might have been slightly drawn away from *material processes* and concrete action. This was not necessarily the case when using quotations as those cases of *verbiage* were further analyzed according to the transitivity framework. Table 5 visualizes the distribution of all the participant types that were present in the image restoration strategies used by BP.
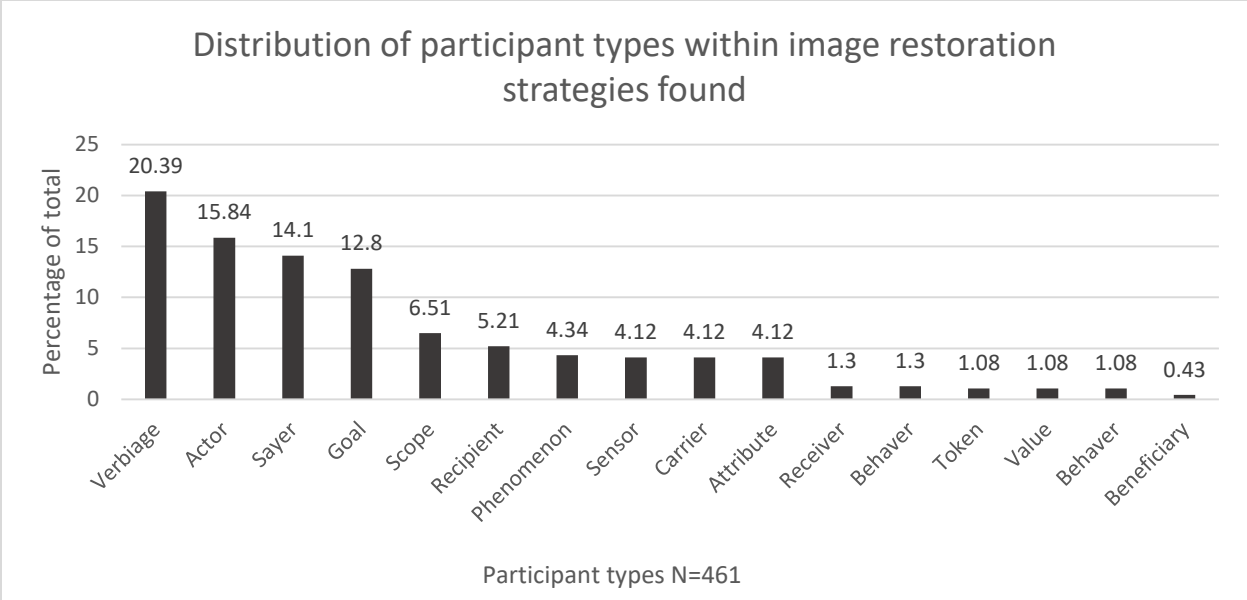
**Table 5** Distribution of participant types within image restoration strategies found.

As can be seen from table 5, there is a significant drop in the frequency of participant types after *goal*. This is to be expected because the frequencies of process types ultimately dictate the possible frequencies of participant types. *Recipients* were mostly the targets of BP's *compensation*, the states and people affected by the oil spill. *Carriers* and *attributes* are firmly in the middle when comparing the frequencies of participant types. A significant amount of the *carriers*, 63.16%, were BP or a representative of BP. It is worth reminding that the corresponding *attributes* for these for those *carriers* were all positive, meaning BP made sure to connect only positive *attributes* to itself. The remaining participant types seen in table 5 begin to taper off after *sensor*, and although individually meaningful occurrences were found among the remaining participant types, they did not play a major role in BP's image restoration strategies.

*Circumstance* as a participant group contained many subtypes and the frequency of these *circumstance* types were also quite varied. The frequencies of all the different subtypes of *circumstance* found within the image restoration strategies used are visualized by table 6.
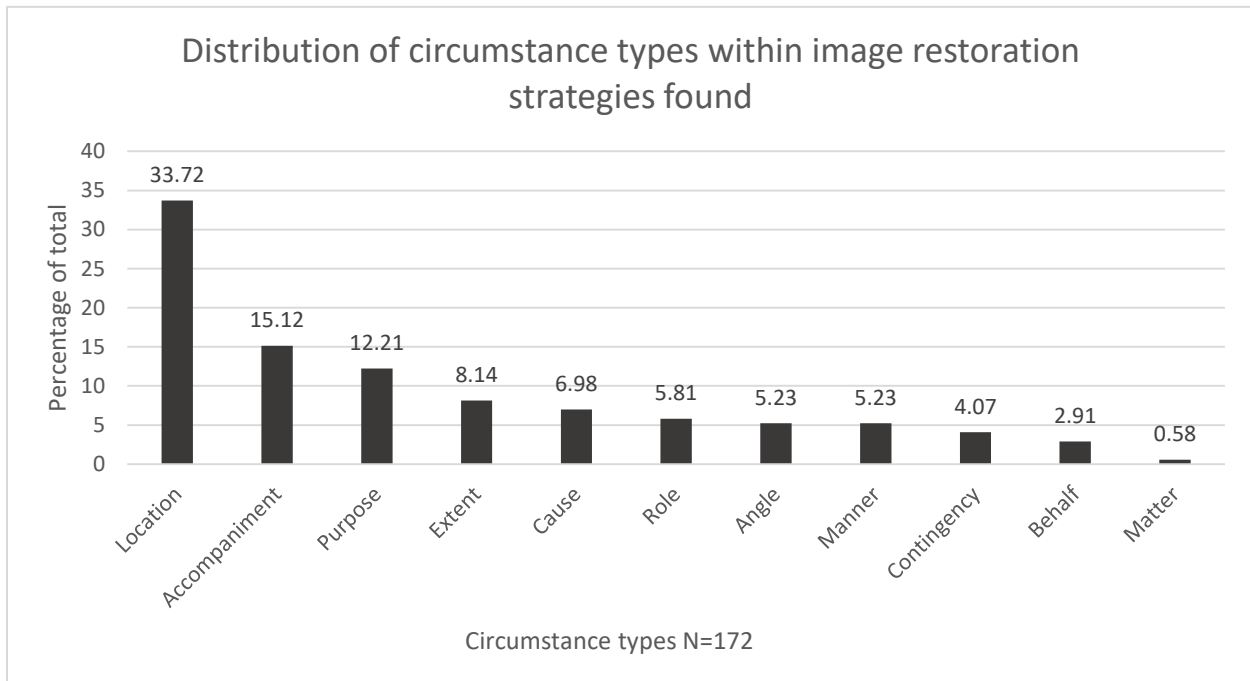


**Table 6** Distribution of circumstance types within image restoration strategies found.

As shown in table 6, *location* was overwhelmingly the most commonly used *circumstance* type at 33.72% of all *circumstance* types used. *Location* supplied information on when and where the incident took place or the restoration work was to take place. The second most used *circumstance* type at 15.12%, *accompaniment*, was mainly used to inform who BP was working with during the restoration effort. It is worth reminding that only once was another party involved mentioned within *accompaniment*. *Purpose*, BP's third most used *circumstance* type, was often used in conjunction with concrete actions to emphasize the restoration effort, the defending of the shoreline, and the mitigation of the environmental and economic impact of the oil spill. *Purpose* was also commonly used when BP addressed *compensation* in the form of payments and claims.

Although the frequency of *circumstance* types somewhat dwindles down after *purpose*, the *circumstance* types *extent*, *cause*, and *role* revealed noticeable patterns. Half of the

occurrences of *cause* contained mention of Transocean by name. By including Transocean into *cause*, BP worked to *shift blame* by portraying Transocean as a part or component of the cause of the oil spill. By doing so, BP attempts to divert responsibility away from itself. Occurrences of *role* mostly portrayed BP as the lease operator. In one case of *role*, BP described its own role by including mention of Transocean as the owner of the drilling rig as well as the party conducting the drilling. By emphasizing its *role* as merely the lease operator, BP attempted to distance themselves from the physical act of drilling, which was the immediate cause of the disaster. Through the use of *extent*, BP emphasized how committed they are to the restoration effort and how hard they are working to fix the situation.

All in all, the transitivity analysis of the image restoration strategies used by BP revealed strong trends and preferences in the linguistic choices made by BP. The analysis also revealed that *circumstance*, which is traditionally thought of as an optional addition, was in fact vital in creating and fulfilling certain image restoration strategies. The linguistic choices made by BP portrayed the oil spill and the parties involved in a way that emphasized BP's concrete actions towards fixing the situation while attempting to distance BP from the explosion by highlighting BP's *role* as merely lease operator. Through *purpose* BP stated that everything they are doing is being done in order to fix the situation, thus highlighting the restoration effort as its utmost priority.

Next, a comparison will be drawn between the image restoration strategies used in the press releases belonging to the immediate aftermath -group and the press releases belonging to the post-Obama address -group.

## 6.3  Comparison of Press Releases Before and After Obama's Address

This section will begin by comparing BP's use of image restoration strategies within the two different time periods. After discussing the results of the comparative analysis of image restoration strategies used, this section moves on to examine the changes and shifts that were revealed by the transitivity analysis of those image restoration strategies used by BP. The UAM CorpusTool's chi-squared values are used to determine the significance levels of the shifts or changes in BP's use of image restoration strategies and

the linguistic choices made within those strategies during the two different time periods. Thoughts and possible explanations are provided for the results throughout the entire section.

### 6.3.1   Comparison of Image Restoration Strategies

This section examines the differences between the press releases from before and after Obama's Oval Office address. The section will begin by comparing the main categories of image restoration strategies used in the two different time periods after which the same will be done with the different subtypes of image restoration strategies used. After comparing the use of image restoration strategies, the results of the comparative transitivity analysis of both time periods will be examined. Analysis and thoughts of possible reasons for the results are provided throughout the section. For the comparison, the UAM CorpusTool was used to calculate the chi-squared values of the comparative differences in order to determine statistical significance, and thus to substantiate the results. The chi-squared values differentiate between weak significance (90% significance level with a 10% chance of error), medium significance (95% significance level with a 5% chance of error) and high significance (98% significance level with a 2% chance of error).

All in all, image restoration strategies were slightly more common during the time frame immediately after the oil spill compared to the time frame after Obama's Oval Office address. The immediate aftermath -group contained a total of 110 occurrences of image restoration strategies compared to 97 in the post-Obama address -group. Although speculation could be made, the total amount of image restoration strategies in the groups were quite similar and do not hold enough statistical significance to warrant further discussion. However, considerable variation was found within the frequency of the various different image restoration strategies used in the two time periods. Table 7 visualizes the distribution of the image restoration strategies used in the two different time periods.
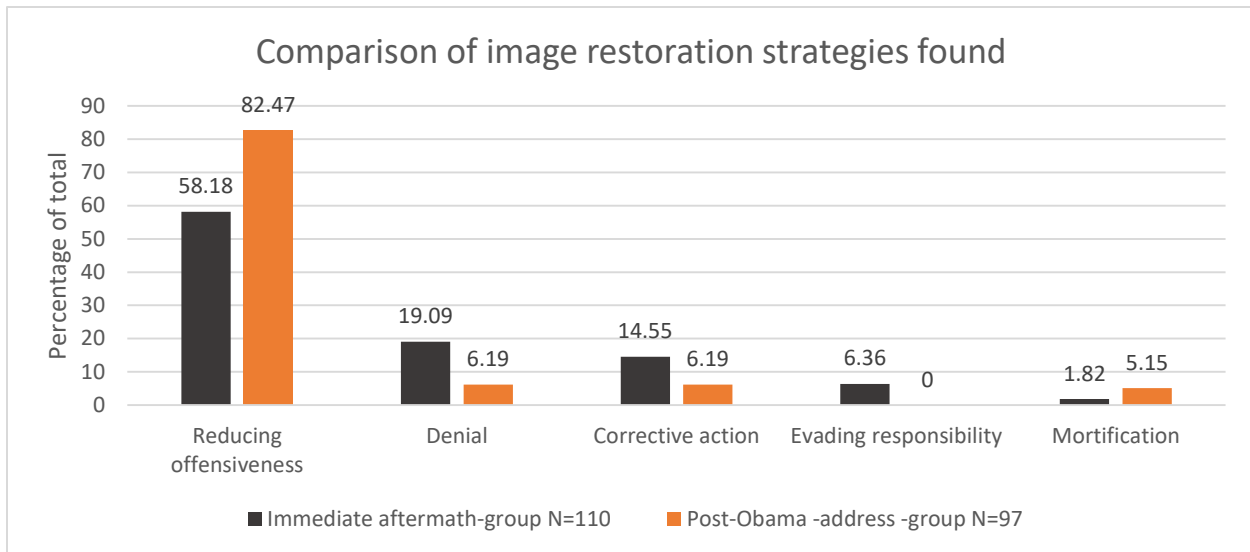
**Table 7** Comparison of image restoration strategies found.

As visualized by table 7, *denial*, *corrective action*, and *evading responsibility* were more common in the immediate aftermath -group. After Barack Obama's first Oval Office address, the role of *reducing offensiveness* and *mortification* grew while especially *denial* and *evading responsibility* became less common. The amount of *corrective action* also decreased after Obama's address.

*Reducing offensiveness* amounted to 58.18% of the image restoration strategies used in the immediate aftermath -group compared to 82.47% in the post-Obama address -group. This difference between the two time frames resulted in the chi-value of 14.367, signaling that the difference is statistically highly significant. The use of *denial* as an image restoration strategy reduced from 19.09% to 6.19% while *evading responsibility* also decreased from 6.36% to 0%. The shifts in the use of *denial* and *evading responsibility* in the two time periods are both statistically highly significant at chi-values of 7.569 and 6.389 respectively. Adding up to 14.55% of the image restoration strategies used before Obama's address and 6.19% after, *corrective action* became less frequent after Obama's involvement and explicit assigning of blame. The shift in the use of *corrective action* between the two time periods was large enough to be of weak statistical significance with a chi-value of 3.793, signaling a 10% chance of error. The difference in the distribution of *mortification* within the image restoration strategies found in the two different groups was statistically insignificant. Next, a comparison of the different subtypes of image restoration

strategies will be drawn. The different subtypes of image restoration strategies contained significant variation. A visualized comparison between the different subtypes of image restoration strategies used during the two time periods is provided in table 8. Although not a subtype, *corrective action* is included because it has no subtypes.
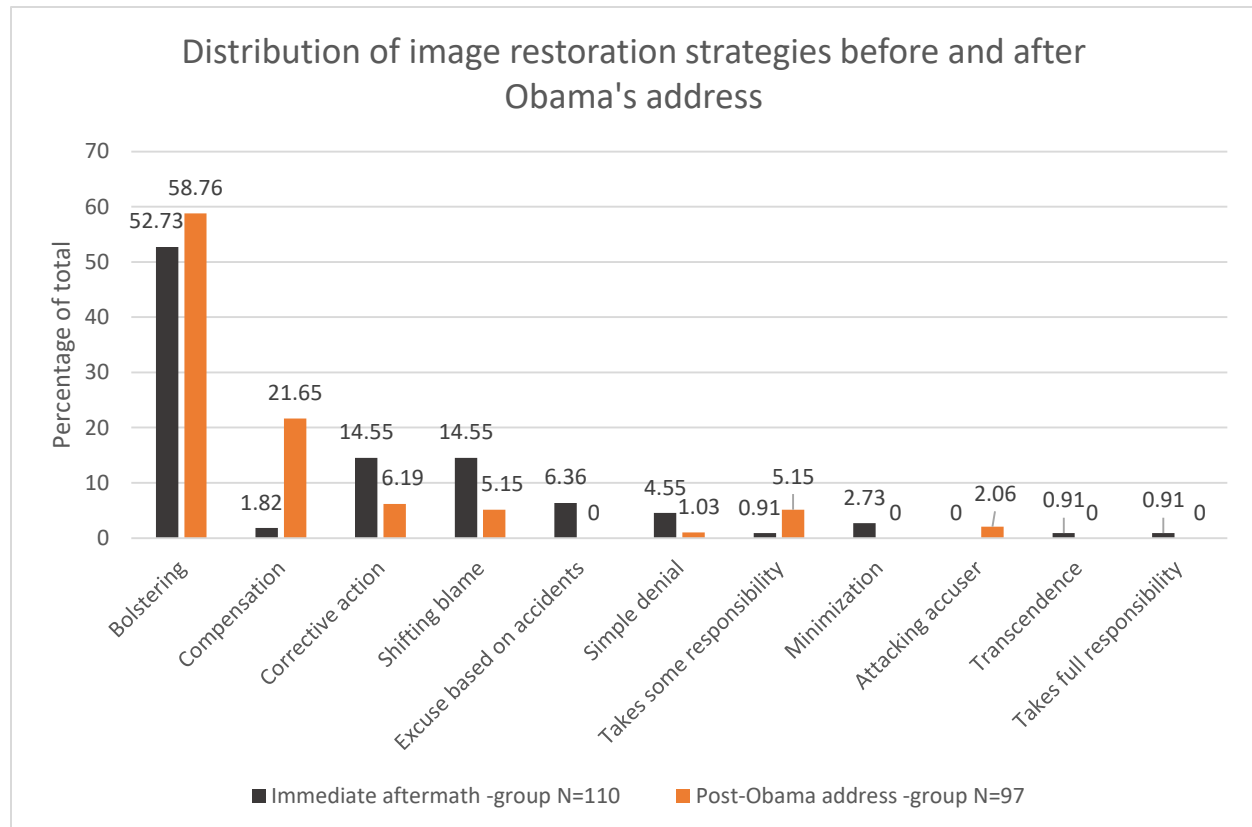


**Table 8** Distribution of image restoration strategies before and after Obama's address.

The comparison of the use of the image restoration category of *reducing offensiveness* revealed notable shifts in the press releases from the two different time periods. In addition to *reducing offensiveness* being more frequent in post-Obama address -group at 82.47% of all image restoration strategies used compared to 58.18% in the immediate aftermath -group, a considerable difference was found in the preferred type of *reducing offensiveness*. *Bolstering* was the most used strategy in both groups at 52.73% in the immediate aftermath -group and 58.76% in the post-Obama address -group, and as such did not reveal a statistically significant shift. However, BP's use of *compensation* increased dramatically, from 1.82% in the immediate aftermath -group to 21.65% in the

post-Obama address -group. This sudden shift in BP's use of *compensation* provided a chi-value of 20.525, signaling that the shift is statistically highly significant.

Following the trend of the shift in *compensation*, BP decreased its use of *shifting blame* from 14.55% in the immediate aftermath -group to 5.15% in the post-Obama address -group signaling medium statistical significance with a 5% chance of error. By viewing the changes of BP's use of *compensation* and *shifting blame*, it would seem that Obama's Oval Office address played a significant role in assigning blame to BP and in reducing BP's usage of *shifting blame* as an image restoration strategy while increasing BP's use of *compensation*. This change in BP's image restoration choices could be interpreted as BP finally accepting more responsibility for the oil spill. It could be possible, however, that as the response effort was ongoing, more information on the extent of the damage done to the environment and local economies was gathered, which would in turn facilitate discussion on *compensation*. However, it is extremely unlikely that such a sudden surge of data concerning damages caused by the spill took place within such a short time period. It is also important to note, that the increased use of *compensation* took place during the exact same time as the increased use of *taking some responsibility* as well as the decreased use of *shifting blame*. As such, the conclusion can be drawn that Obama's involvement in the form of the Oval Office address heavily influenced BP's increased use of *compensation* and notable decrease in *shifting blame* as image restoration strategies.

Although not a subtype, *corrective action* was included in table 8 because, as an image restoration strategy, it contains no subtypes of its own. BP's use of *corrective action* decreased from 14.55% in the immediate aftermath -group to 6.19% in the post-Obama address -group. This decrease resulted in a chi-value of 3.793, signaling that the shift has a weak statistical significance. The decrease in *corrective action* could be explained by the logical assumption that the mobilization of the restoration effort was at its greatest shortly after the oil spill began. By this logic, BP's reporting of *corrective action* might have naturally dwindled down by the time Obama gave his Oval Office address.

*Excuses based on accidents* became significantly less frequent after Obama's first Oval Office address, dropping from 6.36% of image restoration strategies used in the immediate aftermath -group to 0% in the post-Obama address -group. This change

between the two groups provided the comparison of *excuses based on accidents* with a chi-value of 6.389, marking the shift as statistically highly significant. The reduced frequency of *excuses based on accidents* suggests that after being assigned blame by Obama, BP no longer found it beneficial to attempt to emphasize the oil spill being an accident. At that point in time, it might have been more beneficial for BP's public image to no longer concentrate on why the explosion and oil spill happened, but rather what can be done about it at the present time. *Excuses based on accidents* could have also been viewed as BP refusing to take responsibility which would be in conflict with their increased use of *compensation* and decreased use of *shifting blame* within the same time frame. It is possible, however, that the disappearance of *excuses based on accidents* is related to the time periods in the sense that the topics and substances of the press releases could have naturally changed throughout time. It could be assumed, that the oil spill and their causes were in the spotlight immediately after taking place. It could be, that as time went on, discussion naturally shifted away from the incident itself toward the restoration effort. Nonetheless, the total and abrupt disappearance of *excuses based on accidents* would suggest, yet again, that Obama's address heavily influenced BP's choices of image restoration strategies.

The shift in BP's preferred image restoration strategies is further substantiated by the increase of *taking some responsibility* as an image restoration strategy. The use of *taking some responsibility* increased from 0.91% of all image restoration strategies used in the immediate aftermath -group to 5.15% in the post-Obama address -group, resulting in a chi-value of 3.301, indicating a weak statistical significance. Although the statistical significance of the shift in *taking some responsibility* was found to be weak, it is in line with the other changes and shifts in BP's use of image restoration strategies during the exact same time frame and thus supports the hypothesis that Obama's explicit assigning of blame to BP had an effect on BP's choices of image restoration strategies.

The remaining subtypes of image restoration strategies were considerably less frequent in both time periods, and the comparison of those strategies did not amount to statistical significance. This could be in part due to the low total amount of the image restoration strategies in question. Keeping in mind that the comparison between the remaining

subtypes of image restoration strategies are statistically insignificant, some speculation can be made. *Simple denial* made up 4.55% of the image restoration strategies used in the immediate aftermath -group while it amounted to only 1.03% in the post-Obama address -group. Although the use of *simple denial* was rare, the reduced use of *simple denial* does, however, follow the same the trend of BP using less *shifting blame* while using more *compensation* and *taking some responsibility* after Obama's Oval Office address. Denying allegations of, for example, faulty equipment might have done considerably more harm than good for BP's reputation at that point in time.

*Minimization* added up to 2.73% in the immediate aftermath -group while not being used at all after Obama's address. Despite all occurrences being found in the same time period, the difference did not amount to a statistically significant chi-value. The difference could, however, hint that after Obama's Oval Office address, BP no longer deemed it beneficial to attempt to downplay the situation.

*Attacking accuser*, *taking full responsibility*, and *transcendence* were all rare, playing an even smaller role in BP's image restoration strategy than *minimization*. It is, however, worth noting that the single occurrence of *taking full responsibility* occurred 10 days after the well blowout. At that time the full extent and severity of the oil spill following the well blowout could still have been unknown, or at the very least difficult to estimate. It is quite possible that the resulting damage or future damages could have been underestimated by BP, making it considerably easier for them to accept blame at that point in time.

### 6.3.2  Comparison of Transitivity Results

This section will compare and contrast the results of the transitivity analysis conducted on the image restoration strategies found in both time periods. First, process types will be discussed, second participant types, and lastly *circumstance* types. Similarly to section 7.3.1, which compared the use of image restoration strategies between the two different time periods, this section will utilize the UAM CorpusTool to determine the chi-squared values of changes between the two time periods, and thus determine if the

changes are statistically significant. Table 9 displays the distribution of the different process types within both time groups.
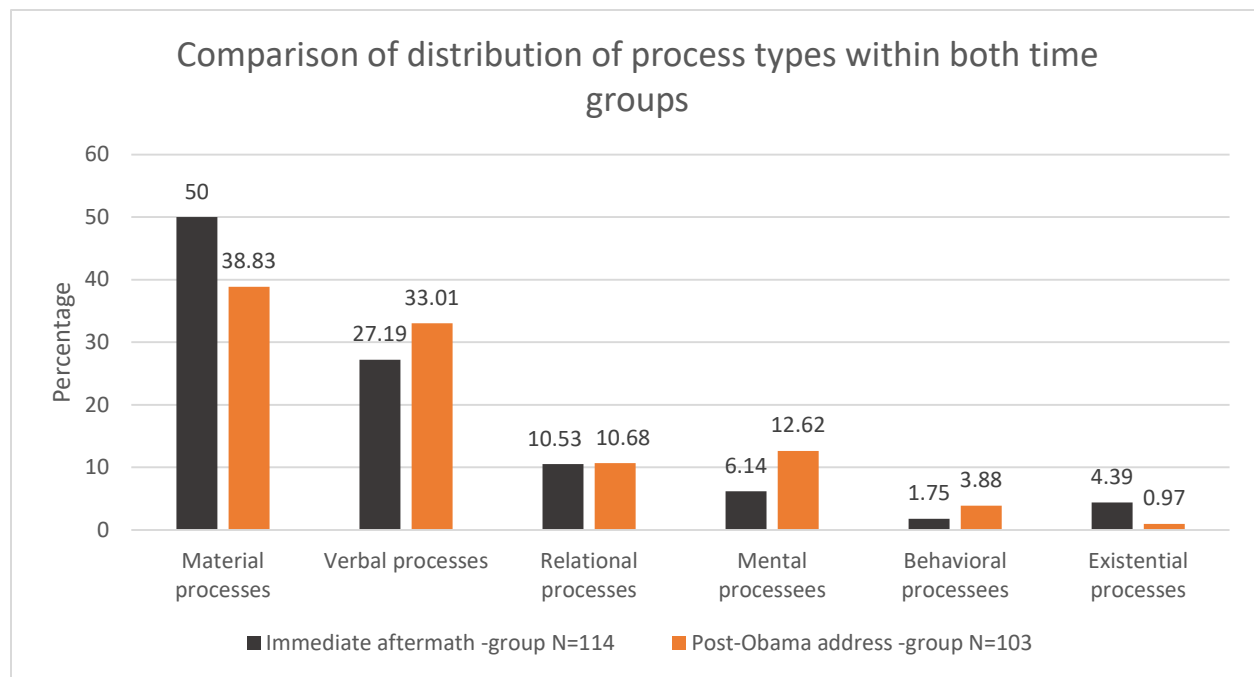


**Table 9** Comparison of distribution of process types within both time groups.

*Material processes* amounted to 50% of all processes in the immediate aftermath -group and 38.83% in the post-Obama address -group resulting in a chi-value of 2.729, marking the difference as having a weak statistical significance. Keeping in mind that the shift in *material processes* has a 10% margin of error, the decrease in *material processes* could be partly due to the numerous concrete actions that were taken immediately after the explosion when the majority of the mobilization of the response effort took place. The frequency of reporting on such matters might have slowed down as the explosion itself became more distant in time. This shift could be connected the decreased use of *corrective action* within the press releases belonging to the post-Obama address -group.

The amount of *verbal processes* grew from 27.19% in the immediate aftermath -group to 33.01% in the post-Obama address -group. Although the difference in amount is not statistically significant, it is worth noting, that the decrease of *material processes* increased the relative amount of *verbal* and *mental processes*, and thus their role within the press releases belonging to the post-Obama address -group. *Relational processes*,

however, remained almost identical at 10.53% in the immediate aftermath -group and 10.68% in the post-Obama address -group.

*Mental processes* became more frequent in the post-Obama address -group, amounting to 12.62% of the processes used compared to 6.14% in the immediate aftermath -group. The difference in the distribution of *mental processes* within both time periods was large enough to have a chi-value of 2.716, and thus be categorized by the chi-test as having a weak significance with a 10% chance of error.

*Behavioral processes* were rare and added up to only 1.75% of the processes in the immediate aftermath -group and 3.88% in the post-Obama address -group, and as such was not of statistical significance. Likewise, the difference in the distribution of *existential processes* between the two time periods was statistically insignificant with *existential processes* amounting to 4.39% in the immediate aftermath -group and 0.97% in the post-Obama address -group. As they were quite rare, both *behavioral* and *existential processes* played a minor role within BP's image restoration strategies. Next, participant types will be briefly examined and compared.

The frequencies of participant types are quite strictly dictated by the changes in the frequencies of process types, and as such their frequencies themselves do not reveal anything noteworthy or unexpected. However, some comments can be made on the differences found within certain subtypes of participants. BP, or a representative of BP, was overwhelmingly the most common *actor* in both the immediate aftermath -group as well as post-Obama address -group. Of the occurrences of *recipient*, occurrences within the immediate aftermath -group were varied and contained, for example, Transocean and the families and colleagues of those who were lost in the explosion. In the post-Obama address -group, all occurrences of *recipients* were either the communities, foundations, businesses, or people whose living situations or livelihoods had been affected by the oil spill.

Occurrences of *attributes* found within the image restoration strategies used by BP revealed an interesting change. *Attributes* within the immediate aftermath -group were heavily focused on BP's commitment and ability to tackle the oil spill. In contrast, most of the *attributes* found in the post-Obama address -group were clearly targeted at

stakeholders, reassuring them of BP's financial strength and commitment to pay future dividends. This same development is visible among the occurrences of *beneficiary* in both time periods. In the image restoration strategies belonging to the immediate aftermath - group, the *beneficiaries* were mostly the local states, businesses and individuals. In contrast, the *beneficiaries* in the post-Obama address -group were, for the most part, the stakeholders. The remaining participant types that were not discussed did not reveal differing trends or tendencies within them. Next, a comparison of BP's use of *circumstance* within both time periods is presented.

BP's use of *circumstance* within their image restoration strategies decreased slightly in the post-Obama address -group when compared to the immediate aftermath -group. The frequencies of each subtype of *circumstance* during both time periods can be seen in table 10.
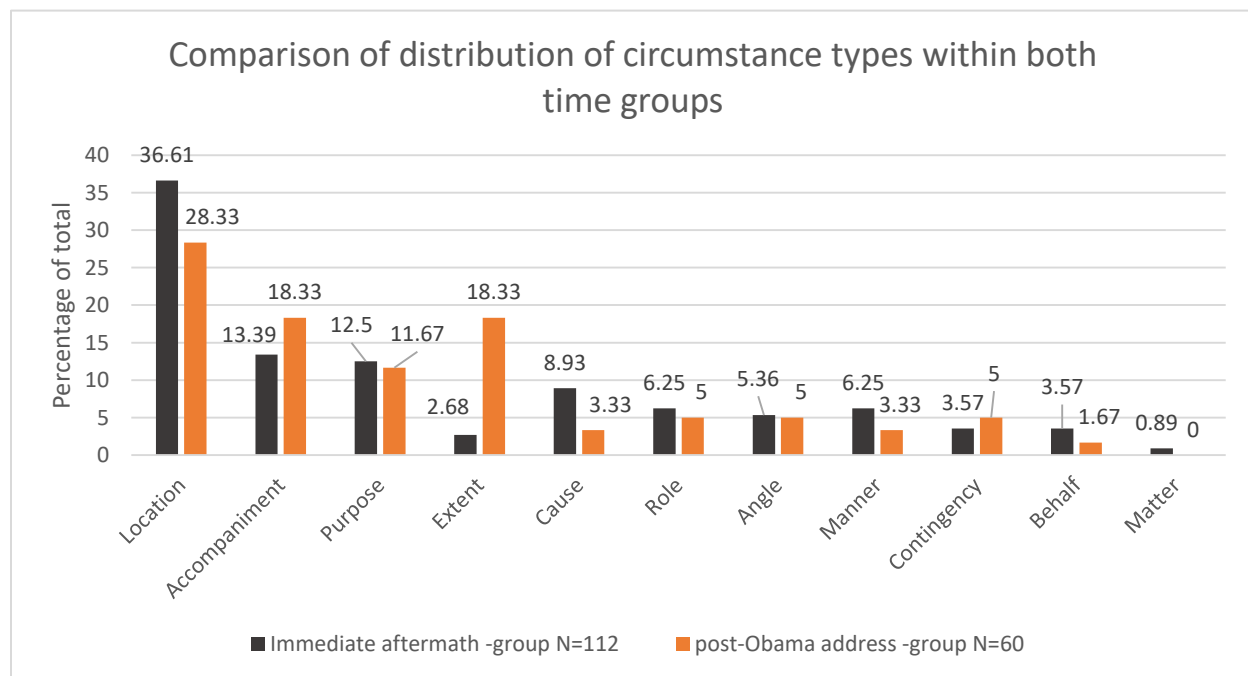


**Table 10** Comparison of distribution of circumstance types within both time groups.

The distribution of *circumstance* decreased greatly, from 112 occurrences in the immediate aftermath -group to 60 in the post-Obama address -group. The shift in the total amount of *circumstance* used by BP during the two time periods has a chi-value of 8.163,

marking the decrease as statistically highly significant. Next, the frequencies of the different subtypes of *circumstances* found within both time periods are discussed.

The distribution of *location* decreased from 36.61% to 28.33% of all *circumstance* types within that time period. The decrease was not large enough to be statistically significant. However, it is worth noting that 56.1% of *location* in the immediate aftermath -group were related to place while 81.25% of *location* in the post-Obama address-group were related to time. This change in location between the two groups might be explained by the initial flood of information that was provided immediately after the explosion and oil leak, much of which described where the event had taken place or what places were or might become affected. Despite this difference, in both groups the single most frequent manifestation of *location* was "today".

Like *location*, BP' use of *accompaniment* remained roughly the same between both time periods, amounting to 13.39% of *circumstance* types in the immediate aftermath -group and 18.33% in the post-Obama address -group. Likewise, *purpose* hardly decreased from 12.5% to 11.67%. However, although distribution of *purpose* barely changed, differences were found within the occurrences of *purpose* in the two time periods. The vast majority of *purpose* in the immediate aftermath -group were directly related to the plugging of the leak, containment of the oil spill and protecting the shoreline. This is not unsurprising as that would be the time period when most of the mobilization toward minimizing the damage of the oil spill happened. In these cases *purpose* worked to inform why particular courses of action were taken. Unlike *purpose* in the immediate aftermath -group, occurrences of *purpose* in the post-Obama address -group were less connected to concrete actions taken toward battling the oil leak or the subsequent damage, but rather toward providing *compensation* to those who were economically affected. This shift within *purpose* can be connected to the decrease of *material processes* and increase of *compensation* in the post-Obama address-group.

*Extent* was the only *circumstance* type to reveal a significant shift between the two time periods. *Extent* amounted to 2.68% of *circumstances* in the immediate aftermath -group compared to 18.33% in the post-Obama address -group. This shift in *extent* is statistically highly significant with chi-value of 12.806 and a 2% chance of error. The increased

frequency of *extent* can be connected to BP's increased use of *compensation* as an image restoration strategy after Obama's address. While the occurrences of *extent* in the immediate aftermath -group were connected to stopping the oil leak, the majority of the occurrences of *extent* in the post-Obama address -group were related to financial claims and payments.

# 7  Discussion

This section will begin by briefly summarizing the main findings of the image restoration analysis after which the results are examined and compared to prior research. This section will then transition to summarize the main results of the transitivity analysis and to view the results in relation to previously conducted studies.

The results of the image restoration analysis reveal that BP attempted to portray a more positive image of themselves and strengthen the public's positive view of the company through the extremely frequent use of *bolstering*, as well as promising *compensation* to those affected by the oil spill. In addition to *bolstering*, BP worked hard to shift and redirect blame to other parties involved by using the image restoration strategy of *shifting blame*. In the press releases analyzed for this thesis, BP never attempted to deny blame or responsibility entirely, but rather attempted to reduce or redistribute blame. BP's third most common image restoration strategy in the press releases following the oil spill was *corrective action*, through which BP worked hard to affirm that they are capable of fixing the situation in a rapid and efficient manner.

The results also show a significant shift in image restoration strategies from BP's press releases immediately after the oil spill to those after Barack Obama's first Oval Office address. While *bolstering* remained frequently used in both groups, *shifting blame* and *denial* became significantly less frequent while the role of *compensation* as an image restoration strategy grew significantly. After Obama's address, BP was also more willing to take responsibility, albeit not full responsibility, for the disaster. The change in BP's willingness to *take some responsibility* is supported by the disappearance of *making excuses that are based on accidents*. The shift in image restoration strategies used by BP strongly suggests that Obama's first Oval Office address caused BP to review or readjust their use of image restoration strategies. As a public figure holding a substantial amount of authority, Obama's statements about BP's responsibility in the oil spill crisis would have likely rendered *shifting blame* and *denial* useless or detrimental. As Benoit stated (1997: 183-184), a company at fault should probably admit this immediately, as a company that falsely denies responsibility for an offense risks substantial damages to

credibility if or when the truth emerges. It could be said, that Obama's address was, in a sense, the moment that the truth was revealed, or at least publicized by probably the highest possible authority figure in the nation.

The results of this thesis differ somewhat from the results of a study conducted by Muralidharan, Dillistone and Shin (2011). Muralidharan, Dillistone and Shin (2011) analyzed BP's social media posts, including images, from Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and Flickr and found that *corrective action* was BP's most used image restoration strategy, being used in 92.4% of all of the posts, followed by *compensation* used in 6.9% of the posts (Muralidharan, Dillistone and Shin 2011: 229). The study revealed that *corrective action* was the most used image restoration strategy on each of the social media platforms used by BP and that it was used the most on YouTube (Muralidharan, Dillistone and Shin 2011: 229).

It is worth noting that each social media platform has its own genre and genres generally follows their own conventions and often have different audiences. It is important to establish that press releases are a different genre from, for example, tweets, Facebook posts or YouTube videos. Thus, differences in the use of image restoration strategies could be considered to be due to differences in genre and audience.

Another proposed reasoning for the increased use of *corrective action* on Youtube is the potential for visuals to evoke sympathy and support (Muralidharan, Dillistone and Shin 2011: 229). Out of the different social media platforms, Twitter and Flickr were the most frequently used. Muralidharan, Dillistone and Shin (2011) propose that this might be due to short tweets being more easily circulated than Facebook posts, and photographs being easier to upload than videos. In addition to using social media, BP spent about $50 million on advertisements to defend its public record (Muralidharan, Dillistone and Shin 2011: 229).

The results of Muralidharan, Dillistone and Shin (2011) are further supported by Katherine Rogers' (2012) findings on BP's use of image restoration strategies on the social media platform Twitter. Rogers' study (2012) found that *corrective action* was the most used image restoration strategy with 46% of the tweets analyzed being coded as *corrective action*. According to Rogers (2012), *bolstering* was the second most common image

restoration strategy used by BP on Twitter and amounted to almost 16% of the coded content. The remaining image restoration strategies that were used in the data analyzed by Rogers were *compensation* in 9.2% of the coded content, *transcendence* in 4.6%, *minimization* in 2,8%, *shifting blame* and *good intention* in 1.8% each, and *simple denial* and attacking the accuser in 0.9% each (Rogers 2012: 32-33).

Comparing the results of this thesis to the findings of Muralidharan, Dillistone and Shin (2011) and Rogers (2012) reveals that BP emphasized *corrective action* considerably more on its social media platforms than in their press releases while *bolstering* was significantly more frequent among the press releases. *Shifting blame* and *denial* were also significantly more common in BP's press releases compared to various social media platforms while *compensation* as an image restoration strategy was used fairly equally in both the press releases as well as on Twitter. Interestingly, in Rogers' data 20.2% of BP's tweets contained no image restoration strategy while 13.88% of the press releases in analyzed in this thesis did not contain an image restoration strategy. Although not a drastic difference, it suggests that press releases were more likely than tweets to contain image restoration strategies. However, it is important to acknowledge the differences between press releases and tweets. Press releases and tweets fulfill different functions and the character restriction of tweets alone makes any larger comparison to BP's press releases difficult. Despite this, Twitter was, in addition to press releases, one of BP's main media platforms and played an important role in BP's image restoration efforts during the aftermath of the oil spill.

Jinbong Choi's (2012) frame analysis on BP's press releases following the 2010 oil spill is also worthy of discussion. Choi (2012) explored the different types of frames that were employed in BP's press releases during the crisis. The results of the frame analysis produced five main frames: informational, philanthropic, social responsibility, defensive and official update. According to Choi (2012), of all BP's press releases related to the Gulf of Mexico oil spill, 34% used the "official update" frame, 23% utilized the "social responsibility" frame, 18% used the "informational frames", 16% used "philanthropic frame", and 9% employed the "defensive" frame (Choi 2012: 424-427). Although impossible to accurately compare to the results of this thesis, some connections can be

drawn. The "social responsibility" and "philanthropic" frames could be likened to *corrective action* and *compensation* which were both frequent image restoration strategies. Similarities could also be drawn between the "defensive" frame and the image restoration types of *denial* and *evading responsibility*. As mentioned, comparison between the frames and image restoration strategies is difficult, but it would seem that the "defensive" frame is somewhat underrepresented compared to the frequency of *denial* and *evading responsibility* as image restoration strategies within the press releases. This is likely due to frame analysis functioning on a higher level and failing to provide more detailed data on the contents of the press releases. It is also worth noting that Choi's frame analysis included the status updates which were omitted in this thesis.

Although the content of a press release, which is the subject of this theses' analysis, naturally affects whether it is successful, the content itself does not reveal the level of its success or failure. Fortunately, Kleinnijenhuis et al. (2015) analyzed the amount of news coverage, BP's press releases, BP's trade volume and share price, and public awareness (in the form of Google searches for BP) in relation to each other during the oil spill crisis. Kleinnijenhuis et al. (2015) found that the daily amount of U.S news coverage about BP followed BP's press releases, the trade volume, and price of BP shares. The study also found that BP's press releases had a positive effect on share price while the increased amount of news had a negative effect on share price. The involvement and participation of former president Barack Obama directly impacted public awareness and increased the amount of Google searches for BP. (Kleinnijenhuis et al. 2015: 422). The study found that BP's press releases related to concrete actions and solutions had a positive influence on BP's publicity while U.S news about the political confusion or chaos, judicial claims and moral virtues that characterized the oil spill were detrimental to BP's public image (Kleinnijenhuis et al. 2015: 422). News concerning judicial claims against BP were also found to have had a negative effect on BP share prices, which suggests that the question of responsibility played an important role during the crisis. The study also found that while concrete solutions and actions to the issue at hand were beneficial to BP's public image, the *mental processes* or discussions of problem solving did not have the same effect (Kleinnijenhuis et al. 2015: 422-423).

As discussed in the transitivity results, *material processes* were the most frequent process type and *material participants* the most frequent participant type. BP preferred to portray itself taking action through *material processes*, almost always in the role of *actor*. The findings of the study by Kleinnijenhuis et al. (2015) suggest that by making these linguistic choices of portraying itself as the *actor* doing concrete things, BP was able to positively influence its trade volume, share price and ultimately public image (Kleinnijenhuis et al. 2015: 422-423). The transitivity analysis in this thesis found that *verbal processes* were almost as frequent as *material processes* and while *mental processes* were not extremely common, they were not exceedingly rare either. As the results of the study by Kleinnijenhuis et al. (2015) found that *mental processes* or discussions of problem solving did not have a positive effect on public image, it might have been more beneficial for BP to use less *verbal* and *mental processes* and instead opt to take an even more active role through the use of *material processes*.

The fact that Obama's involvement had a direct impact on public awareness is perhaps not surprising but it does support the idea that Obama's Oval Office address was impactful and had a direct effect on the linguistic choices made by BP in their press releases. In light of the findings made by Kleinnijenhuis et al (2015), it can be speculated that BP's reduced use of *material processes* in the press releases following Obama's first Oval Office address was a mistake.

A somewhat surprising outcome of the combination of the Image Restoration Theory and transitivity frameworks that emerged was the importance of *circumstance*. *Circumstance* was discussed in its own section within the results mostly because of its optionality and how, unlike participants, it is not tied to process types. However, the analysis revealed that some cases of *circumstance* were mandatory to complete the use or function of an image restoration strategy. This highlighted emphasis on *circumstance* seems to be the unforeseen result of the combination of the two frameworks. Although grammatically *circumstance* has generally been viewed as merely additional and optional, they were crucial in terms of performing certain image restoration strategies. Not only did *circumstance* fulfill the expected informational function of the press release, it was often

important, and in some cases vital, for the fulfillment of the promotional aspect of the image restoration strategies and the press release.

In summary, comparison to other studies revealed that the use of image restoration strategies was different in BP's press releases compared to other media outlets. According to Muralidharan, Dillistone and Shin (2011) and Rogers (2012), *corrective action* was the preferred image restoration strategy on the different social media platforms. In contrast, BP's press releases heavily favored *bolstering* with *compensation* coming at a rather distant second place. Regarding the study of Kleinnijenhuis et al (2015), it would seem that by emphasizing itself as the *actor* doing concrete actions in *material processes*, BP was able to positively influence its public image. However, BP's use of *material processes* declined after Obama's Oval Office address. In light of the results from the study of Kleinnijenhuis et al (2015), the decreased use of *material processes* might have had a negative, or at least non-beneficial effect on BP's public image. The analysis also revealed the unexpected importance of *circumstance* in performing certain image restoration strategies.

# 8  Limitations

Like every study, this study has its limitations. Increasing the sample size of the press releases analyzed would have been effective way to substantiate results that emerged from the image restoration and transitivity analyses. In the end, however, this limitation was a natural one, as there were only so many press releases released between the initial explosion and Obama's Oval Office address. Although the frequency of press releases concerning the oil spill naturally dwindled down, they continued for a long period of time. Analyzing the press releases from a longer period of time would provide insight into what BP's strategies eventually evolved into within the press releases. Such an analysis could also take into account other notable events that might have had an effect on BP's image restoration strategies.

The fact that the transitivity system may sometimes leave some room for interpretation is another limitation that needs to be considered. Although most cases are fairly straightforward according to the transitivity framework, some messages or text can simply have more variation in how they are interpreted. This is an aspect that cannot be entirely removed as it is impossible to know the exact intent or meaning behind the text. Image restoration theory is not entirely exempt from this quality either. However, both frameworks are well respected and established, and when it comes to the purpose of this thesis and the data used, their merits far outweigh their limitations. Whatever limitations there might be can be effectively countered by the explanation of decisions and remaining consistent within the analysis.

Other limitations that must be acknowledged are personal bias and human error. Although the aim of this thesis was not to criticize BP or the oil industry, but rather to simply describe the discourse strategies employed by BP in their press releases, I must acknowledge that I do not think favorably of the company or industry. Although I feel that the framework of this thesis works well to eliminate personal bias from the analysis, it is possible that I have categorized an image restoration strategy that someone with a more favorable opinion of BP or the oil industry might not have. Regarding human error, it is an unavoidable component when working alone. If this study was not a thesis paper, the aspect of human

error could have been minimized by working together with someone else. However, the aspect of human error was addressed and minimized by re-doing the annotation process of the press releases after their initial analysis.

# 9 Conclusion

This thesis set out to examine BP's press releases during the Gulf of Mexico oil spill crisis in 2010 through three research questions. The first research question set out find what types of image restoration strategies were used by BP to positively influence its public image. The second research question aimed to reveal the transitivity choices made within those image restoration strategies used by BP to further examine how BP attempted to portray and influence how others would perceive BP, other parties involved in the crisis and the crisis itself. The third research question addressed whether BP's image restoration strategies and transitivity choices changed between the time period immediately after the explosion on the oil rig and the time period immediately after Barack Obama's first Oval Office address, in which he explicitly laid blame for the oil crisis on BP.

The image restoration analysis found that BP emphasized the use of *bolstering* to strengthen or maintain a positive public image. *Bolstering* was overwhelmingly the most frequently used image restoration strategy by BP while *compensation* was the second most used and promised *compensation* to those individuals, communities, and states affected by the oil spill. BP's third most used image restoration strategy within the press releases was *corrective action*. Through *corrective action* BP emphasized that they would correct the situation in a rapid and efficient manner. In addition to the three most common image restoration strategies, BP attempted to shift and redirect blame to other parties involved through the use of *shifting blame*. Although BP never attempted to deny responsibility entirely, they attempted to reduce or redistribute blame in various different ways.

The comparison of BP's use of image restoration strategies within the press releases of the two time periods revealed significant shifts in BP's image restoration strategy. After Barack Obama's first Oval Office address, BP significantly increased the use of *compensation* as an image restoration strategy. At the same time, BP significantly decreased the use *of excuses based on accidents* as well as the *simple denial* and *shifting blame*. The shift in BP's use of image restoration strategies strongly indicates that after Obama's Oval Office address, BP was more ready to publicly accept some responsibility

for the oil spill. The results also reveal that BP no longer attempted to portray the situation as an accident, and began to emphasize *compensation* as an image restoration strategy.

The transitivity analysis conducted on the image restoration strategies that were found in BP's press releases provided further insight into how BP portrayed the disaster and the various parties involved. The analysis revealed how BP preferred the use of *material processes*, placing itself in the role of *actor*, portraying itself as taking concrete action toward fixing the situation at hand. The transitivity analysis also shed light onto how certain image restoration strategies manifested themselves. BP often included Transocean within the *circumstance* type *cause*, thus connecting the two. By doing so, BP effectively employed the image restoration strategy of *shifting blame*. In addition, the transitivity analysis revealed how BP emphasized its *role* as merely the lease operator, attempting to distance themselves from the drilling operations and thus the explosion. The significance of *circumstance* revealed by the transitivity analysis was unexpected. Because of the grammatical optionality of *circumstance,* it is often in a minor role when transitivity analyses are conducted. However, this thesis found that *circumstance* played an important role in fulfilling the functions of certain image restoration strategies. Thus, although grammatically optional, *circumstance* was often mandatory in the formulation and use of BP's image restoration strategies. In addition, the results of the transitivity analysis also showed how BP used *circumstance* to connect only positive attributes to itself in attempt to better its public image.

The results of the comparative analysis of transitivity within the two time periods was not quite as varied as the results of the comparison between the image restoration strategies. Overall, BP's use of *material processes* decreased while *mental processes* increased slightly. Viewing the results of this thesis in light of the study conducted by Kleinnijenhuis et al. (2015: 422-423) suggests that BP's emphasis on *material processes* and portraying itself in an active role taking concrete action was beneficial for BP's public image. However, keeping in mind the results of the study conducted by Kleinnijenhuis et al, the shifting of emphasis from *material processes* to *mental processes* after Obama's Oval Office address was most likely detrimental or, at the least, non-beneficial to enforcing a positive image of BP. The most significant shift revealed by the comparison of the

transitivity results of both time periods was found in the use of the *circumstance* type *extent*. After Obama's Oval Office address, BP increased its use of extent significantly. Through the use of extent, BP emphasized the amount and intensity of their restoration effort, highlighting how hard they are working around the clock to restore the situation. This most likely did not have the same beneficial effect on public image that concrete actions in the form of *material processes* would have had.

By comparing the results of this thesis to the results of studies conducted on BP's social media posts, we can see how BP's press releases employed a different approach to image restoration. While BP's press releases overwhelmingly emphasized *bolstering*, BP heavily emphasized the use of *corrective action* as an image restoration strategy on various social media platforms. These differences in BP's preference of image restoration strategies are likely related to differences in genre.

The fact that Barack Obama's first Oval Offices address had such an effect on BP's image restoration strategies and linguistic choices provides avenues for further research. This thesis concentrated on a very limited time period when in reality the oil spill crisis continued for years with some of the effects remaining visible to this day. Further research could analyze how certain events that took place later on during the crisis affected BP's use of image restoration strategies and transitivity choices. Such events could be, for example, the release of the official government document which laid blame and responsibility for the oil spill onto BP. Eventually, the court ruled BP as primarily responsible for the Gulf of Mexico oil spill and the eleven deaths of crewmembers. The time period during the civil and criminal proceedings and the final verdict would provide suitable time periods for further research.

In conclusion, this thesis found that BP had a clear emphasis in their choice of image restoration strategies in their press releases following the Gulf of Mexico oil spill. In addition, transitivity analysis revealed how BP used linguistic choices to portray itself in a positive way and to indirectly shift blame away from itself. However, BP's preference of image restoration strategies and transitivity choices changed significantly after former President of the United States Barack Obama gave his first Oval Office address in which he assigned blame to BP. These shifts reveal that Obama's statements did in fact have

a direct effect on BP's image restoration strategies and linguistic choices in their press releases.

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## Appendix 1: Sample Annotation of Press Release for Image Restoration Strategies

**BP Atlantis**

Release date: 16 May 2010

<u>BP today rebutted allegations that its Atlantis platform in the Gulf of Mexico operated with incomplete and inaccurate engineering documents</u>. (*Simple denial*)

Responding to claims that flawed or missing documentation posed a threat to safe operation of the platform, recently made in various news programs and print media, <u>BP said it had thoroughly investigated these claims when they were first made by a former contract worker in 2009 and found them to be without substance</u>. (*Simple denial*)

<u>The investigation found that the operators on the platform had full access to the accurate, up-to-date drawings (topsides, hull and subsea) necessary to operate the platform safely</u>. (*Bolstering + simple denial*)

A second investigation of the same allegations by the Ombudsman's office focused on project document and filing procedures and had no bearing on operating or regulatory issues. <u>After this review BP made some procedural changes in the project execution plan, but these likewise had no connection with the safe operation of the platform.</u> (*Simple denial*)

<u>"As CEO Tony Hayward constantly makes clear, safe and reliable operations are his number 1 priority for BP and the company has a very strong record of safe and reliable operations in the Gulf of Mexico," a company spokesman said</u>. (*Bolstering*) <u>"It is completely erroneous to suggest that the minor internal process issue we identified and immediately amended last year on the Atlantis platform suggests anything different."</u> (*Simple denial*)

<u>The design, construction, installation and operation of Atlantis have received a high level of oversight by both the US Minerals Management Service (MMS) and the US Coast Guard</u>. (*Bolstering*) <u>BP has and will continue to work with the MMS or any other regulator when concerns are raised about any aspect of our operation</u>. (*Bolstering*)

The Atlantis field has been in service since October 2007 and has safely produced many million barrels of oil. (*Bolstering*) The platform was successfully maintained through the course of two major hurricanes in 2008. (*Transcendence + bolstering*) Its safety, operations and performance record is excellent. (*Bolstering*)

## Appendix 2: Sample Annotation of Press Release for Transitivity

**BP** (*Sayer*) **reiterates** (*Verbal process*) **oil spill response transparency** (*Verbiage*)

Release date: 21 May 2010

<u>BP</u> (*Sayer*) <u>today</u> (*Location*) <u>reiterated</u> (*Verbal process*) <u>its pledge to be open and transparent in its response to the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.</u> (*Verbiage*)

<u>BP</u> (*Sayer*) <u>confirmed</u> (*Verbal process*) <u>its continuing commitment to co-operate with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in facilitating access by the US Government and the public to sampling/monitoring data on the Deepwater Horizon spill response</u>. (*Verbiage*) The commitment was made in a letter sent to Janet Napolitano, Secretary of Homeland Security and Lisa Jackson, administrator of the EPA.

"<u>We</u> (*Carrier*) <u>are</u> (*Relational process*) <u>committed to providing the American people with the information they need to understand the environmental impact from the spill and the response steps that have been taken,</u>" (*Attribute*) (*Verbiage*) <u>said</u> (*Verbal process*) <u>BP's chief executive Tony Hayward.</u>  (*Sayer*)

"<u>We</u> (*Behaver*) <u>share</u> (*Behavioral process*) <u>with you</u> (*Accompaniment*) <u>a strong commitment to transparency.</u> (*Behavior*) <u>BP</u> (*Actor*) <u>is working</u> (*Material process*) <u>hand-in-hand with federal, state and local governments</u> (*Accompaniment*) <u>to gather data on the seabed and in the water, and to incorporate those lessons so that we can continually improve the effectiveness of our response efforts,</u>" (*Purpose*) (*Verbiage*) <u>Hayward</u> (*Sayer*) <u>added.</u> (*Verbal process*)

BP has begun the process of collecting and uploading relevant data to its own website www.BP.com and has committed to work with the US Coast Guard and the EPA with respect to uploading of materials on a rolling basis onto this website.

BP's commitment was confirmed in response to a letter, dated 20 May, from the EPA and the DHS.

## Finnish Summary

Vuonna 2010 Meksikonlahdella syntyi yksi historian pahimmista öljyvuodoista, kun kansainvälisen energia-alan yrityksen, BP:n, vuokraama Deepwater Horizon -öljynporauslautta räjähti ja syttyi palamaan. Räjähdyksessä ja sitä seuranneessa tulipalossa kuoli 11 ihmistä ja vuoto johti suuriin ekologisiin ja ekonomisiin tuhoihin Meksikonlahden alueella. Suuren ympäristökriisin lisäksi BP kohtasi valtavan viestintä- ja pr-kriisin, kun yritys joutui median ja yleisön hyökkäysten kohteeksi. Suurimman julkisuuden saanut julkinen syytös BP:tä kohtaan tuli presidentti Barack Obamalta. Obama piti ympäristökriisin vuoksi ensimmäisen virkahuoneen puheensa, jossa hän eksplisiittisesti totesi BP:n olevan syyllinen, ja että BP tulee maksamaan.

BP vastasi kohtaamaansa pr-kriisiin monella eri media-alustalla, julkaisemalla suuren määrän tiedotteita, olemalla aktiivinen Twitterissä ja Facebookissa, sekä julkaisemalla videoita YouTube -videopalvelussa ja kuvia Flickr -kuvapalvelussa. Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma käsittelee BP:n julkaisemia tiedotteita öljyonnettomuuden aikana. Yrityksen tiedotteet valikoituivat tutkielman aineistoksi, koska tiedotteilla on virallisempi status, ja toimittajat ja uutislähteet usein käyttävät tiedotteita tiedonlähteinä. Koska toimittajat käyttävät tiedotteita usein lähteinä, tarjoavat tiedotteet mahdollisuuden vaikuttaa siihen, miten asiasta uutisoidaan. Täten BP pystyi vaikuttamaan tiedotteiden kautta siihen, miten heistä ja Meksikonlahden öljyonnettomuudesta uutisoitiin.

Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma vastaa kolmeen kysymykseen: Millaisia strategioita BP käytti tiedotteissaan yrittäessään vaikuttaa positiivisesti julkiseen imagoonsa? Toiseksi, millaisia kielellisiä valintoja BP teki heidän käyttämissään strategioissaan vaikuttaakseen miten öljyonnettomuus ja sen eri osapuolet kuvaillaan ja esitetään? Kolmanneksi, miten BP:n strategiat ja kielelliset valinnat muuttuivat sen jälkeen, kun Obama suoranaisesti asetti vastuun BP:n harteille ja syytti heitä koko öljyonnettomuudesta? Ensimmäiseen tutkimuskysymykseen vastaamiseen tutkielma käytti William Benoitin imagon palauttamisen teoriaa (Image Restoration Theory) imagon palauttamisen strategioiden löytämiseen ja kategorisointiin. Toiseen tutkimuskysymykseen vastaamiseen tutkielma käytti M.A.K Hallidayn transitiivisuusteoriaa, joka perustuu siihen, että kielen avulla ilmaisemme kokemuksemme ympäröivästä maailmasta erilaisten *prosessien*,

*osallistujien* ja *olosuhteiden* avulla. Koska se, miten ilmaisemme kokemuksemme ympäröivästä maailmasta on subjektiivista, on transitiivisuuteen liittyvät valinnat kytköksissä motivaatioihin ja ideologioihin. Teorioita muovattiin hieman tutkielman tavoitteisiin sopivimmiksi. Obaman virkahuoneen puhe on merkittävä tämän tutkielman kannalta, koska se tavoitti erittäin suuren yleisön Yhdysvalloissa. Lisäksi, presidentin virkahuoneen puheita pidetään lähinnä silloin, kun presidentti on poistumassa virasta, on sattunut katastrofi, tai ilmoitetaan suuresta linjauksen muutoksesta.

Tutkielma analysoi 36 BP:n tiedotetta, 18 ensimmäistä tiedotetta heti räjähdyksen jälkeen ja 18 tiedotetta Obaman ensimmäisen virkahuoneen puheen jälkeen. Tiedotteet valittiin kronologisessa järjestyksessä, mutta pienemmät statuspäivitystiedotteet jätettiin huomioimatta, koska ne olivat lyhyitä ja koostuivat teknisistä tiedoista, usein toistaen asioita, jotka tulivat ilmi suuremmissa tiedotteissa. Tiedotteet kerättiin BP:n Internet-sivuston arkistoista ja tallennettiin yksitellen tekstitiedostoina. Tekstitiedostot lisättiin UAM CorpusTooliin, jolla luotiin oma korpus. UAM CorpusTool valikoitui muiden korpusohjelmian joukosta sillä, että ohjelman sisällä voi luoda omat tasot, joiden avulla analysoida tekstiä manuaalisesti. Täten UAM CorpusTool sopi hyvin imagon palattaumisen ja transitiivisuuden analyysiin.

Analyysi paljasti, että BP käytti 36 analysoidussa tiedotteessa imagon palauttamisen strategioita yhteensä 207 kertaa. Vain viidessä tiedotteessa imagon palauttamisen strategioita ei ilmennyt ollenkaan. Analyysi paljasti, että BP suosi huomattavasti *vaikutusten vähentämistä*. *Vaikutusten vähentämisen* strategioista BP käytti huomattavasti eniten *huomion kääntämistä positiivisiin seikkoihin*. Toiseksi eniten vaikutusten vähentämisen strategioista BP käytti *kompensaatiota*. *Vaikutusten vähentämisen* lisäksi BP käytti *vastuun kieltämisen* strategioita *siirtääkseen vastuuta muille osapuolille* ja *kiistääkseen* heitä kohdistuneita syytteitä. Kolmanneksi eniten BP käytti imagon palauttamisen strategioista *toiminnan palauttamisen strategiaa*. Sen keinoin BP lupasi parantaa toimintaansa tai varmistaa, että samanlaista onnettomuutta ei voisi sattua uudestaan.

Transitiivisuusanalyysi BP:n käyttämille imagon palauttamisen strategioille paljasti, että BP esitti itsensä aktiivisessa roolissa tehden konkreettisia asioita tilanteen

parantamiseksi ja korjaamiseksi. BP korosti tätä asettamalla itsensä *tekijän* rooliin ja suosimalla vahvasta *materiaalisia prosesseja*. BP myös vakuutteli yleisöä heidän omistautumisesta öljyonnettomuuden korjaamista kohtaan ja osakkeenomistajia heidän vahvasta taloudellisesta tilanteesta. Vaikka *materiaaliset prosessit* olivat käytetyimpiä, olisi BP voinut käyttää niitä enemmän, sillä *verbaaliset prosessit* olivat *materiaalisten prosessien* jälkeen hyvin yleisiä. Vaikka transitiivisuusteoriassa *olosuhteet* ovat usein valinnaisia, ne osoittautuivat tärkeäksi osaksi BP:n imagon palauttamisen strategioita. *Olosuhteista syy* sisälsi usein maininnan Transoceanista, joka oli Deepwater Horizon -öljynporauslautan omistaja. Sisältämällä maininnan Transoceanista *syyn* sisälle, BP epäsuorasti *siirsi vastuuta* itseltään Transoceanille. Käyttämällä *roolia*, BP asetti itsensä vain vuokralaiseksi, etäännyttäen itseään samalla itse poraustoiminnasta ja täten myös räjähdyksestä, joka johti öljyvuotoon.

Vertailemalla tiedotteita ennen ja jälkeen Obaman eksplisiittistä vastuun asettamista BP:lle, paljastui, että BP käytti imagon palauttamisen teorioita hieman enemmän ennen Obaman virkahuoneen puhetta. Analyysi paljasti, että ennen Obaman puhetta *vastuun välttelemisen* ja *kieltämisen* strategiat olivat huomattavasti yleisempiä kuin Obaman puheen jälkeen. Tätä muutosta korosti se, että Obaman virkahuoneen puheen jälkeen *huomion kääntäminen positiivisiin asioihin* ja *kompensaatio* strategioina lisääntyivät huomattavasti. Myös *anteeksipyytämisen* strategiat lisääntyivät Obaman puheen jälkeen. Tulokset paljastavat, että Obaman virkahuoneen puheella oli suora vaikutus BP:n käyttämiin imagon palauttamisen strategioiden valintoihin.

Vertailemalla transitiivisuusanalyysin tuloksia kahden ryhmän välillä paljastui, että *materiaalisten prosessien* osuus laski Obaman virkahuoneen puheen jälkeen, kun taas *verbaalisten* ja *mentaalisten prosessien* osuus nousi. Vertailu osoitti myös, että *olosuhteiden* sisällä tapahtui muutoksia kahden aikaryhmän välillä. Ennen Obaman virkahuoneen puhetta *edunsaajina* olivat useimmin katastrofialueen asukkaat, yritykset ja osavaltiot, kun taas puheen jälkeen *edunsaajina* olivat useimmin osakkeenomistajat. Analyysi paljasti myös, että prosessien *tarkoitus* muuttui aikaryhmien välillä. *Tarkoitus* oli ennen Obaman puhetta liitetty *materiaalisiin prosesseihin*, jotka liittyivät öljykatastrofin korjaamiseen, kun taas Obaman puheen jälkeen *tarkoitus* liitettiin *kompensoinnin*

tarjoamiseen öljyvuodon taloudellisille uhreille. Tämä muutos on suoraan liitettävissä kompensoinnin kasvuun imagon palauttamisen teoriana.

Tutkielman tulokset eroavat aikaisemmista aiheeseen liittyvistä tutkimuksista. Esimerkiksi Muralidhan et al. (2011) tutkivat BP:n eri sosiaalisten medioiden viestejä Meksikonlahden öljyonnettomuuden aikana ja löysivät, että tilanteen palauttaminen oli jokaisella eri alustalla yleisin imagon palauttamisen strategia. On tärkeää huomioida, että kyseessä on hyvin erilaiset genret. Tiedotteet, twiitit, Facebook-viestit ja Youtube-videot muodostavat kaikki omat genrensä ja ne palvelevat eri yleisöjä ja funktiota. On myös otettava huomioon, että esimerkiksi twiiteissä on hyvin rajattu viestin pituus.

Vaikka tämän tutkielman tulokset eivät suoraan kerro BP:n strategioiden tai tiedotteiden toimivuudesta, voimme katsoa tuloksia aikaisemman tutkimuksen valossa. Kleinnijenhuis et al. (2015) tutkivat uutisten määrää, BP:n kauppamäärää, osakkeen hintaa ja Google-hakujen määrää ja niiden suhteita toisiinsa Meksikonlahden öljyonnettomuuden aikana. Kleinnijenhuis et al. (2015) löysivät, että BP:stä uutisoinnin määrä oli yhteydessä BP:n julkaisemien tiedotteiden määrään, osakkeiden myyntiin ja hintaan. Tutkimuksen mukaan BP:n tiedotteet vaikuttivat positiivisesti osakkeiden hintaan, kun taas uutisten määrän kasvu vaikutti negatiivisesti osakkeiden hintaan. Tutkimus osoitti, että Obaman kantaaottava virkahuoneen puhe lisäsi selkeästi yleistä tietoisuutta öljyonnettomuudesta, mikä näkyi lisääntyneinä Google-hakuina. Tutkimus paljasti myös, että tiedotteet, joissa BP tarjosi konkreettisia ratkaisuja ongelmien korjaamiseksi, vaikuttivat positiivisesti BP:n imagoon, kun taas kiistat vastuullisuudesta ja vahingonkorvauksista vaikuttivat BP:n imagoon negatiivisesti.

Tarkastelemalla tämän pro gradu -tutkielman tuloksia Kleinnijenhuis et al. (2015) tutkimuksen valossa voi todeta, että BP:n materiaalisten prosessien suosiminen ja itsensä asettaminen tekijän rooliin oli onnistunutta kriisiviestintää. Tulosten valossa BP:n olisi kuitenkin kannattanut jatkaa materiaalisten prosessien suosimista myös Obaman virkahuoneen puheen jälkeen, sillä lisääntynyt verbaalisten ja mentaalisten prosessien käyttö ei vaikuttanut ainakaan positiivisesti BP:n imagoon.

Obaman ensimmäisen virkahuoneen puheen vaikutus BP:n käyttämiin imagon palauttamisen strategioihin ja kielellisiin valintoihin tarjoaa mahdollisia lisätutkimuksen

aiheita. Meksikonlahden öljyonnettomuus jatkui pitkään, ja tämän tutkielman puitteissa vain osa tiedotteista analysoitiin. Lisätutkimuksessa voisi tarkastella, miten muut merkitykselliset tapahtumat vaikuttivat BP:n viestintään, joko tiedotteissa tai sosiaalisen median alustoilla. Esimerkiksi myöhemmin käyty oikeudenkäynti tai hallituksen julkaisema virallinen raportti tapahtuman syistä, tekijöistä ja vastuussa olevista tarjoavat potentiaaliset ajankohdat lisätutkimuksille. Kaiken kaikkiaan, mahdollisuuksia lisätutkimukselle olisi huomattavasti, ja vaikka Meksikonlahden öljyonnettomuudesta on kahdeksan vuotta, on aihe edelleen ajankohtainen, kun presidentti Donald Trump kumosi Obaman ympäristöpoliittisia saavutuksia, jotka toteutettiin Meksikonlahden öljyonnettomuuden seurauksena.