

Repairing the Company's Image: Image Repair Strategies and Theme Structure in Boeing's Press
Releases Published after the Lion Air and Ethiopian Airlines Plane Accidents

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In 2019, aerospace giant Boeing faced a public image crisis when two of their planes crashed fatally only five months apart. In this comparative study, I examine Boeing's image repair efforts in their press releases issued after these accidents. Since both plane crashes involved the same jet model and the preliminary investigations revealed that the pilots in both planes experienced similar problems with the flight control law, the accidents posed a severe threat to Boeing's image.

The image repair efforts of Boeing are examined through analyzing the image repair strategies and theme structure. The aim of the study is to find out firstly, what kinds of image repair strategies Boeing applied before and after the second accident and secondly, what kinds of themes are used and what kinds of implicit meanings are potentially constructed by means of the thematic position. Lastly, I intend to find out any potential patterns or correlations between the image repair strategies and the choices of theme. The analysis of image repair strategies is conducted using a model that builds on William Benoit's Image Repair Theory and Timothy Coombs's Crisis-Response Strategies. The theme structure analysis rests upon M.A.K. Halliday and Christian Matthiessen's view of theme and rheme and how they coincide with given and new information. This allows the thematic position to be used as a rhetorical resource, directing the reader to perceive some information as given or mutually agreed.

The results of the study revealed that bolstering was the primary image repair strategy used both before and after the second accident, which implies that the company reinforced the positive image by emphasizing its good qualities and good deeds in the past. The results also indicated that Boeing increased the use of corrective action as an image repair strategy after the second accident. In addition to the two most frequent strategies, also praising others, simple denial and shifting the blame were used. The theme structure analysis revealed that themes referring to the company itself were overwhelmingly most common throughout the data and they were paired with rhemes that bolster the company's image. The thematic position was also utilized in order to shape the audience's perceptions and it was done more often after the second accident.

Overall, the image repair efforts increased and changed after the second accident, when the allegations also increased. Even though Boeing did not accept full responsibility of the accidents, they increased the use of corrective action by promising to prevent such accidents happening again and making enhancements to the flight control law, pilot training and manuals.

Key words: image repair, Image Repair Theory, Crisis-Response Strategies, thematic structure, Boeing, press release

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MCAS	Maneuvering Characteristic Augmentation System
AOA	Angle of Attack
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
APA	Allied Pilot Association
INTSC	Indonesian National Transportation Safety Committee

1 Introduction

The desire to maintain one's face is natural to human beings. When someone or something is threatening our image, we tend not to overlook it, for our image (or face or reputation) is considered valuable commodity. We not only want to have positive image of ourselves, but also seek others to think of us in an equally favorable way (Benoit 2015, ix). Good image improves a healthy self-image, maintains our trustworthiness and thus persuasiveness in the eyes of others (Benoit 2015, 2). Others are more likely to cooperate with us if we have a good reputation and do not offend them (Benoit 2015, ix). Image is equally important to companies, and because their initial purpose is to make profit on their shareholders and owners – and a successful business normally requires public relations and cooperation with others – a positive image can be even more essential to companies. If a company's image is severely tarnished, its partners in cooperation, customers and other stakeholders – not to mention shareholders – can refuse to cooperate with it in future and take their business elsewhere (Benoit 2015, 3). Additionally, it is believed that the bigger the responsibility of a wrongdoer, the bigger the threat to one's image (Benoit 2015, 18). Thus, companies may invest in the image repair efforts even more than individuals do (Benoit 1997, 177).

It is common for people and organizations to face direct accusations or doubts of wrongdoing, performed by others (Benoit 2015, 1). Due to the competition for limited resources, external events that affect our action, human errors and differing goals, wrongdoing is an inevitable feature of human interaction (Benoit 2015, 17). Despite that and the value a reputation can have (especially in business), many companies still are reactive in crisis situations rather than proactive, that is, they make an effort in reputational risk management only after the crisis erupts (Shanahan and Seele 2015, 42–43). Company's communications has an essential and strategic role in managing reputation and stakeholders' perceptions of the company (Shanahan and Seele 2015, 42). The efforts put in corporate discourse seek to modify audience's perceptions concerning the crisis and the responsibility that the company has on it (Shanahan and Seele 2015, 43). By choosing the right words, channels, audiences and timing, it is possible to have a great impact on how people perceive something.

This thesis examines the image repair efforts of airplane manufacturer Boeing, during an image crisis that followed two fatal plane crashes in 2018 and 2019. Accusations were made against Boeing when it emerged that the pilots of both accident planes, 737 MAX, had similar problems with a flight control law. The aim is to find out what kind of image repair efforts,

focusing on theme structure and image repair strategies, Boeing applied in their press releases issued after these accidents. The exact purpose of this study can be summed up in the following questions:

1. What kinds of image repair strategies are used before and after the crisis intensified?
2. What kinds of themes are used before and after the crisis intensified?
What kinds of implicit meanings are potentially constructed by means of the thematic position?
3. How do the image repair strategies correlate with the choices of theme and is there variation between the two data?

To find out about the image repair strategies used, I apply a model that builds on William Benoit's Image Repair Theory and Timothy Coombs's Crisis Response Strategies. Through this model, I am able to identify and categorize the different image repair strategies used in the press releases. The model and the original frameworks are discussed in section 3.

Theme structure refers to the system of constructing information within discourse, that is, how people organize the elements in their speech or writing. The order of the elements plays an important role in how we orient to the information we are about to receive and how we perceive it. This, of course, allows the theme structure to carry a great potential for rhetorical effects, for it can determine how we interpret and conceptualize ideas. Thus, thematization can also be utilized in repairing the public image. Through theme analysis, I aim to establish how the thematic position is potentially utilized in order to shape the audience's perceptions of the company and the events. I discuss the theme structure in more detail in section 4.1. Since Boeing's crisis intensified after the Ethiopian Airlines accident, another important objective of this study is to find out whether this second accident made Boeing to change their image repair work.

There is already a good amount of research in crisis communication and the image repair strategies used by different companies, especially with the focus on business and communication. The image repair strategies of H&M (Haraldsson and Gabrielsson 2018) and Texaco (Brinson and Benoit 1999) – to name a few – and numerous politicians (Benoit 2015) and athletes (Stinson 2015) have previously been studied. In Katila's (2018) work, a more linguistic approach was taken to examine BP's image repair efforts. Boeing's rather newly occurred crisis has not yet been studied comprehensively, and this kind of comparative study combining the methods of image repair analysis and theme analysis is unique. This kind of research is necessary because of two reasons. Firstly, when image repair discourse is studied, it

enables organizations to learn and thus communicate more effectively during crises. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, it enables us consumers to become aware of the linguistic ways both organizations and media influence our perceptions.

Now I turn to section, 2 which begins with explaining the background of this study – it describes the concept of crisis in general and the background of 737 MAX accidents that took place in October 2018 and March 2019. Section 3, as already mentioned, covers the theory of image repair while section 4 concentrates on the theme structure and describes the concepts of theme/rheme and given/new. Section 5 discusses and validates how and why the data was selected and gathered, as well as the methods used in the study. Section 6 presents the results of the analysis, and section 7 goes on to examining and discussing them more thoroughly. Lastly, section 8 concludes the thesis.

2 Background

In the following sections I will provide background for this study. Section 2.1 deals with the definition of crisis. Section 2.2 proceeds to describing the events that preceded and followed the two tragic accidents and section 2.3 explains why the 737 MAX accidents counts as an image crisis.

2.1 Crisis defined

As mentioned above, wrongdoing is an inevitable feature of human interaction, and it can be consequence of human error, conflicting goals and interests, limited resources or external events, that can be beyond human's control, such as natural disasters (Benoit 2015, 17). Thus, crises are also permanent phenomena in human everyday life, and the number as well as the severity of crises is also growing as the complexity of society and technology grows (Stephens, Malone, and Bailey 2005, 390). Since this thesis will concentrate on image crises, it is relevant to describe the phenomenon.

In his book "Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing and Responding", W. Timothy Coombs (2012, 2) explains the importance of communication in preventing and reducing the threats of crises and describes how practitioners can best act in such situations, by reviewing the latest research in the field. He writes that even though crisis management has been a popular issue to write about, there is no prior agreement on the definition of the term crisis itself. Therefore, he combined the common characteristics of several different perspectives, creating the following definition: "A crisis is the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization's performance and generate negative outcomes" (Coombs 2012, 2). What is essential in this definition is that the stakeholders' *perceptions* define an event as a crisis (ibid.). Regardless of what the organization itself thinks, if the stakeholders believe that it is in crisis, they will, naturally, act and treat the organization as if it was the truth (ibid.). Therefore, whenever the stakeholders perceive the organization as being in crisis, the crisis occurs (ibid.). Another essential point is the extent of the damage: crisis is an event which either affects or has the potential to affect the entire organization (Coombs 2012, 3). Earlier, Pearson and Mitroff (1993, 49) proposed a similar definition, with a few small differences: in addition to previously mentioned characteristics, they emphasize the lack of organization's (complete) control over the event as well as the need for immediate attention and action. However, as Bloch (2014, 25)

points out, even though crises have the potential to affect negatively on the organization's image, operations et cetera, they need not to. She outlines that the ambivalence of its outcome is one of the primary features of a crisis. Therefore, a crisis can be a turning point to negative, but also sometimes to positive (ibid.).

Obviously, crises are relevant to any kinds of organizations and public figures, and not only those carrying on commercial business. But for the sake of clarity, I will now go on to talking about companies specifically. Crises can violate stakeholders' expectations of the company and weaken its legitimacy, resulting in people creating negative feelings towards it, such as anger and disappointment (Coombs 2012, 3; Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer 2003, 4). Consequently, the relationship between the company and its stakeholders, as well as the company's reputation is at risk (Coombs 2012, 3) while this, naturally, can affect negatively on the company's business and profitability, even survival (Seeger et al. 2003, 4). Crises tend to vary widely in terms of their severity and intensity (Stephens et al. 2005, 392), and their effects on the company vary similarly, as well as the reactions and responses they evoke. Pearson and Mitroff (1993, 48) point out that there are critical differences between crises, depending on whether it is human-induced or for example caused by a natural disaster. It is generally acknowledged that companies and individuals in general have little control over natural disasters, whereas human-induced crises are, in principle, preventable at least to some extent (Pearson and Mitroff 1993, 48–49). Thus, crises that are caused by human action usually pose a more severe threat to company's image (ibid.). The severity of the threat also depends on other factors, for example the company's history with similar crises (as in Boeing's 737 MAX crisis) and the perceived quality of interaction between the company and its stakeholders (Shanahan and Seele 2015, 44).

One of the basic assumptions of Coombs's (2012, 3) book is that “[a] crisis is unpredictable but not unexpected”, meaning that companies (should) know that they are prone to crises, however, what they do not know is when the crisis erupts. Some crises strike suddenly, whereas some offer a clear warning. Coombs uses a television news magazine that is planning to show a negative story about a company as an example: the company in question will know about the oncoming crisis well beforehand. Furthermore, he argues that neglectful or careless management of the crisis can increase the damage (Coombs 2012, 4). For these reasons, it is important for organizations to know how to react in the most efficient ways when facing a crisis.

2.2 Boeing 737 MAX accidents and the aftermath

The Boeing Company was founded in 1916 by William E. Boeing and George Conrad Westervelt (Boeing n.d.). To this day, Boeing has achieved a position as a leading aerospace company and a manufacturer of aircrafts, satellites and other space, defense and security systems and support services (Lamiman 2017, 21; Boeing n.d.). Their leading product, Boeing 737, is the most sold aircraft in the world (Johnston and Harris 2019, 4). After their chief rival's, Airbus's, announcement of a new upgrade, Boeing decided to respond with a new version of 737, Boeing 737 MAX, which had larger engines than its predecessors (ibid.). It has been reported that Boeing developed the new version in order to win back an important customer, American Airlines, who was about to order hundreds of new jets from Airbus. Thus, being under such competitive pressure, Boeing ended up on accelerating the launching of the new version (Cohan 2019; Gelles, Kitroeff, Nica and Ruiz 2019; Webb 2019). Boeing also developed a system called Maneuvering Characteristics Augmentation System (henceforth MCAS) to manage with the increased stall risk caused by the bigger engines (Johnston and Harris 2019, 4). The system is designed to keep the plane stable by becoming active if the angle of attack, that is, the angle at which the relative wind meets the reference line, usually the wing, is too high (Freed and Hepher 2018). In other words, if the angle of attack sensor (AoA sensor) signals that the nose of the plane is either too high or too low, the MCAS automatically seeks to correct the course (Freed and Hepher 2018). According to Boeing, no additional simulator training for the pilots already licensed for the Boeing 737 was needed, since the new model is so similar to the previous one (Johnston and Harris 2019, 4). Instead, the pilots received a computer-mediated video course (Rucinski 2019).

In March 2019 Boeing encountered a crisis when Ethiopian Airlines flight from Addis Ababa to Nairobi, involving this brand-new jet model, crashed a few minutes after takeoff killing all 157 people on board. It was the second aircraft of the same jet model to fatally crash within five months: in October 2018, Lion Air flight in Indonesia, from Jakarta to Pangkal Pinang, had crashed similarly, a few minutes after the airplane had taken off. All 181 passengers and 8 crew members died. The accidents seemed to have some similarities: both preliminary reports refer to "flight control problems", which led to the pilots losing the control over their respective aircrafts (Komite Nasional Keselamatan Transportasi 2018, vii; The Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau of Ethiopia 2019, 5). To be exact, inaccurate input from the angle of attack sensors in both planes seemed to have activated the MCAS function, which

resulted in the plane pushing its nose downward, while the pilots were unable to deactivate the MCAS and therefore to maintain the flight altitude (Boeing 2019d).

In March 2019, the 737 MAX was grounded worldwide after the second accident and it remains being grounded for an undetermined time period. While the first crash already attracted attention, and Boeing delivered several press releases expressing their condolences and promises to assist in the investigation, the second crash seriously consigned Boeing under fire. It is clear that already one plane crash is very tragic and requires actions as well as response from the airplane manufacturer. But accidents do happen, however regrettable it is. Whereas, two similar accidents with the same plane model and in such a short time period, is a devastating and unprecedented situation, and the allegations expectedly fell on Boeing. This is visible also in Boeing's actions: the publishing frequency of press releases increased significantly after the second crash. Within the month following the first crash, Boeing issued four press releases concerning the accident. As for the second crash, the number of issued press releases within a month was nine. Accordingly, I find it realistic to claim that that was the ultimate point after which the crisis seriously intensified. After the second crash, families of the victims started to protest, shareholders of Boeing and 737 MAX pilots to file lawsuits and airline companies to ask for compensations for losses caused by the grounding (Helmore 2019; Wallace 2019; Baker 2019). The discussion on media has focused around the questions of the adequacy of information flow, the efficiency of pilot training, the reliability of MCAS and Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) criteria for granting the certificate (Freed and Hepher 2018).

Judging from the protests, lawsuits and compensation demands, it is clear that people hold Boeing responsible for the accidents. The media have questioned among all Boeing's reliability and the safety testing of MCAS (Freed and Hepher 2018). Furthermore, one of the biggest debates concerns the amount of information given to airline companies and their pilots. Many 737 MAX pilots and airlines have revealed that they were not given adequate amount of neither information nor training for the new system, some even claim that the pilots were not aware of it until the Lion Air's plane crashed (Cheslow 2019). Many pilots, including the Allied Pilots Association (APA), seem to be dissatisfied with the amount and type (computer explanation) of training they received when the 737 MAX launched (Rucinski 2019). Some media sources claim that the pilots only received an iPad lesson of one or two hours (Lahiri 2019), while some say that besides that, at least the Lion Air pilots had a familiarization flight with the new aircraft model (Freed and Hepher 2018). According to some sources, the training did not cover the MCAS, nor did the flight manuals of the aircrafts include instructions or information of it (Freed and Hepher 2018).

In April 2019, Wall Street Journal published an article claiming that Boeing had refrained from advising its customers that a disagree alert, a system designed to warn the pilots about possible malfunctions of the sensors, did not work (Pasztor 2019). Boeing responded with a statement, reporting that the disagree alert was an optional feature and operable only if the customer opted for an additional safety feature (Boeing 2019c). Some allegations were also made against Federal Aviation Association, since it holds the main responsibility for certifying the Boeing aircrafts and training regulations (Freed and Hephher 2018). The questions have arisen, on what grounds did FAA certify firstly, the 737 MAX as safe and secondly, the training program as sufficient (Freed and Hephher 2018)?

While not taking stand on the reliability of the media sources, nor the truthfulness of aforementioned allegations, it is considered relevant to acknowledge them, for they have an impact on the impressions the media followers have of the company. Furthermore, the accidents naturally had rather severe financial consequences. Boeing's quarter result reporting indicates that the company's revenues had decreased by 2% in the first quarter of 2019, compared to that of 2018 (Boeing 2019a) and by 35% in the second quarter of 2019, respectively (Boeing 2019b). According to the Financial Times (Provan and Samson 2019), Boeing's stock plummeted sharply immediately after the Ethiopian Airlines crash, lowering its market value by 28.1 billion euros. While these are supposedly for the most part a consequence of the grounding of the 737 MAX fleet, they may also suggest that the events have undermined the stakeholders' confidence in Boeing. Considering the people's reactions to the events, mainly negatively loaded media attention and the financial damage, it seems safe to claim that Boeing's image was severely threatened.

2.3 Boeing 737 MAX accidents as a crisis

Billings, Milburn and Schaalman (1980, 302) were among the first ones to determine the process of defining a situation as a crisis. Their Model of Crisis Perception supports the view according to which the 737 MAX plane crashes caused Boeing a crisis. The first step of the process is perceiving the triggering event. Triggering event is determined by the prevailing state and standard state: the current state diverges from the normal, that is, how things should be. Only then it is possible to sense the problem (ibid.). The triggering event in Boeing's crisis was the Lion Air accident in October 2018, but as discussed earlier, the situation intensified notably only after the Ethiopian Airline's plane crash. In addition to the discrepancy between the prevailing state and standard state, three other variables – the value of possible loss, the

probability of loss and time pressure – determine whether a situation is a crisis or not. The size of the discrepancy between the states, the importance of the problem and the possible loss caused by an unsolved problem affect the value of possible loss (Billings et al. 1980, 304). In Boeing's case, crashing airplanes are essential problems to the company, and the possible loss caused by not remedying the problem would be severely tarnished image, and subsequently major economic losses due to the decrease in the sales. According to the Model of Crisis Perception, the probability of the loss can either reduce or increase the perception of crisis. The probability of the loss consists of three variables: whether the indicator is accurate, the plausible explanations for the discrepancy and the response uncertainty. The first two are quite self-explanatory. The latter refers to the scenario where a decision maker is certain that a response will solve the problem, which naturally reduces the perception of crisis, at least in the eyes of the one who is in crisis (ibid.). In Boeing's situation, the truthfulness of the allegations and other possible reasons and contributors to the accidents affect the probability of the loss. The last determinant introduced by Billings, Milburn and Schaalman, the time pressure, refers to the urgency of the problem. If there is no time pressure, the future negative consequences are more distant and thus the degree of perceived crisis is lower (Billings et al. 1980, 305). Obviously, two subsequent plane crashes was an urgent problem, and in addition to the casualties, the negative effects on company's image and finances were instant.

3 Frameworks for image repair

The first part of the analysis draws on a model that rests upon two well-known image repair and crisis communication researchers' frameworks, William L. Benoit's Image Repair Theory, and W. Timothy Coombs's Crisis-Response Strategies. Both frameworks provide a set of strategies that can be deployed in order to repair one's image when facing a crisis. However, these sets of strategies have their flaws and gaps, thus, to get as comprehensive analysis as possible, I chose to integrate them so that they complement each other. Despite the flaws, I find it reasonable to use these frameworks as the basis for my analysis for the following reasons. As Cowden and Sellnow (2002, 199) state, "Benoit (1995) offers the most comprehensive and widely applied typology" and the suitability of his model has been proved by multiple other researchers in similar studies (see i.e. Katila 2018 and Cowden and Sellnow 2002). Coombs's version provides slightly different typology, and while it is partly overlapping with Benoit's model, it recognizes some strategies that Benoit's typology does not. For example, Coombs separates the strategies of praising others and suffering, which Benoit's classification lacks completely. Therefore, these two versions together lay a strong foundation for an image repair analysis.

The integration process involved firstly, combining the overlapping categories into one and secondly, choosing the strategies that were recognized only in one of the models. Additionally, some re-organizing of the categories was needed. The original models by Benoit and Coombs can be found in Appendix 1. In the next sections, the background and basic assumptions of these frameworks, as well as the new, combined set of image repair strategies will be introduced. In 3.1, I will present Benoit's Image Repair Theory, the pioneer model. Then, I will very briefly deal with Coombs's version and explain how it differs from the previous one. Finally, section 3.3 presents the new categorization model used in this thesis.

3.1 Image Repair Theory

William L. Benoit is one of the leading and most cited researchers in the field of crisis communication and he has contributed particularly to the research of image repair discourse and corporations encountering reputational threats. He developed a model which describes the various ways of responding to crises. Benoit's Image Repair Theory was first introduced in 1994, and since then this model has been used to analyze organizations' and public figures' responses to crises. The theory was initially intended to help organizations, politicians, and

other practitioners develop crisis response messages, as well as researchers and educators understand and critically evaluate these messages (Benoit 1997, 177). Originally, Benoit used to call his model *Image Restoration Theory*, but decided to change the name to Image Repair Theory, for he thinks that a “broken” image cannot necessarily be fully and completely restored, only repaired (Benoit 2015, x). It is, obviously, possible for image repair efforts to succeed completely, but it is by no means always the case (Benoit 2015, x). Thus, a more suitable term *repair* will be used instead of *restore* in this thesis as well.

According to Benoit, there are two key assumptions offering a base for Image Repair Theory: 1) communication is a goal-directed activity and 2) maintaining a favorable reputation is one of the main goals of communication (Benoit 2015, 14).

The first assumption, that communication is a goal-directed activity, is based on early researchers and intellects’ observations: most rhetorical theorists (among all Aristotle and Burke) claim that rhetoric is directly connected with the speaker’s goal, which is supported by many communication theorists who agree that a communicative act without a goal scarcely exists (Benoit 2015, 14–15). However, there are some points that should be taken into account. Firstly, people may have multiple goals colliding with each other, in which case the goals must be prioritized (Benoit 2015, 15). Sometimes goals can also be unclear or vague, or the communicator may not know how to achieve that goal in the most effective way (ibid.). Furthermore, people do not use the same amount of effort in every communicative act, but rather tend to invest in those that one finds important (Benoit 2015, 16). Finally, communicator’s goals, however clear or well-thought-out, may be difficult to identify from the outside, while hidden agendas and unclear goals can make this even more complicated (ibid.).

The second assumption arises from distinctions made by Clark and Delia – according to them, the three objectives in an interaction are 1) instrumental objective, that is, to get a response from a listener related to the particular problem that defines the task of the interaction situation, 2) interpersonal objective, meaning the creation or maintenance of a relationship, and 3) identity objective, which means managing the situation in order to present and maintain a certain image of oneself (Benoit 2015, 16–17). Fisher also recognizes the role of different identity goals – establishing, maintaining, weakening and repairing image – in communication (Benoit 2015, 17). This also goes back to the assumption that wrongdoing is inevitable part of human interaction, but at the same time, desire to maintain a favorable image of oneself characterizes human species.

Benoit argues that the starting point to understanding image repair is knowing where the demand for such moves derives from, that is, attacks (Benoit 1997, 178). Attacks have two

characteristics: firstly, the accused is believed to be responsible for the act in question, and secondly, the act in question is considered offensive and disapproved by salient audience (ibid.). The accused can be held responsible for an act if they not only performed, but also for example encouraged, facilitated or permitted the act to occur (ibid.). It is also noteworthy that – again – perceptions play greater role than reality: as long as the relevant audience thinks that the accused is responsible for the offensive act, whether it in fact is the case or not, the image of the accused is at risk. Similarly, it is not essential whether the act in fact is offensive (and, as a side note, it seems somewhat problematic to define “offensive act” as such, since offences often are subjective emotional experiences), but rather whether the audience perceived it as such (ibid.). According to Benoit, corporations may have multiple different audiences, each having their own, diverse interests, concerns and goals. Thus, it is important to prioritize the most important audiences and take that into account when communicating during a crisis (ibid.). This thought is supported by Virtanen and Halmari’s (2005, 8–9) observation that after all, it is the audience and their current beliefs that determine whether a certain type of persuasion works, thus governing what are the most effective persuasion strategies in each situation.

Even though image repair is admittedly important for both individuals and companies, it must be borne in mind that image repair per se may not be their only or the most important goal (Benoit 2015, 20). The accused’s primary goal may be for example to avoid being sentenced, in which case repairing one’s image by admitting the misbehavior and apologizing, can interfere achieving the primary goal (Benoit 2015, 15).

Unlike some other theories (for example Situational Crisis Communication Theory by Coombs), Benoit’s Image Repair Theory focuses on message options instead of describing different kinds of crisis situations or stages (ibid.). It aims to describe what corporations can say when they face a crisis (ibid.), thus its approach is more appropriate to linguistic research and particularly to discourse analysis. Image Repair Theory builds on ancients’ *apologia*, however being more comprehensive present-day version. The model distinguishes five broad categories for responding to threats: *denial*, *evasion of responsibility*, *reducing offensiveness of event*, *corrective action* and *mortification*, each of these covering several subcategories (ibid.).

Even though Benoit’s theory is widely used it has its limitations. For example, it does not offer answers to questions of how the positive image is initially developed, provide typology of attack strategies, nor does it cover other forms of crises than image threats (Benoit 2015, 45). Still, these issues are not considered relevant for this thesis. The Image Repair Theory also does not pay attention to the cultural differences in image repair efforts (ibid.), which might be slightly problematic, since Boeing is an international company communicating to customers

around the world. However, it would be unrealistic to acknowledge all cultural differences in this study. The model also fails to acknowledge the phase of the crisis in crisis communication (Zhang and Yao 2017, 13), that may have offered a new, interesting angle for this study. However, considering the scope of the study, it would have been difficult to fit that in. As mentioned earlier, the categorization system is not completely comprehensive in terms of the individual strategies. Additionally, the names of the categories may seem imprecise: for example, the category of reducing offensiveness includes the subtype of *bolstering*, which means emphasizing all the good in the company and its actions. However, does this in fact reduce the offensiveness, or just direct the audience to think other things instead? By integrating the two models, I sought to avoid impreciseness in the classification.

3.2 Crisis-Response Strategies

W. Timothy Coombs emphasizes the importance of crisis situation in the strategy selection. He even developed a model called Situational Crisis Communication Theory, in which he suggests that organizations should select the appropriate crisis-response strategy after evaluating the level of crisis responsibility and the possible reputational threat following the crisis. However, in his earlier work, *Choosing the Right Words: the Development of Guidelines for the Selection of the "Appropriate" Crisis-Response Strategies*, he focuses more on creating and describing the most common strategies used by organizations (Coombs 1995, 448; Shanahan and Seele 2015, 43). These strategies form also the basis for the typology of Situational Crisis Communication Theory. Coombs's typology builds on Image Repair Theory and the works of Allen and Caillouet (1994), and combines these creating a new repertoire of crisis-response strategies (Coombs 1995, 449). He also draws on the insights of Attribution Theory, which helps to explain the relationship between the crisis situation and the response strategies (Coombs 1995, 448). While Benoit's image-repair strategies are designed to being applied to both individuals and companies' crises, Coomb's crisis-response strategies are targeted primarily to organizational crises (Coombs 1995, 449).

Coombs also divides response strategies into five broad supercategories: *nonexistence strategies*, *distance strategies*, *ingratiation strategies*, *mortification strategies* and *suffering strategy*, of which the four first ones include various subcategories (Coombs 1995, 450). One decisive flaw in Coombs's model is that it associates the strategy of shifting the blame with the strategy of denial of volition. As I see it, these two are distinct strategies, and I found integrating

them problematic, because shifting blame seems to occur rather frequently in the data. Again, this shortcoming was corrected by creating a new, integrated version.

3.3 Image repair strategies

In this subsection, I will introduce the typology used in this thesis. The model builds on Benoit’s and Coombs’s insights (see Appendix 1) and is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1 The integrated model, based on Benoit (2015) and Coombs (1995)

<p>Denial Simple denial Shifting the blame Intimidation</p> <p>Evasion of responsibility Provocation Defeasibility Accident Good intentions</p>	<p>Reducing offensiveness Minimization Differentiation Transcendence Attack the accuser</p> <p>Ingratiation Bolstering Praising others</p>	<p>Mortification Mortification Compensation Corrective action</p> <p>Suffering strategy</p>
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3.3.1 Denial

The supercategory of denial comprises three variants. Firstly, *simple denial*, where the accused party directly and unambiguously denies the accusation (Benoit 1997, 179). Referring back to the key concepts of attacks: the accused party can deny that the act ever occurred, that they, in particular, performed the act, or that it was harmful (Benoit 1997, 179). Secondly, *shifting the blame* means that the accused party claims that someone or something else is actually responsible for the act (Benoit 1997, 180). Shifting the blame may be more effective than simple denial, firstly because it provides a target for the audience’s negative emotions, while shifting them away from the accused. Secondly, it also answers – unlike simple denial – to the question that may have arisen: if you did not do it, then who did? (Benoit 2015, 22–23). Accused can also use the *intimidation* strategy: threatening to use its power against some actor (Coombs 1995, 451), most probably the accuser. For example intimidations of filing a lawsuit or physical violence are realizations of this strategy (Coombs 1995, 451).

3.3.2 Evasion of responsibility

Evasion of responsibility has four subcategories: *provocation*, *defeasibility*, *accident* (or *denial of intention*), and *good intentions*. Through the provocation strategy the accused claims that their offensive act was a consequence of another offensive act performed by someone else. Therefore, their act can be seen as justified (Benoit 1997, 180). This strategy is common among small children: fighting siblings may justify their actions by saying that the other sibling did something wrong, which led to the accused child performing the offensive act. That way the accused can shift at least part of the blame on someone else and be held less responsible of the act. Defeasibility strategy means that the accused party invokes the lack of information about or control over the situation (ibid.). For example, if a student is late from a morning lecture because of a delayed bus, the lecturer may not hold the student fully responsible for being late. The accused party can also claim that the action occurred unintentionally, by accident (ibid.). Sometimes when using this strategy, the audience holds them less accountable of the act, because the accused did not intend to do ill. Coombs calls this strategy denial of intention (Coombs 1995, 451). The last subtype of the evasion of responsibility, good intentions, is a strategy where the accused party stresses that the action was performed with good intentions and that the accused party meant well (Benoit 1997, 180). This strategy may evoke the feelings of sympathy towards the accused among audience.

3.3.3 Reducing offensiveness

Reducing offensiveness strategies do not attempt to deny or reduce the responsibility of the accused for the act, but rather to decrease the audience's negative feelings towards the act or the accused (Benoit 2015, 25–26). Firstly, the accused can use *minimizing* strategy by for example downplaying the negative consequences, thus minimizing the negative feelings associated with the act (Benoit 1997, 180). Secondly, the accused can employ *differentiation*, that is, to make a distinction between their offensive act and previous, more offensive acts performed by someone else (Benoit 1997, 181). Thus, the created contrast may make the act in question look less severe in the eyes of the audience. The third strategy to reduce offensiveness is to use *transcendence* (ibid.). Through transcendence, the accused places the act in different, more favorable or broader context (Benoit 2015, 25). Benoit's own example for transcendence is a well-known tale about Robin Hood: Robin Hood was said to have robbed from the wealthy, which may seem immoral. However, since he did that in order to help the poor, the deeds may

seem justified (ibid.). Fourth, Boeing claims that the accused may want *to attack the accusers*. Ways of doing this are for example to question the credibility of the source (that is, the accuser) or the accuracy of the representation, or to imply that the victim of the act (if it is the same as the accuser) “deserved it”. Consequently, the image of the accused becomes less tarnished. Attacking the accuser may also function as a diversion, since it may divert the audience’s attention from the original accusation (ibid.).

3.3.4 Ingratiation

By using the ingratiation strategies, the accused seeks to gain public approval by linking themselves to things that are positively valued by the public (Coombs 1995, 452). Ingratiation includes *bolstering* and *praising others*. Bolstering means that the accused tries to strengthen the audience’s positive feelings towards them, so that the positive feelings outweigh the negative feelings associated with the offensive act and the accused (Benoit 1997, 180). They can for example emphasize the previous good deeds or traits of the accused to divert audience’s attention from the wrongdoing while evoking positive feelings in them. The accused can also praise others, which may lead the target of the praise to approve of and like the accused (Coombs 1995, 452). Praising others can also make the accused seem humble and “look better”, not only in the eyes of the target of the praise, but also other audiences’.

3.3.5 Mortification strategies

The fifth superstrategy is mortification strategy, which includes *compensation*, *corrective action* and *mortification*. This strategy seems to be, according to for example Stephens et al. (2005, 405), the most common image-repair strategy. The accused can try to compensate for the act by offering the victim a reimbursement (Benoit 2015, 25). If accepted by the victim, it can lead to reducing the negative feelings arising from the act, thus helping to repair the tarnished image (Benoit 1997, 181; Benoit 2015, 25). Another way to repair one’s image is to perform corrective action. This strategy means that the accused promises to fix the occurred problem by either offering to rectify the harm that has already been done, or to prevent it from happening again (Benoit 2015, 26). It can be useful at this point to differentiate between corrective action and compensation. In compensation, the accused offers a gift as a counterbalance, not necessarily even related to the actual damage, whereas in corrective action, the accused addresses the actual source of damage and tries to change that (ibid.). The last strategy is mortification (or *repentance*), that is, the accused admits the damage and the

responsibility and asks for forgiveness (ibid.). Mortification is, however, rather multifaceted strategy, for there are no universal “rules” for an apology, and it can differ from very indirect expressions of regret (that is, admission of sympathy) to very straightforward “I’m sorry” or “Please forgive me” -type of apologies (that is, admission of guilt). When using the mortification strategy, there is also always the risk that the accused admits the misbehavior and asks for forgiveness, but the audience does not accept the apology (ibid.). Therefore, many people and companies exploit the vagueness of language (ibid.) – that way they can manipulate the message and possibly the audience’s perceptions as well. That makes it also intriguing and meaningful for researchers to investigate these messages more closely.

3.3.6 Suffering strategy

The last strategy is suffering strategy, which due to its uniqueness comprises its own supercategory. Through suffering strategy, the accused seeks to win the sympathy of the audience (Coombs 1995, 453). They may portray themselves as “an unfair victim of some malicious, outside entity” (ibid.). They may not necessarily refer to any specific person or party, but rather focus on playing the victim.

4 Theme structure and given/new

Another framework used in this thesis is the theme structure. M.A.K. Halliday and Christian Matthiessen (2004, 64) argue that clauses in all languages have the character of a message. In other words, they are organized in a way that they fit in and contribute to the flow of discourse (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 64). According to Halliday and Matthiessen, there are two related systems to manage the flow of discourse: the systems of *theme* and *information* (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 88). Organizing messages in different ways enables the language user to determine how the information flows and thus affect how the addressee perceives the message. In the following subsections I will describe the ideas behind these systems.

4.1 Theme structure

Geoff Thompson (2004, 141) notes that “when we look at language from the point of view of the textual metafunction, we are trying to see how speakers construct their messages in a way which makes them fit smoothly in into the unfolding language event.” *Thematization* is one way of clarifying this. It relates to the way the clauses are structured and thus, to the way information is constructed (Thompson 2004, 142). In English, and many other languages as well, including Finnish, the message is created by assigning a specific status to a part of the clause. This status is called *theme*. The rest of the clause – that is, *rheme* – adds to the theme, constituting the message.

In written English, theme and rheme are indicated by position. By placing something in the beginning of a clause, one assigns a thematic status to it. Consequently, this part becomes the “point of departure of the message [...] which locates and orients the clause within its context” (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 64). Let us compare the two made-up examples below:

- (1) *The pilots* were not offered enough additional training by Boeing to pilot the MAX 737.
- (2) *Boeing* did not offer enough additional training to the pilots to pilot the MAX 737.

The examples represent the same state of affairs, however, the starting points of the messages are different. The italicized theme in example 1 – the pilots – implicates that the orientation of the following text is the pilots, whereas the theme in example 2 suggests that the focus is on

Boeing. It is important to note, as Thompson (2004, 142) also underlined, that theme is not the same as “the topic of the clause”, even though one might feel tempted to think so. Rather, it is something that enables the reader or hearer to connect the clause to the previous ones and to instantly see how the upcoming information contributes to what has already been said (ibid.).

In spoken language, intonation can also be used in order to mark the theme of the clause (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 64). As Halliday points out, some grammarians prefer the terms *topic* and *comment* to theme and rheme, however, there are somewhat different connotations attached to them. Topic tends to refer to one sort of theme alone, the *topical theme*. (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 65). Thus, I will keep to the theme/rheme terminology.

Even though theme is the first constituent of the clause, identifying it is not always straightforward. In some clauses, such as simple declaratives, the subject is usually the first constituent of the clause, therefore subject and theme are the same (Thompson 2004, 144). Since the material of this study consists of press releases, the most common clause type is declaratives. Yet, theme can also be for example an adjunct (*In 10th March 2019*, Ethiopian Airlines’ plane crashed soon after takeoff), a complement (*All the rest*, the investigation team refused to tell) or a WH-word or group (*What* happened after takeoff?), to name only a few (Thompson 2004, 145–147).

4.2 Information unit – given and new

The system of information has to do with what is already known or predictable in the discourse (the *given*) and what is new or unpredictable (the *new*). While the theme structure operates in the clause level, given and new elements operate in the level of *information units*, which can, but need not to, correspond to clauses. A clause can involve one or more information units and vice versa (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 89). According to Halliday and Matthiessen, the idealized form is that “each information unit consists of a given element accompanied by a new element”. However, there are few exceptions. In the beginning of discourse there can, of course, be units consisting of new elements alone. Also, the given elements can be *phoric*, which means that they are reference to something that is already “present” either in verbal or nonverbal context. This can be done by using for example ellipsis. Therefore, a better description for information unit is that it consists of an obligatory new element and an optional given element. The given element tends to occur in a clause-initial position and be followed by the new element, thus, given/new usually coincide with theme/rheme (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 89).

Even though theme is usually chosen from the pieces of given information while rheme usually offers new information, these two systems are not the same thing (Lassen 2004, 269). Halliday and Matthiessen describe the concepts of given and new as follows:

The significant variable is: information that is presented by the speaker as recoverable (Given) or not recoverable (New) to the listener. What is treated as recoverable may be so because it has been mentioned before; but that is not the only possibility. It may be something that is in the situation, such as I and you; or in the air, so to speak; or something that is not around at all but that the speaker wants to present as Given for rhetorical purposes. The meaning is: this is not news. Similarly, what is treated as non-recoverable may be something that has not been mentioned; but it may be something unexpected, whether previously mentioned or not. The meaning is: attend to this, this is news. (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 91)

So, the interplay of theme and rheme and given and new can be used as a resource to create rhetorical effects (Lassen 2004, 270). In this thesis, the focus is not only in finding out what kinds of themes and rhemes correspond with each other and the image repair strategies, but also in examining whether the reader is, by means of theme structure and given and new, directed to think that some parts of the text are mutually agreed on.

5 Data and methods

In the following sections, I will describe the process of data collection and any potential alternative solutions and explain the reasons for dismissing them. After that, I will discuss further the methods used in this paper and the analysis process in section 5.2.

5.1 Data

Boeing's image crisis was chosen as a target of scrutiny based on a few motives. Firstly, the events occurred quite recently, and it has not yet been studied much even though Boeing's crisis communication has been criticized in the media by among all communications specialists (see i.e. Matthews 2019 and Hickman 2019). Secondly, human-induced crises create more condemnation among people, and often require more image repair than nature catastrophes, for example. Therefore, I wanted to focus on a crisis that is human-induced.

During the crisis, Boeing relied mostly on press releases and Twitter in their external crisis communication. However, Twitter communication largely consisted of tweeting shorter excerpts from the statements published in press releases. Furthermore, the nature of press releases as a genre supports my decision to choose press releases as the material for this study. Press releases are directed not to consumer, but primarily to journalists and other media, and that way indirectly to the public. In his book "Preformulating the News", Geert Jacobs (1999, xi) claims that press release is a discourse genre whose "only *raison d'être* is to be retold". That is to say, their purpose is for their message to be forwarded as precisely as possible, preferably even word for word, in news reporting (ibid.). Hence, the ultimate objective is to have an effect on how media portrays the company. Boeing's press releases are accessible for everyone in their website, where I also gathered the data for this study.

Because the study has a comparative perspective, I wanted to examine press releases after the first accident and after the second accident to find out whether the choices of theme and their correlation to image repair strategies changed as the crisis intensified. The data selection was based on time and topic: first, I went through Boeing's media room on their website and gathered those press releases that were issued after the Lion Air plane crash but before the Ethiopian Airlines crash. Next, I opted the press releases that dealt with the accident. The selection process resulted in five press releases (1161 words) in total and their publication times range from October 2018 to January 2019. It is important to note that one of the press releases is remarkably long compared to the others, and it deals with the preliminary report

published by Indonesian National Transportation Safety Committee (INTSC). Large part of the text focuses on describing the course of events preceding the accident and of the accident flight.

To keep the two data of different time periods comparable, I chose to limit my data based on the time scope. The press releases before the second accident were published within 79 days, so when I collected the second part of the data, I picked all accident-related press releases issued after the second crash but within 79 days. This resulted in fifteen press releases (7276 words) in total. It is obvious that Boeing increased the number of issued press releases after the second accident, since that was the very moment when the crisis really erupted. As the time frame stays the same and the quantitative analysis is made using percentages and not the number of occurrences, the two sets of data remain comparable despite the fact that the number of press releases is different. It is also worth mentioning, that the further away (temporally) from the accidents press releases are issued, the more they tend to deal with the plane enhancements and statements about the grounding rather than the accidents themselves.

5.2 Methods

The present study combines comparative perspective with mostly qualitative but also quantitative analyses, as well as two different frameworks for analyzing the data. Thus, it is a multi-method study. Microsoft Excel was chosen as the primary tool for the analysis: the annotations were recorded in Excel as it suited better for the qualitative part of the analysis than other programs, for example UAM CorpusTool, which was also tested. The scope of the study permitted also compiling the statistical summaries in Excel.

After gathering the data and piloting the analysis, the data was imported into an Excel file. With regard to the comparative perspective of the study, I made a sheet for both data, the one before the second accident and the one after the second accident. Henceforth, the two different data will be referred to as before-data and after-data. To see what kinds of themes and rhemes were used, they were separated on different columns.

Next, the themes had to be categorized. There are some general categorizations for thematic structure, such as Thompson's (based on Halliday and Matthiessen) representation of thematic systems (see Thompson 2004, 164). Nevertheless, this system illustrates thematic structure from a more grammatical point of view: it distinguishes for example subject, predicator, adjunct and clause as theme types. For my purposes, this is neither sufficient nor appropriate. Instead, I wanted to find out what the themes indicate with respect to content, in other words, what concepts the themes refer to, for example the Boeing company itself, pilots

or airline companies. Since there was no existing system for that purpose, it had to be developed as the process proceeded. I had familiarized myself with the data when piloting the study, therefore I had some idea what kind of theme types there might be even before I started analyzing the thematic structure. A simple version of the system of theme categories was first created intuitively: the first version comprised apparent categories such as the *Boeing company*, *pilots*, *airlines*, *other parties* and *safety*. The system was complemented as the analysis revealed new categories. The themes were classified into theme types, based on what concepts, actors or phenomena they refer to. For example, the *Boeing company* constitute one category, and under that category there are different realizations that occurred or were hypothesized to occur in the data as themes: for example *Boeing* (or *the Boeing company*), *the company* and *we*. A group of themes was considered a category if the theme occurred in the data twice or more often. Subcategories were identified if the distinction between subcategories was considered relevant. For example, it does make a difference whether the company talks about *Boeing* or *we*. This will be discussed more in section 6.2.

According to Thompson (2004, 155), there are two ways to treat *clause complexes*, that is, entities that consist of two or more clauses. That is what traditional grammarians call *sentence*. The basic assumption of Systemic Functional Grammar is that every clause has a theme and a rheme. Yet, as Thompson suggests, it may sometimes be more fruitful to treat a dependent clause preceding the clause it depends on, as a theme for the whole clause complex (Thompson 2004, 155). There may be various reasons for doing that, and it is often considered offering more precise information about the development of the text or the information flow. In this study, the dependent clauses in initial position are treated as themes of the whole clause complex, because it seems to give more information about the potential hidden meanings, that is, the propositions of which the company is trying to “convince” the audience. In other words, the ideas that are presented as “obvious” or “taken-for-granted” are easier to identify this way.

My analysis bases on the assumption that theme usually corresponds with given information and rheme usually with new information. Therefore, I also had to go through all the themes in the data and identify those exceptional instances where theme did not correspond with given information. I made a separate column where I marked whether the theme was the new element instead of the usual given. That way I could easily acknowledge the exceptions when interpreting the findings.

Since the primary focus of this part of the analysis is on themes and the potential hidden meanings created by means of them, rhemes were not classified further. Still, the role of rhemes was acknowledged and they were examined in order to know what kind of rhemes

follow the (potentially) strategic choices of theme. More detailed categorization of rhemes was not considered purposeful for this study.

To find out what kind of image repair strategies are used before and after the crisis struck, the data were annotated for image repair strategies according to the set of image repair strategies introduced in section 3.3. I used close reading as the method in identifying them and marked the image repair strategies and the subtypes on separate columns on the Excel sheets. Then, a second round of categorizing and annotating was conducted in both image repair strategies and theme structure, in order to avoid errors in the analysis.

After the categorization and annotation process, I compiled the statistics of each category in both theme/rheme and image repair strategies to see the distribution of these and to compare what kind of thematic choices and image repair strategies were used before and after the crisis. Lastly, I took a more qualitative approach and examined the use of theme for rhetorical purposes as well as correlations between the two linguistic strategies. To be able to do this effectively, the clause complexes were re-organized in a new Excel sheet by their theme types. The focus was on the following matters: firstly, whether the choice of theme is used as a rhetoric device to direct the reader to think that something is mutually agreed or obvious even though in reality it is not? Secondly, whether there are any visible correlations with the choice of theme and the choice of image repair strategies and whether these vary between the two data?

6 Analysis

In this section, the findings of the study will be presented. Section 6.1 will cover findings about the image repair strategies and section 6.2 will focus on the findings of the theme structure. The results will be discussed in more detail later in section 7.

6.1 Image repair strategies

To identify and examine the image repair strategies used, the accusations must first be understood. Let us recall the accusations presented in section 2.2. First and foremost, the MCAS was said to be deficient, which led to the planes being unsafe to fly. It was also claimed that Boeing had been aware of the discrepancy between the disagree alert and the AOA sensor long before it was disclosed to the customers. In other words, it was alleged that Boeing was withholding safety information from its customers. Additionally, there were allegations claiming that Boeing did not offer adequate information and training for the pilots and the airline companies. Next, I shall proceed to presenting the findings of image repair analysis.

The distributions of image repair superstrategies used before and after the second accident are displayed below in Figure 1.

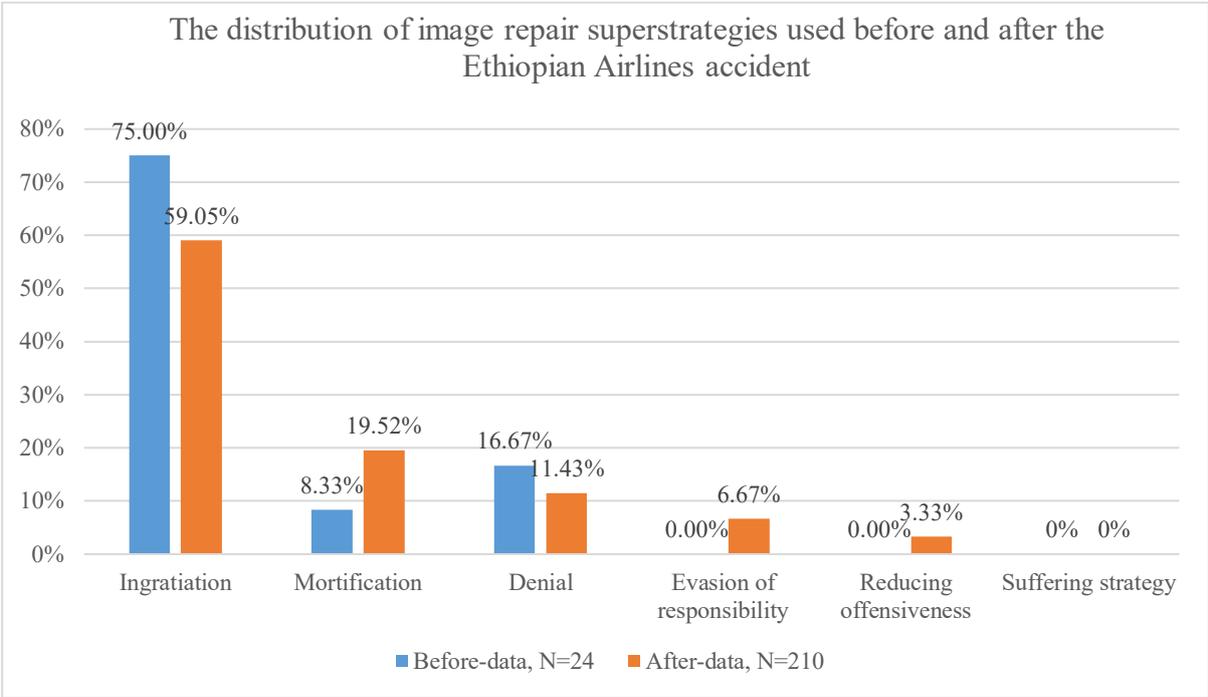


Figure 1 The distribution of image repair superstrategies used before and after the Ethiopian Airlines accident

In total, image repair strategies occurred 234 times in the entire data, of which 24 was in the before-data and 210 in the after-data. The dissimilarity between the use of image repair strategies in the two data is mostly accounted for the difference in the sizes of the data, although the percentages reveal that there is correlation in the choice of image repair strategies throughout the data, at least to some degree. Three most used image repair strategies in both data are ingratiation, mortification and denial. Overwhelmingly most frequent image repair strategies were ingratiation strategies. 75% of all strategies in the before-data and 59.05% in the after-data were ingratiation strategies. Yet, in the before-data, next in frequency were denial at 16.67% and mortification at 8.33%, whereas in the after-data, mortification was second frequent (19.52%) and denial third (11.43%). Thus, the use of denial strategies decreased while mortification strategies increased as the accusations towards Boeing intensified after the second plane crash. The strategies of evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness and the suffering strategy did not occur in the before-data at all. Evasion of responsibility composed 6.67% of the image repair strategies in the after-data and reducing offensiveness 3.33%. It must be borne in mind that image repair strategies tend not to exclude each other: that is, one clause complex can function as more than one type of strategy (see ie. example 4 in section 6.1.1). Next, I will discuss each category separately in more detail and give examples of the subtypes. As suffering strategy was used neither in the before-data nor in the after-data, it will be left out of the analysis.

6.1.1 Ingratiation

Ingratiation strategies occurred 142 times in the data – 18 times before and 124 times after the second crash – which composes an overwhelming majority of the overall amount of strategies used. Additionally, the distribution of the ingratiation subtypes, bolstering and praising others, was similarly clear: bolstering added up to 88.89% and praising others to 11.11% in the before-data. The corresponding numbers for the after-data were 88.71% and 11.29%. The cases of bolstering included for example expressions of sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims, which occurred in almost every press release at least once. Typical ways to bolster the positive image were also explaining how Boeing is helping in the investigation process, emphasizing the values of the company, such as safety, quality, integrity and continuous improvement, and – especially later in the after-data – reminding the readers of the previous

achievements of the company. These achievements were not necessarily in any way related to the accidents, and not even safety, as can be seen in example 3.

- (3) Overall, our investments in our communities exceeded \$280 million in 2018 – a company record – as we continue to drive positive, lasting change across the globe in important areas such as STEM learning and veterans’ support.

Those clause complexes that describe Boeing’s role in assisting in the investigation were classified as bolstering, and not corrective action, because they did not include any signs of Boeing admitting the fault. Instead, they presented the company as a technical expert providing support. Praising others was typically directed to the FAA, Ethiopian Airlines (example 4), the investigators, the customers and their passengers, as well as the families of the victims:

- (4) In that time Ethiopian has been a pioneer and a leader in our industry, launching Africa into the jet age, connecting the continent with all corners of the globe with its extensive network, and earning a reputation for service and safety.

6.1.2 Mortification

In total, mortification strategies occurred 43 times throughout the data. However, there is a clear difference in the distribution of mortification strategies between the two time periods. Before the second accident, mortification strategies were used only two times (8.33% of the total number of strategies), whereas after the second accident, they were used 41 times (19.52% of the total). The increase in the use of mortification strategies may be explained by the fact that even though Boeing did not explicitly admit full responsibility even after the second accident, they realized that since the flight control law was not functioning properly, they had to accept at least part of the responsibility in order to maintain their credibility and reputation as a professional airplane manufacturer.

Corrective action was notably the most commonly used subtype of mortification, as it amounted to 100% of all mortification strategies in the before-data and 80.49% in the after-data. Typical instances of corrective action promised enhancements to the safety of the plane by making additional updates to the MCAS or improvements to the manuals and pilot training. Some occurrences were more generic, such as promises to break the “chain link” that permitted the accidents to occur or promises to prevent such accidents from happening again. What is especially interesting is that even though the use of mortification strategies usually implies that the accused accepts at least part of the responsibility of the act, in my data, mortification

strategies were sometimes used in parallel with other strategies and even with denial strategies, as is illustrated in example 5.

- (5) For the past several months and in the aftermath of Lion Air Flight 610, Boeing has been developing a flight control software enhancement for the 737 MAX (corrective action), designed to make an already safe aircraft even safer (simple denial).

In example 5, Boeing announces an enhancement for the plane, that is, corrective action, but continues by saying that the plane is already safe, which contradicts the assumption that it requires enhancements. By claiming that the plane is already safe, Boeing denies the accusation that it was initially faulty. Corrective action also occurred together with for example bolstering and minimizing.

Another subtype of mortification strategy that occurred in the data is mortification. In the before-data there was none, but in the after-data the percentage was 19.51% of the overall mortification strategies. However, some of the occurrences of mortification regretted the grounding of the 737 MAX and its effects to the customers, not the accidents themselves or the defect in the MCAS. That being said, there were still several bits where Boeing explicitly writes that they are “sorry for the lives lost in the accidents”. The compensation strategy was not found in this data. To conclude, Boeing started to adopt considerably more mortification strategies after the second plane crashed and the accusations got more severe.

6.1.3 Denial

The strategy of denial was used 28 times in total, 4 times in the before-data and 24 times in the after-data. These numbers correspond to 16.67% and 11.43% respectively. Intimidation was the only denial strategy that was not found anywhere in the data. Shifting the blame was more common (75%) in the before-data than simple denial (25%), while in the after-data, simple denial was more common but the difference was much smaller: simple denial occurred a little more often (54.17%) than shifting the blame (45.83%).

In the data, simple denial was typically used to deny the accusations that the 737 MAX is not a safe aircraft. This was often done either explicitly by insisting that the plane is safe (see example 6), or implicitly by saying that the company “is confident” in the safety of the MAX (see example 7). Even more indirect ways of contradicting the allegations were also used by Boeing. Such ways were for example assuring that the corrective actions are performed “out of

an abundance of caution”, which implies that there is actually not much to rectify. These were the most common cases of simple denial in the data.

- (6) The 737 MAX is a safe airplane that was designed, built and supported by our skilled employees who approach their work with the utmost integrity.
- (7) We remain confident in the fundamental safety of the 737 MAX.

There were few other cases also: the strategy was used to contradict the accusations of inadequate amount of information of MCAS available, and the accusations that Boeing knew about the discrepancy of the disagree alert and the AOA sensor, but intentionally neglected to inform the customers.

Shifting the blame was usually done by stating that all the information needed to safely operate the plane has been available to the pilots or that the pilots have been able to manually override the automatic aiding systems. This then implies that the pilots had made the mistakes and not Boeing. There were also a few cases where the blame was shifted on FAA, by saying that Boeing informed FAA of the problem with the disagree alert and the AOA sensor. Quite surprisingly, there was also one occurrence where the blame is shifted on Ethiopian Airlines in general:

- (8) As the airline’s Group CEO Ato Tewelde GebreMariam said in his heartfelt statement yesterday, this tragedy does not define Ethiopian — and it won’t define the aviation industry or our enduring relationship with their team.

Here, by assuring that the accident will or should not change people’s idea of Ethiopian Airlines, the attention is taken away from Boeing’s responsibility and the possibility that the accident may change the public’s opinion of *them*. By saying that the accident will not define Ethiopian Airlines or change Boeing’s willingness to cooperate with them, Boeing is actually implying that the accident may have been a result of the airline’s mistake. For if there is a need for reassurances, there probably is also a doubt.

6.1.4 Evasion of responsibility

Throughout the data, the evasion of responsibility was not as common image repair strategy as ingratiation, mortification and denial. It did not occur in the before-data, and in the after-data it amounted only to 14 occurrences, that is, 6.67% of all the strategies used. The subtypes of evasion of responsibility were distributed so that provocation did not occur at all, defeasibility

occurred eight times (57.14% of all evasion of responsibility strategies), good intentions five times (35.71%) and accident only once (7.14%).

Defeasibility strategy appeared especially in situations where Boeing underlined that the crashes resulted from “a chain of events”, suggesting that they had little or no control over the situation. Also, there were cases where Boeing among all pleads their standard processes (example 9), or ignorance about the issue (example 10).

- (9) When the discrepancy between the requirements and the software was identified, Boeing followed its standard process for determining the appropriate resolution of such issues.
- (10) Senior company leadership was not involved in the review and first became aware of this issue in the aftermath of the Lion Air accident.

Example 9 illustrates a case of defeasibility strategy where the lack of control is used as an excuse. The company has certain established practices, and when an issue occurs, they follow the already existing, standard practices to solve the problem. Undoubtedly the company has other options to handle the situation, too, but the message this wording conveys is: these are the rules, and we are obliged to follow them. Example 10 illustrates another type of defeasibility: the lack of information. Although, it is interesting that in this case, the lack of information applies only to the management team and not the entire company. Therefore, the management is evading the responsibility, but the employees can still be held responsible.

Boeing also pleaded good intentions. They said that the MCAS was supposed to enhance the safety and to improve the handling characteristics of the MAX. They also emphasized that the disagree alert was meant to be a stand-alone feature. With connection to that, the only occurrence of accident as a defeasibility strategy also handled the AOA sensor-disagree alert problem. It is noteworthy that the only time when Boeing used this strategy, the issue in question is not the plane crash itself.

- (11) However, the disagree alert was not operable on all airplanes because the feature was not activated as intended.

The wording reveals that Boeing admits that something has gone wrong and not according to plan.

6.1.5 Reducing offensiveness

Rather expectedly, reducing offensiveness was among the least frequently used image repair strategies in Boeing's press releases with the frequency being only 3.33% of all the strategies in the after-data and 0% in the before-data. Minimizing was the only identifiable subtype of the reducing offensiveness strategy. Most of the occurrences did not minimize the effects of the accidents, but rather the defects in the aircraft that caused the accidents. An example of such minimizing can be seen below:

(12) It is important to note that the FAA is not mandating any further action at this time.

The assumption behind this kind of a message is that if the FAA does not mandate Boeing to take action, the problem cannot really be that big. Only one occurrence minimizing the accident itself was found:

(13) As part of our standard practice following any accident, we examine our aircraft design and operation, and when appropriate, institute product updates to further improve safety.

The underlined part is of the essence: by paralleling the Ethiopian Airlines accident to any and all other plane crashes, Boeing is with subtlety downplaying the significance of it.

As already mentioned, differentiation, transcendence and attacking the accuser were not found from the data. The small amount of reducing offensiveness strategies throughout the data can be explained by the fact that a fatal, human-induced accident is generally considered particularly severe. It is extremely difficult to make the act seem less offensive than it is, when it is a matter of people's lives.

6.1.6 Summary of image repair strategies

As Figure 2 visualizes, the preferred image repair subtype used by Boeing both before and after the second accident was bolstering. In their image repair work, they put great emphasis on building and re-building a positive image, relying largely on Boeing's good characteristics. This included especially showing solidarity and empathy and accentuating their expertise, commitment to work, goodwill and sense of duty. After the second accident, Boeing started also to remind the readers of their previous achievements and good deeds.

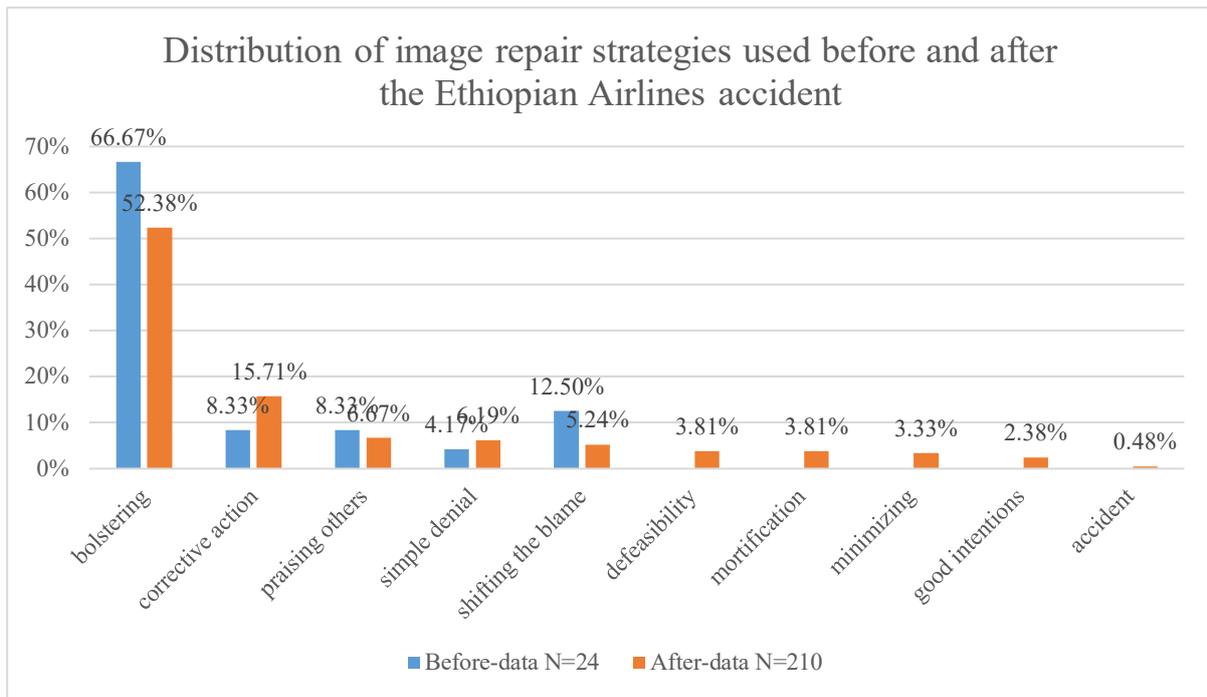


Figure 2 Distribution of the image repair strategies

It must be taken into consideration that even though according to the Figure 2, shifting the blame seems to be another key image repair strategy used prior to the second accident, the number of occurrences was only three. Thus, one cannot confidently conclude that shifting the blame was a key strategy in the before-data. To sum up, bolstering was the primary image repair strategy used before the second accident while shifting the blame, praising others, corrective action and simple denial complemented the image repair efforts.

Soon after the second accident had happened, the suspicion of the public was thrown on the plane manufacturer. Accordingly, Boeing’s image repair efforts intensified: the use of corrective action as an image repair strategy increased from 8.33% to 15.71%. Through the corrective action strategy, Boeing promised to make enhancements to the MCAS, the pilot training and the operation manuals. In addition to these concrete actions, Boeing used to make more abstract promises, such as preventing such accidents from happening again. Such promise may carry a strong rhetoric power since it asserts that the problem will never occur again. Its effectiveness can still be questioned, because it does not contain any concrete acts, and it may seem being mere empty words.

Corrective action and bolstering formed the basis for Boeing’s image repair efforts after the second accident had happened, while praising others, simple denial and shifting the blame continued to complement the image repair work.

6.2 Thematic structure

In this section, I focus on examining what kinds of themes and rhemes Boeing used and whether and how the theme structure is used as a resource of taken-for-grantedness. In other words, how the concepts of theme and given are utilized in order to create the illusion of mutual acceptance. I will also try to find potential patterns in terms of how different themes and image repair strategies are used together. The distribution of the theme types in both data are illustrated in Figure 3.

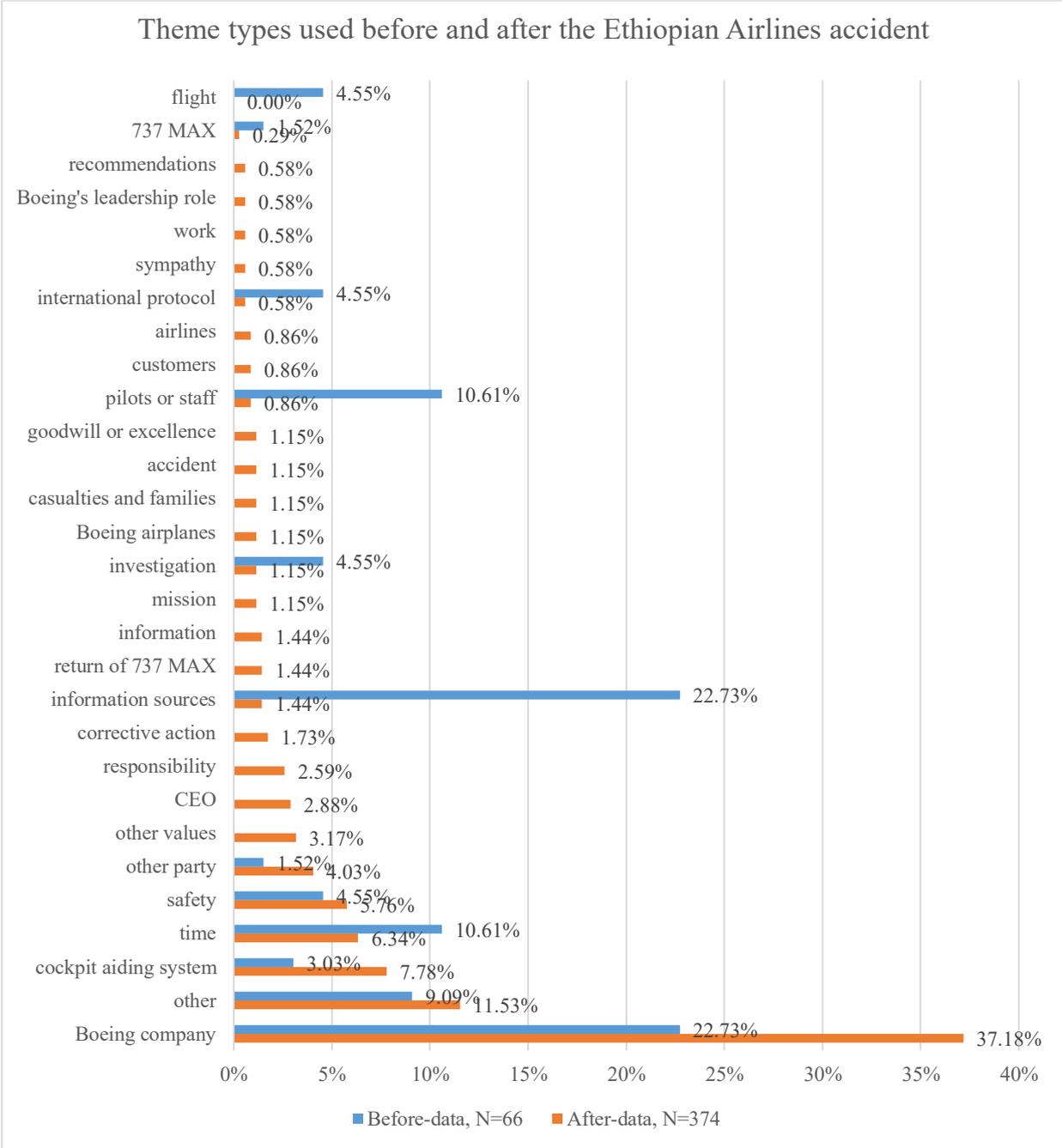


Figure 3 The theme types used before and after the Ethiopian Airlines accident

Quite predictably, overwhelmingly most often used themes in both data were those referring to *the company*. Company themes included words such as *Boeing*, *we*, *our team(s)* et cetera. In the before-data, company themes were accompanied by rhemes that either express sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims, highlight that the events have caused distress to the company, or inform that the company is willing to help and is assisting in the investigation. These rhemes, without exception, presented the company in a positive light, that is, modify the themes positively. Not surprisingly, most of them involved the image repair strategy of bolstering while a few of them included the strategy of praising others, in this case the investigation team. It is important to note that many of the theme-rheme pairs recur throughout the data. For instance, examples 14 and 15 occurred multiple times in the data, even verbatim. Themes are italicized and rhemes underlined.

- (14) *The Boeing Company* is deeply saddened by the loss of Lion Air Flight JT 610. We extend our heartfelt sympathies to the families and loved ones of those on board.
- (15) *We* are taking every measure to fully understand all aspects of this accident, working closely with the investigating team and all regulatory authorities involved.

Despite the large percentage of ingratiation strategies, there was also one occurrence of simple denial among the company-related themes:

- (16) *We* are confident in the safety of the 737 MAX.

As for the after-data, there was more variation in the combinations of theme and rheme. Surely the pattern of *company* themes paired with bolstering rhemes continued to occur after the second crash as well, however, the number of rhemes expressing corrective action increased considerably. In the after-data, the strategy of corrective action occurred in 13.18% of the rhemes, while in the before-data, the corresponding percentage was 0%.

With regard to the level of responsibility expressed by the company, it is essential to pay more attention on the different subtypes of the *company* theme. Whether it is done intentionally or not, the choice of theme in this category may impact the perceived liability of the company. When the company refers to itself with a proper noun, *Boeing*, it is distancing itself from the issue at hand, as if when talking about a third party. When the company refers to itself with the first person personal pronoun *we*, it is including the speaker voice in the theme. Müller (2017, 119) suggests that the reader may feel more attached when the company uses the

first person personal pronoun because it “may convey an emotional effectiveness”, while using the proper noun may create a more objective perception.

In the data, not many significant differences could be seen in the use of *we* and *Boeing*. However, it is evident that in the before-data *we* was used almost merely to express grief and sympathy, that is, in more humanitarian contexts, while *Boeing* was used primarily to inform things in technical and investigation-related contexts. In the after-data, no such clear distinction was found, since *we* themes were paired with both emotional and technical rhemes, due to its high frequency in the data. Nevertheless, 17 out of 21 occurrences of *Boeing* themes were paired with rhemes dealing with technical issues and operations. Considering this, it seems probable that Boeing may have wanted to emphasize how solidary and empathetic they are, by using the *we* themes in more humanitarian contexts. Similarly, they may have wanted to associate the company itself with professionalism and efficiency, by using the company name in action-related and practical contexts. Another observation with regard to the *company* theme is that in addition to *Boeing* and *we*, Boeing also referred to the company with expressions such as “our entire team”, “all of us” and “together as a One Boeing team”. Such themes create an idea of cohesive, caring and family-like community, which may positively shape the reader’s perception of the company.

In the before-data, *information source* was as common theme type as *company*. This category included the reports, manuals, reviews and different information sources in the airplane, such as maintenance logs. In the end of November, approximately one month after the first accident, INTSC published the preliminary report on the first accident. After that, Boeing issued a press release disclosing the content of the report. Therefore, the number of *information source* themes was remarkably high. Most of these and the following rhemes made up reported clauses (i.e. “the report states that...”). The rhemes mostly preceded the summary of the preliminary report, thus not usually incorporating any image repair strategies. The after-data contained only few *information source* themes, and some of them were paired with rhemes that incorporate the strategies of denial and evasion of responsibility.

Themes signifying *time* made up 10.61% of the themes in before-data and 6.34% in the after-data. This category is rather self-explanatory – it included mostly time adverbials, such as “earlier today” and “On Oct. 28”. Before the second accident, *time* themes were followed by rhemes that describe the course of events or Boeing’s actions. In the after-data, the category of *time* themes was rather heterogeneous, which makes generalizing or drawing conclusions difficult. Choices of theme appeared to be made on the grounds of fluency of the information

flow, rather than strategically. Praising others, bolstering and corrective action were the most common image repair strategies used within this theme category.

Themes of the category of airline *pilots and staff* were common (10.61%) only in the before-data. Before the second accident, these theme-rheme pairs were solely descriptive accounts of what had happened before and during the accident flight and only one of them included an image repair strategy, namely shifting the blame. After the second accident, there were only few occurrences of *pilots and staff* theme, but they were usually accompanied by rhemes including the strategy of shifting the blame (see example 17).

(17) *The pilot will always be able to override the flight control law using electric trim or manual trim.*

By claiming that the pilots are always able to override the aiding system, Boeing is shifting the blame on the pilots. Despite the future tense, the following sentence (see example 18) reveals that the intended meaning supposedly is that pilots are already able to override the flight control system. The relevant parts are marked in bold.

(18) In addition, it can be controlled through the use of **the existing runaway stabilizer procedure as reinforced in the Operations Manual Bulletin (OMB) issued on Nov. 6, 2018.**

The theme category of *other* was rather large (9.10% in the before-data and 11.53% in the after-data), because it covered all those themes that were either not frequent enough in the data to form their own category or could not be classified into any of the categories. The former included for example themes that occurred only once in the data, while the latter included mostly themes that should have rather be classified according to their grammatical function, such as subordinate clauses or adjuncts. Examining the subordinate clauses as themes is particularly interesting, for they have a great potential for revealing the implicit strategies of “taking-for-grantedness”. Consider the following example:

(19) *As our customers and their passengers continue to fly the 737 MAX to hundreds of destinations around the world every day, they have our assurance that the 737 MAX is as safe as any airplane that has ever flown the skies.*

As argued before, placing a component as theme of the clause complex makes it less susceptible to questioning, because according to thematic structure, normally the theme provides given

information that is already mutually known or acknowledged. It is important to note that it had not been explicitly stated anywhere in the previous press releases that the customers and their passengers actually *will* continue to fly the 737 MAX. Therefore, example 19 is an apparent instance of using theme structure as a rhetorical device, an attempt to make the reader think that the information is given, even though it is not. The idea is: do not seize upon this. As Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, 91) put it: “this is not news”.

Another example of such rhetorical effect is illustrated in example 20:

- (20) *Our continued disciplined approach is the right decision for our employees, customers, supplier partners and other stakeholders as we work with global regulators and customers to return the 737 MAX fleet to service and deliver on our commitments to all of our stakeholders.*

As mentioned in section 2.2, Boeing launched 737 MAX in response to Airbus’s launch of their new jet model. Due to the great competitive pressure, there was speculation that Boeing rushed the development process of MAX, at the expense of its safety. But, after the second accident Boeing started to underline their thoroughness, by saying for example that they are taking their time to make the plane enhancements. In other words, they argued the exact opposite of what was rumored. In example 20, the theme, Boeing’s “continued disciplined approach” is presented as given information. Consequently, the reader is more likely to believe that they are disciplined and thorough and not rushing in their work. Similarly, example 21 indicates that Boeing wants people to believe that despite the crisis, the company continues to innovate and grow:

- (21) *While organic investment remains our primary engine for innovation and growth, we’re also making complementary inorganic investments where they add strategic, long-term value.*

To give a more comprehensive idea of the themes that were used this way, they were collected in Table 2. The table illustrates the themes and their meanings (according to my interpretation).

Table 2 Themes and their meanings

Theme	Suggested meaning
<i>As our customers and their passengers continue to fly the 737 MAX to hundreds of destinations around the world every day</i>	The accident will not affect Boeing's customers' trust in them
<i>The enhanced flight control law</i>	The development will successfully enhance the MCAS
<i>As part of our standard practice following any accident,</i>	This accident is comparable to any other accident
<i>Ensuring safe and reliable travel on our airplanes</i>	Travelling with Boeing airplanes is safe and reliable
<i>This overarching focus on safety</i>	Boeing has an overarching focus on safety
<i>With a shared value of safety</i>	Safety is Boeing's value
<i>When the MAX returns to the skies with the software changes to the MCAS function</i>	MAX returns to service
<i>It's this shared sense of responsibility for the safety of flight</i>	Boeing is responsible and safe
<i>With a deep sense of duty</i>	Boeing has a deep sense of duty
<i>As we work closely with customers and global regulators to return the 737 MAX to service</i>	MAX returns to service
<i>This progress</i>	Boeing has made progress
<i>In light of our commitment to continuous improvement and our determination to always make a safe industry even safer</i>	Boeing aims to continuous improvement. The aviation industry is safe. Here also: MAX is already safe but Boeing still wants to improve.
<i>When the MAX returns to the skies</i>	MAX returns to service
<i>Our continued disciplined approach</i>	Boeing's approach is disciplined and continued
<i>Our leadership role</i>	Boeing has a leadership role in the industry
<i>our commitment to our values</i>	Boeing is committed to their values
<i>our pursuit of excellence</i>	Boeing is pursuing excellence
<i>Overall, our talented test pilots</i>	Boeing's test pilots are talented
<i>With the certified software update implemented</i>	The software update will be certified by FAA and implemented to the planes
<i>As an example of our progress</i>	Boeing has made progress
<i>In light of our commitment to continuous improvement</i>	Boeing aims to continuous improvement. Here also: MAX is already safe but Boeing still wants to improve.
<i>Overall, our investments in our communities</i>	Boeing has invested in their communities
<i>Boeing's leadership position in the aerospace industry</i>	Boeing has a leadership role in the industry
<i>Safety, quality, integrity and all of our enduring values</i>	Safety, quality and integrity are Boeing's values
<i>When we get the values right</i>	Boeing has the values right
<i>The strength of our strategy</i>	Boeing's strategy is strong
<i>With our expertise across the commercial, defense and space markets</i>	Boeing has expertise in the markets
<i>While organic investment remains our primary engine for innovation and growth</i>	Boeing will continue to grow and innovate
<i>When finalized</i>	Boeing's and Embraer's partnership will be finalized
<i>When we're aligned with our values</i>	Boeing is aligned with its values
<i>As the MAX safely returns to the air after the software modifications are approved and certified</i>	MAX returns to service safely
<i>When the MAX returns to service</i>	MAX returns to service
<i>With safety as our clear priority</i>	Safety is Boeing's clear priority

These meanings can certainly be elaborated further, for example, “Safety is Boeing’s value” also probably involves a proposition that Boeing manufactures safe airplanes, thus, 737 MAX is also fundamentally safe. Only the first row of Table 2 is from the before-data, which implies that Boeing started to utilize the thematic position in shaping people’s perceptions only after the crisis had intensified.

The category of themes referring to *cockpit aiding system* is also rather self-explanatory. It includes the MCAS and different parts of it, the updates to these features and the basic cockpit instruments, such as speed and altitude displays and stick shaker. In the before-data, *cockpit aiding system* themes amounted only to 3.03% (that is, two occurrences) revealing nothing considerable in terms of image repair. In the after-data, instead, they were rather common: they amounted to 7.78% of the themes and majority of their rhemes included image repair strategies. Many of the rhemes incorporated the subtypes of evasion of responsibility: defeasibility and good intentions, in particular. What was noteworthy in this theme category is that a great majority of the evasion of responsibility strategies throughout the data were used together with them. Also reducing offensiveness (especially minimizing), denial and mortification strategies occurred with these themes.

Safety themes make up 4.55% of the themes in the before-data and 5.76% in the after-data. Not surprisingly, *safety* themes are connected to rhemes that usually bolster the positive image of the company: 85% of the *safety* themes and the following rhemes incorporate image repair strategies of bolstering or praising others. They underline that safety is a core value and a priority at Boeing. Although the *safety* themes and their rhemes are rather consistent, one observation is especially noteworthy. Let us compare examples 22 and 23.

(22) *Safety* remains our top priority and is a core value for everyone at Boeing.

(23) *The safety of our airplanes, our customers’ passengers and their crews* is always our top priority.

In example 22, the rheme carrying the word “remains”, reveals that Boeing has acknowledged that the events may shake the audience’s confidence in them, thus, their image as a safe aircraft manufacturer is threatened. Example 23 does not contain such reference. Roughly speaking, the rheme in example 22 *reassures*, while the rheme in example 23 *states*.

The category of *other party* (1.52% in the before-data and 4.03% in the after-data) includes other actors than Boeing, Ethiopian Airlines or Lion Air. Even though there were a few rhemes incorporating bolstering strategies, no significant pattern between the themes and

image repair strategies was found within this category. At the same time, the themes referring to the *airlines* (in this case only Ethiopian Airlines, since Lion Air was not used as a theme), were followed by rhemes that without exception incorporated the strategy of praising others. *Airline* themes were very rare, they consisted only three occurrences in the after-data, but it seems like Boeing wants to praise the airlines to win them over. Yet, it is important to keep in mind that as discovered in section 6.1.3, shifting the blame on the pilots was part of Boeing's image repair repertoire. Thus, while openly praising the Ethiopian Airlines, Boeing still indirectly shifted the responsibility onto the airline and their pilots.

The category of *other values* refers to other values than safety, or the word "value" itself. These themes occurred only in the after-data, and they amounted to 3.17% of all themes. As was the case with *safety* themes, *other values* themes were mostly (80%) accompanied with bolstering strategies. Example 24 illustrates that Boeing's other values, such as continuous improvement, are placed as given information so that the reader will no longer question their truth value:

- (24) *In light of our commitment to continuous improvement and our determination to always make a safe industry even safer, I've asked the Boeing Board of Directors to establish a committee to review our company-wide policies and processes for the design and development of the airplanes we build.*

When we take a closer look at example 24, we notice that, as a matter of fact, the theme is unnecessary. The actual content is included in the rheme, while the theme is only there to fill in the thematic position, that is, the given element. The reader would get the same information with respect to content, if the theme of the clause complex were "I", which is now part of the rheme. However, the theme proposes an angle from which the following rheme is hoped to be looked at. In order to recognize another interesting rhetorical effect, let us compare examples 25 and 26:

- (25) *When we get the values right, it enables our strategy.*

- (26) *If we don't, we can't succeed.*

The theme in example 25 includes the word "when", which creates the impression that getting the values right will happen and placing it as a theme only strengthens this impression. Example 26 uses the same logic, however, the conjunction was changed from "when" to "if". While "when" is used to *predict* that something positive *will* happen, "if" is used to *hypothesize* that

something negative *could* happen. The contrast between the two themes is relevant. Perhaps a more probable option would have been: “If x, something positive would happen. If y, something negative would happen”. By using different conjunctions in the themes, Boeing underlines that the proposition in example 26 is only hypothetical.

Unlike the name of the category may sound like, the *responsibility* themes did not accept full responsibility for the accidents, but rather put emphasis on the overall importance and responsibility that Boeing as an aircraft manufacturer has. The frequency of the *responsibility* themes was 2.59% of all themes in the after-data. Many of these themes occurred together with ingratiation strategies, especially bolstering. Such an instance can be seen in example 27.

(27) *With a deep sense of duty, we embrace the responsibility of designing, building and supporting the safest airplanes in the skies.*

The after-data involved speeches and letters from the company’s CEO, therefore it was also used as a theme. As with the *company* theme, *CEO* themes were also divided into “CEO” and first person singular pronoun, “I”. However, since most of these themes occurred in the letters and speeches from the CEO, “I” was much more common theme than “CEO” or his whole name “Dennis Muilenberg”. In total, *CEO* themes amounted to 2.88% of all the themes. Not surprisingly, many of the themes were accompanied by bolstering strategy. The rhemes involve very emotionally loaded word choices, as illustrated in example 28:

(28) *I cannot remember a more heart-wrenching time in my career with this great company.*

After the grounding of 737 MAX, Boeing started to use the *return of the plane* as themes. There are not that many occurrences of *return* themes (five in total, which composes 1.44% of the overall number of themes), but they are very consistent in their wording. Consider the following example:

(29) *As the MAX safely returns to the air after the software modifications are approved and certified, all MAX production aircraft will have an activated and operable disagree alert and an optional angle of attack indicator.*

The example shows once again how thematic position can be cleverly utilized: the word choice implies that the MAX will return safely back to use. The reader is inclined to believe that the information presented in the theme position is true. Also, the theme in example 29, as well as

other similar themes, implies that the grounding of the MAX will end as soon as the enhancements to the software are done, that is, in the near future. *The return of MAX* themes and their rhemes include both bolstering and corrective action strategies.

Another category where the theme structure was utilized was Boeing’s *goodwill or excellence*. This category included Boeing’s and their staff’s expertise or experience, the strength of their strategy and the investments. All of these are more easily taken for granted, as they are used as themes. As per the name of the category, all of them and their rhemes bolstered the positive image of the company. The rest of the categories will not be covered one by one, for they were either very infrequent or no significant trends or findings were found within them.

6.2.1 Summary of the theme analysis

As Figure 3 illustrated, in both data, *Boeing company* was overwhelmingly most frequently used theme. Other than that, there was no correlation in terms of the frequencies of themes. The analysis revealed that the unequal sizes of the data caused the themes to be rather different. There were much less themes and theme categories in the before-data, which made it difficult to compare the theme groups with each other. The compilation of themes with relation to the image repair strategies can be seen in Table 3. The rows highlighted with grey are those where correlation between the two time periods was found at least to some degree.

Table 3 Themes with relation to image repair strategies

Before-data		After-data	
Theme	IR strategies	Theme	IR strategies
Boeing company N=15	bolstering (12), praising others (2), simple denial (1)	Boeing company N=129	bolstering (59), corrective action (17), mortification (8), simple denial (7), praising others (5), defeasibility (2), shifting the blame (1), minimizing (1)
Safety N=3	bolstering (2)	Safety N=20	bolstering (13), praising others (1)
Cockpit aiding system N=2	–	Cockpit aiding system N=19	defeasibility (5), minimizing (4), good intentions (3), shifting the blame (2), accident (1)
Other party N=1	–	Other party N=14	bolstering (2), minimizing (1), praising others (1)
Pilots or staff N=7	shifting the blame (1)	Pilots or staff N=3	shifting the blame (2)
Responsibility N=0	–	Responsibility N=9	bolstering (5), praising others (1), corrective action (1)
Other values N=0	–	Other values N=11	bolstering (8), corrective action (2)
CEO N=0	–	CEO N=10	bolstering (4), praising others (1)
Time N=7	corrective action (1), shifting the blame (1)	Time N=22	bolstering (6), corrective action (4)
Information sources N=15	–	Information sources N=5	shifting the blame (1), simple denial (1), good intentions (1)
Corrective action N=0	–	Corrective action N=6	corrective action (3), bolstering (2)
Information N=0	–	Information N=5	shifting the blame (2)

Mission N=0	–	Mission N=4	bolstering (4)
Boeing airplanes N=0	–	Boeing airplanes N=4	shifting the blame (2), bolstering (1), simple denial (1)
Accidents N=0	–	Accidents N=4	bolstering (2)
Investigation N=3	corrective action (1), shifting the blame (1), bolstering (1)	Investigation N=4	corrective action (2)
Casualties and families N=0	–	Casualties and families N=4	bolstering (3), praising others (1)
Goodwill or excellence N=0	–	Goodwill or excellence N=4	bolstering (4)
Customers N=0	–	Customers N=3	corrective action (2), praising others (1)
International protocol N=3	–	International protocol N=2	–
Sympathy N=0		Sympathy N=2	bolstering (2)
Work N=0	–	Work N=2	bolstering (2), simple denial (1)
Boeing's leadership role N=0	–	Boeing's leadership role N=2	bolstering (2)
Recommendations N=0	–	Recommendations N=2	minimizing (2)
737 MAX N=1	–	737 MAX N=1	bolstering (1), simple denial (1)
Flight N=3	–	Flight N=0	–
Other N=6	bolstering (1)	Other N=40	bolstering (10), corrective action (5), minimizing (2), defeasibility (1), simple denial (1), good intentions (1)

Despite the different sizes of the two data, there was some correlation between the pairings of themes and image repair strategies. *Boeing company* themes were typically used together with the strategy of bolstering. In the after-data, they were also often accompanied by corrective action. The distinction between the use of *we* and *Boeing* themes, explained earlier in section 6.2, may be due to Boeing's potential willingness to portray the company itself as an efficient professional and to emphasize the company's soft values by using *we* theme in more humanitarian contexts. Themes referring to *safety* also often occurred together with bolstering. Clause complexes where *pilots or staff* was in a thematic position included the strategy of shifting the blame, but the numbers were so small that any conclusions drawn from that is mere speculation. It is also noteworthy that the majority of evasion of responsibility strategies – in this case defeasibility, good intentions and accident – were used together with *cockpit aiding system* themes. Next, I will turn to discussing the results in more detail.

7 Discussion

In this section, I will discuss and speculate the findings presented in section 6 and compare them to the previous research.

As concluded in section 6.1, there was a great difference in the number of image repair strategies used before and after the second accident, which presumably comes mostly from the different sizes of the data. However, when comparing the number of image repair strategies found and the number of overall number of theme/rheme pairs, it is obvious that Boeing reinforced their image repair work after the second accident. Before the second accident, 24 image repair strategies were found, the overall number of theme/rheme pairs being 66. This means that 36.36% of the theme/rheme pairs included image repair strategies. The corresponding numbers after the second accident are 210 and 347, thus, 60.81% of the theme/rheme pairs incorporated image repair strategies. This signifies a major change in Boeing's crisis communication, triggered by the Ethiopian Airlines accident. The image repair strategy frequency being 36.36%, it seems as if Boeing did not find it necessary to invest in image repair work after the first accident. Maybe denying and dismissing the responsibility was a conscious choice, a part of their crisis communication strategy, or maybe they just did not succeed in anticipating the severity of the crisis. Obviously, we now know that this reactive method costed Boeing a lot. If they had begun to tackle the matter immediately, the Ethiopian Airlines accident may have been prevented.

Although the denial strategies – simple denial and shifting the blame – were used to some extent even after the Ethiopian Airlines accident, the results revealed that the overall use of denial strategies decreased compared to the before-data. It seems as if Boeing reacted to the intensifying allegations by adopting less denial strategies, and more corrective action strategies instead, since they were unable to deny their part in the events anymore. It is noteworthy that even though Boeing added more corrective action – which falls to the category of mortification strategies – to their image repair efforts afterwards, the company did not admit full responsibility of the accidents. My hypothesis is that Boeing did not want to accept the responsibility of the tragedies, but the situation (that is, the allegations and the findings of the investigations) forced them to accept at least some of the responsibility.

The small number of reducing offensiveness strategies – that is, minimizing, differentiation, transcendence and attacking the accuser – may be caused by the fact that it is difficult to reduce the offensiveness of accidents that are not only fatal, but also human-induced

and preventable. Furthermore, Boeing probably realized that people most likely found the Ethiopian accident especially offensive, since it could have been avoided if Boeing had taken actions immediately after the Lion Air accident.

I shall now move on to viewing the results in the light of earlier research conducted on aviation industry. As mentioned in the introduction of this study, there is not much prior research published on the Boeing's 737 MAX crisis. In her Master's Thesis, Taylor Heine (2019), made a brief analysis on Boeing's image repair efforts employed after the 737 MAX grounding. Heine adapted Benoit's typology in her analysis and the results indicated similar tendencies to those of my study: bolstering was the most consistently used image repair strategy, and corrective action was also heavily relied on. Mortification was also used frequently, but only after the preliminary report of the Ethiopian flight had been released. Shifting the blame and compensation were also among the identified strategies (Heine 2019, 15–21). The higher frequency of mortification strategies in Heine's study probably arises from the fact that the preliminary report of the Ethiopian Airlines accident was not published until early April in 2019. My data consisted also several press releases prior to the release of the preliminary report. It is important to remember that in my analysis, the supercategory of mortification included the subtypes of actual mortification, corrective action and compensation. One should not confuse the supercategory mortification with the subtype mortification. Heine's analysis revealed that the compensation strategy was not used until July 3rd when Boeing announced a 100-million-dollar fund to support the families and communities affected by the accidents. That is why compensation is absent in my data but present in Heine's data. Perhaps Boeing's crisis management team assumed that offering compensation signals more guilt than corrective action, and therefore did not resort to compensation at first. Corrective action was disguised as a precaution by using expressions such as "out of an abundance of caution" and "to make a safe airplane even safer". Compensation, however, implies that "we owe you something", which then implies guilt and therefore liability.

William Benoit and Anne Czerwinski (1997) have studied the airline USAir's image repair strategies and their effectiveness after a fatal plane crash on September 1994 in Pittsburgh. Benoit and Czerwinski examined an advertisement series published in the newspapers. The advertisement included three different letters, of which one was signed by the CEO, one by the USAir pilots and one by the USAir flight attendants (Benoit and Czerwinski 1997, 47). The results revealed that USAir used bolstering, denial and corrective action to rectify their public image. Even though the genre is different from the present study, the results show that there is a high degree of agreement in the image repair efforts used. The strategies

were used in a very similar way than in my data: bolstering was carried out by emphasizing the safety of the company, denial by asserting that the planes are safe – thus denying that they are dangerous – and corrective action was carried out by announcing to hire new, trustworthy agents to oversee USAir’s activities (Benoit and Czerwinski 1997, 48–49).

The comparison of previous research and the findings of the present study indicate that bolstering is among the most common strategies used by aviation companies in crises caused by plane crashes. One potential reasoning for that is that companies find bolstering as a rather safe or neutral strategy: through bolstering, company can positively influence the customers’ perceptions of them, without either denying the accusations or admitting the responsibility.

The results of the theme analysis supported the observation that the severity of the crisis changed drastically after the second accident: there was a clear shift also in the themes. Before the second accident, the themes used were quite concrete, such as *information sources*, *pilots and staff*, *time* and *flight*. After the second accident, Boeing started to add more varied, and more abstract, themes, such as *values*, *responsibility* and *leadership role*. These themes tend to include emotionally loaded words and bolster the image of the company by default. This also implies company’s (probably conscious) effort to appeal to the audience’s emotions.

What may be more interesting is the use of thematic position for rhetoric purposes, which I shall now turn to discussing. As became evident in section 6.2, the data included both, simple themes, such as *Boeing*, that contained no rhetorical strategies, and more complex themes, such as subordinate clauses, that did. Placing themes expressing for example Boeing’s commitment to their values and the return of the 737 MAX in thematic position has the effect of making them given information and less susceptible for questioning the components’ truth values. The fact that thematic position was utilized only after the second accident supports the conclusion that Boeing’s crisis communication initially relied on dismissing the crisis rather than resolving it. As can be seen in Table 3, in the data this rhetorical device goes hand in hand with emotional word choices. Since some of the press releases were speeches from the CEO, it would be interesting to examine the effect of intonation and other prosodic features on the message.

As mentioned before, the power of taken-for-grantedness builds on the assumption that the theme coincides with the given element of the sentence. Accordingly, as described in section 5.2, I separated those themes that were new instead of given. Let us recall this example that was first presented in section 6.2:

- (19) *As our customers and their passengers continue to fly the 737 MAX to hundreds of destinations around the world every day, they have our assurance that the 737 MAX is as safe as any airplane that has ever flown the skies.*

The example is from the before-data, where it was the first reference to the assumption that the accident will not impact on the flying public's confidence in Boeing. The theme is exceptionally not given, but the thematic position enables the element to be treated and perceived as such. Also, the conjunction "as" in the beginning implies that the airlines indeed will continue to use their planes. "Hundreds of destinations" and "every day" only strengthen the message by reminding how popular the plane model is. The effect may not be as strong as with the themes that function as given elements, which normally is the case, but the effect is still there. When reading a text, the reader builds on already existing knowledge. The interplay between theme and rheme and given and new helps our brains to process information: first we are offered the element that we either already are familiar with or that is somehow present in the situation, and only then we are ready to receive the new element, for it can be "anchored" to the given information. If our brains are accustomed to process information this way, would we notice when this pattern is broken? Or would we automatically treat the element in thematic position as given, even when it is not?

I shall now proceed to discussing the results of theme analysis in relation to previous research. Although theme structure is rather comprehensively researched area, the focuses are usually on different areas. There are not many studies available concerning using theme structure to create the illusion of taken-for-grantedness. Lorena Potter (2016) dealt with the topic in her paper where she discussed the ideological representations of Syria in Arabic and English news reports. Her findings revealed that theme structure and given/new information were used to shape social representations, but it was done differently in English and Arabic news reports. Positive representations of Syria were found in the Arabic reports while negative representations emerged from the analysis of English reports (Potter 2016, 18). Although the results of Potter's analysis are not directly comparable to those of mine, their relevance to the present study lies in how they demonstrate that the systems of theme and information are utilized in news reporting the same way as I have uncovered in my analysis.

Inger Lassen (2004) examined biotechnology press releases using the framework of theme/rheme and given/new combined with Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis model. Although Lassen's viewpoint was slightly different from mine, there are still some mutual elements. One press release in Lassen's material was issued by biotechnology advocates from multi-national company Monsanto, and the other one by biotechnology critics.

Thus, they represented opposing interests. Lassen's findings revealed that the themes in both press releases were developed by resuming preceding rhemes as a theme in a new sentence. However, the two parties used this mechanism for different purposes: pro-biotechnology party used the themes referring to the company frequently, and the following rhemes modify the themes positively. The anti-biotechnology party uses themes referring to the product, agriculture activists and proponents, and the rhemes represent the new methods, actions and the motives of the pro-biotechnology party in a very critical light. Lassen also found out that pro-biotechnology party used grammatical metaphor¹ (see Thompson 2004, 220), more frequently for resuming earlier rhemes as themes with given propositional content (Lassen 2004, 270–271). When it comes to theme/rheme pairs, Lassen's findings coincide to those of mine. In both data, there was found a pattern where the themes of the pro-party referred to the company itself and the following rhemes positively modified the themes.

When interpreting the results of the present study, some limitations have to be acknowledged. First of all, press releases as research material in this kind of study may be problematic. Press releases are directed to journalists, who are professionals of the media and discourse. Thus, they may be more aware of the various ways through which companies try to shape our perceptions than an average reader. Considering this, the strategies used in press releases may be less effective, if the journalist becomes aware of them and decides to reformulate the message. However, as mentioned in section 5.1, press releases are intended to be re-told as accurately as possible in the news reports, preferably even word for word. Therefore, the messages with the exact wording and original thematic choices can be conveyed to a larger audience. Furthermore, especially the interplay of theme/rheme and given/new rely much on people's unconscious information processing, and identifying the strategies requires conscious analyzing of the text.

Secondly, human error is an inevitable risk when conducting a study that builds on qualitative analysis. Identifying the strategies, classifying the elements and analyzing the results relies on my own interpretation, thus there is a prospect of human error. Since this was acknowledged already from the beginning, two rounds of annotation and categorizing were made to avoid errors and misinterpretations.

¹ In her study, Lassen refers to the notion of grammatical metaphor (originally defined by Halliday (2004)), meaning a situation where the process is put at the center where it functions as an actor. For example, "develop" becomes "development" and "logic" becomes "logicality". As Thompson states (2004, 224), there are other types of grammatical metaphors as well, but Lassen only focuses on this one.

8 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to find out what kind of image repair efforts aerospace company Boeing made during a crisis that followed from two fatal airplane crashes. While image repair work can be done through various means, the present study focused on theme structure and image repair strategies adapted from Benoit's (2015) and Coombs's (1995) models. The study set out to find out firstly, what kind of image repair strategies were used before and after the crisis struck. Secondly, what kind of themes were used and whether any implicit meanings were constructed by means of them. Lastly, whether there were any patterns or correlation between the image repair strategies and the theme choices. Great emphasis was put on the comparative perspective, that is, the study aimed at finding out whether Boeing's image repair work changed when the crisis intensified after the second accident.

The image repair analysis revealed that bolstering the company's image was the primary image repair strategy used by Boeing both before and after the second accident. Boeing bolstered their public image mostly by showing empathy towards the victims and their families and accentuating the expertise and other good traits of the company and its employees. After the second accident, corrective action gained in frequency. Through corrective action Boeing promised to enhance the faulty flight control system that had contributed to the accidents, as well as improve the manuals and pilot training. Additionally, they made promises to prevent such tragedies from ever happening again. In addition to bolstering and corrective action, praising others, simple denial and shifting the blame complemented the image repair efforts. Boeing clearly diversified their use of image repair strategies after the second accident, which can at least partly be due to the larger data.

The theme analysis revealed that the themes before and after the second accident varied a lot. Before the second accident, the themes tended to refer to concrete concepts, such as *information sources* and *pilots and staff*, as was illustrated in Figure 1 in section 6.2. After the second accident, Boeing diversified their theme choices: they added in also more abstract and emotionally loaded themes, such as *values* and *responsibility*. Themes referring to the company itself were overwhelmingly most common throughout the data. The sentences and clauses with *Boeing company* themes tended to, as expected, bolster the company's image. Correlation was found also between the themes that referred to *safety* and the strategy of bolstering. Closer inspection of the themes revealed that Boeing also utilized thematic position in order to shape the audience's perceptions of the company. Some of the themes were

constructed so that they included presumptions or beliefs, whose truth value had become less susceptible to questioning, due to the thematic position.

Comparison of the results of the two time periods revealed that there was a change in Boeing's image repair work. The first change was in the amount of press releases, which doubled after the second accident. The company also applied notably more image repair strategies in their press releases. Before the second accident, Boeing relied mostly on bolstering, while after the second accident, they added in more varied range of image repair strategies. Especially corrective action was applied more frequently after the second accident. Since the preliminary investigations revealed that the faulty part of the flight control law contributed to both accidents, Boeing probably found it necessary to respond to the intensified allegations and accept at least part of the blame. Otherwise their professional image would have been even more severely threatened. It is important to note that during these two time periods, Boeing did not accept the full responsibility of the accidents. Comparison also revealed that the thematic position was utilized more often after the second accident.

As mentioned earlier, image repair work can be done through other means as well. Other persuasive techniques, such as repetition and emphasis, were also used in the press releases, but due to the limited scope of the study, they were not discussed. Further research could examine these other image repair efforts made by Boeing. They all have an effect on how the audience perceives the company's image.

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Appendix 1 The typology of Benoit's Image Repair Theory and Coombs's Crisis-Response Strategies

Image repair strategies (Benoit)

Denial

Simple denial
Shifting the blame

Evasion of responsibility

Provocation
Defeasibility
Accident
Good intentions

Reducing offensiveness

Bolstering
Minimization
Differentiation
Transcendence
Attack the Accuser
Compensation

Corrective action

Mortification

Crisis-response strategies (Coombs)

Nonexistence strategies

Denial
Clarification
Attack
Intimidation

Distance strategies

Excuse
 Denial of intention
 Denial of volition
Justification
 Minimizing injury
 Victim deserving
 Misrepresentation

Ingratiation strategies

Bolstering
Transcendence
Praising others

Mortification strategies

Remediation
Repentance
Rectification

Suffering strategy

Appendix 2 Analysis sample

THEME			NEW	RHEME	IMAGE REPAIR STRATEGY	
Boeing	boeing company	Boeing		continues to have full confidence in the safety of the 737 MAX	denial	simple denial
However, after consultation with the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), and aviation authorities and its customers around the world	other		x	Boeing has determined -- out of an abundance of caution and in order to reassure the flying public of the aircraft's safety -- to recommend to the FAA the temporary suspension of operations of the entire global fleet of 371 737 MAX aircraft.	mortification, denial	corrective action, simple denial
"On behalf of the entire Boeing team, we	boeing company	we		extend our deepest sympathies to the families and loved ones of those who have lost their lives in these two tragic accidents	ingratiation	bolstering
said	other			Dennis Muilenburg, president, CEO, Chairman of The Boeing Company.		
We	boeing company	we		are supporting this proactive step out of an abundance of caution	denial	simple denial
Safety	safety			is a core value at Boeing for as long as we have been building airplanes; and	ingratiation	bolstering
it	safety			always will be		
There is	other			no greater priority for our company and our industry		
We	boeing company	we		are doing everything we can to understand the cause of the accidents in partnership with the investigators, deploy safety enhancements and help ensure this does not happen again	mortification	corrective action
Boeing	boeing company	Boeing		makes this recommendation and supports the decision by the FAA	mortification	corrective action

Appendix 3 Finnish summary

Vuoden 2018 lokakuussa lentoyhtiö Lion Airin lento päättyi traagisesti lentokoneen syöksyessä maahan. Kaikki koneen matkustajat sekä lentohenkilökunta saivat surmansa onnettomuudessa. Noin viisi kuukautta myöhemmin, maaliskuun 2019 alussa, Ethiopian Airlinesin lentokone putosi samankaltaisesti maahan kesken lennon ja kaikki matkustajat sekä lentohenkilökunta menehtyivät. Molemmat koneet olivat lentokonejätti Boeingin 737 MAX-mallia, johon oli rakennettu uusi sakkauksenestojärjestelmä. Ennakkotutkinnoissa selvisi, että molempien turmakoneiden lentäjillä oli ollut samanlaisia ongelmia sakkauksenestojärjestelmän virheellisen toiminnan kanssa ennen koneen putoamista. Lion Airin onnettomuuden jälkeen Boeing sai osakseen epäilyjä sakkauksenestojärjestelmän luotettavuudesta ja Boeing julkaisikin useamman lehdistötiedotteen koskien onnettomuutta. Kuitenkin Ethiopian Airlinesin lentoonnettomuuden jälkeen Boeingin julkisuuskuva kärsi toden teolla, sillä oli ilmeistä, että viallinen sakkauksenestojärjestelmä oli vähintäänkin osasyynä onnettomuuksiin. Kaksi päivää Ethiopian Airlinesin onnettomuuden jälkeen 737 MAX asetettiin lentokieltoon.

Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma tarkastelee Boeingin imagonkorjaustyötä heidän lehdistötiedotteissaan loppuvuoden 2018 ja alkuvuoden 2019 aikana sattuneiden Lion Airin ja Ethiopian Airlinesin lentokoneonnettomuuksien aiheuttaman julkisuuskuvakriisin aikana. Imagonkorjaustyö voi pitää sisällään monia eri ulottuvuuksia, mutta tässä tutkimuksessa keskitytään erityisesti William Benoitia (2015) ja Timothy Coombsia (1995) mukailien imagonkorjausstrategioihin sekä teemarakenteeseen. Tutkielma pyrkii vastaamaan kolmeen tutkimuskysymykseen: ensiksikin, mitä imagonkorjausstrategioita Boeing käyttää lehdistötiedotteissaan? Toiseksi, millaisia teemoja Boeing käyttää ennen ja jälkeen Ethiopian Airlinesin onnettomuuden sekä millaisia implisiittisiä merkityksiä teemarakenteen avulla mahdollisesti välitetään? Kolmanneksi, miten imagonkorjausstrategiat korreloivat teemavalintojen kanssa ja onko tässä eroa ennen ja jälkeen Ethiopian Airlinesin onnettomuuden?

Imagonkorjaustyötä on tärkeää tutkia erityisesti kahdesta syystä: mitä enemmän aiheesta julkaistaan tutkimustietoa, sitä paremmin yritykset pystyvät kehittämään viestintäänsä ja vastaamaan kriiseihin. Lisäksi koen aiheen tutkimisen tärkeäksi etenkin kuluttajan näkökulmasta – tiedon karttuessa kuluttajat näkevät, miten yritykset ja organisaatiot pyrkivät itse kielen keinoin vaikuttamaan näkemyksiimme ja mielipiteisiimme heistä. Tässä

tiivistelmässä esitellään tutkimuksen teoreettinen viitekehys, tutkimuksen materiaali ja menetelmät sekä tärkeimmät tulokset ja johtopäätökset.

Teoreettinen viitekehys

Tässä tutkimuksessa imagonkorjausstrategioita analysoitiin mallin avulla, joka perustuu William Benoitin (2015) alun perin vuonna 1994 julkaistuun imagon korjauksen teoriaan sekä tämän pioneeriteorian pohjalta rakennettuun Timothy Coombsin (1995) malliin kriisivastausstrategioista. Molemmat teorit tarjoavat luokittelun erilaisille strategioille, joita organisaatiot ja julkisuudenhenkilöt voivat käyttää kriisiviestinnässään. Tässä tutkimuksessa käytetty malli on yhdistelmä Benoitin ja Coombsin luokitteluista. Luokitteluja yhdisteltiin niin, että päällekkäisiä luokkia yhdisteltiin, valikoitiin mukaan luokat, joita oli vain toisessa, sekä järjesteltiin luokkia uudestaan. Tämä uusi, yhdistelty malli sisältää kuusi strategiaa, joista viisi sisältää useampia alakategorioita. *Vastuun kieltämisen* strategiat ovat *vastuun kieltäminen*, *vastuun siirtäminen* jollekin toiselle osapuolelle (Benoit 1997, 179–180) ja syyttäjän *pelottelu* esimerkiksi oikeuteen haastamisella (Coombs 1995, 451). *Vastuun välttelyn* strategia sisältää neljä alakategoriaa: syytetty voi vedota siihen, että tätä *provosoitiin*, että tällä *oli tiedon tai kontrollin puute* tilanteesta, että tapahtuma oli *onnettomuus* tai vahinko, tai että tällä oli *hyvä tarkoitus* teon takana (Benoit 1997, 180). *Vaikutusten vähentämisen* strategiat ovat vaikutusten suuruuden *vähättely*, *erottautuminen* muista vastaavanlaisista kriiseistä positiivisesti, vetoaminen siihen, että *tarkoitus pyhittää keinot* (Boeing 1997, 180–181), sekä *syyttävän tahon* (tai tiedon luotettavuuden) *kyseenalaistaminen* (Benoit 2015, 25). *Mielistelystrategiaa* voi toteuttaa *huomion kääntämisellä positiivisiin seikkoihin* (Boeing 1997, 180) sekä sidosryhmien *mielistelyllä* hyväksynnän saamiseksi (Coombs 1995, 452). Häpeästrategia sisältää *anteeksipyytämisen tai pahoittelun*, aiheutuneen vahingon *hyvittämisen* asianosaisille sekä tilanteen *korjaamisen*. Viimeinen strategia, *uhriksi tekeytyminen*, esittää syytetyn uhrina syyllisen sijaan. (Benoit 2015, 25–26).

Teemarakenteen analysoiminen perustuu Hallidayn ja Matthiessenin (2004) käsitykseen kielen *teema-* ja *informaatorakenteesta*. Lauseen *teema*, eli lauseen alkuun sijoitettu elementti, tarjoaa lukijalle näkövinkkelin, josta kirjoittaja toivoo lukijan seuraavaksi tarjottua tietoa, *reemaa*, tarkastelevan. Informaatorakenteella Halliday ja Matthiessen puolestaan tarkoittavat sitä, että tietoa rakennetaan esittämällä jo ennestään tunnettu tai tilanteesta päättämällä selviävä ”tosiasia” (given), ja täydentämällä tätä tietoa uudella, ennestään tuntemattomalla tiedolla (new). Lauseen teema vastaa yleensä lauseen ennestään

selvänä pidettyä elementtiä ja reema yleensä uutena tarjottua tietoa. (Halliday ja Matthiessen 2004, 89). Näin ollen teemavalinnat vaikuttavat siihen, miten lukija tekstin kautta saamaansa tietoon suhtautuu. Temaattisessa asemassa oleva elementti tulkitaan helpommin itsestään selväksi tiedoksi, kuin remaattisessa asemassa oleva. Tässä tutkimuksessa pyrittiin selvittämään paitsi sitä, millaisia teemoja Boeing käytti, myös sitä, miten Boeing mahdollisesti hyödynsi temaattista asemaa haluttujen merkityksien välittämisessä lukijoille.

Aineisto ja menetelmät

Tutkimuksen aineisto koostui kahdestakymmenestä onnettomuuksia käsittelevästä lehdistötiedotteesta, jotka kerättiin Boeingin verkkosivuilta. Tiedotearkisto on vapaasti saavutettavissa kaikille. Tiedotteista viisi oli julkaistu Lion Airin onnettomuuden jälkeen ja viisitoista Ethiopian Airlinesin onnettomuuden jälkeen. Tiedotteet olivat julkaistu samalla aikavälillä, eli 79 päivän kuluessa onnettomuuksista. Boeingin lehdistötiedotteet valikoituivat tutkimusaineistoksi siksi, koska Boeing viesti onnettomuuksien jälkeen pääasiassa niiden sekä Twitterin avulla. Twitter-julkaisuilla mainostettiin kuitenkin suureksi osaksi lehdistötiedotteita, joten tiedotteiden ottaminen tutkimusaineistoksi oli luonnollinen valinta. Lisäksi lehdistötiedotteiden avulla yritykset pyrkivät vaikuttamaan siihen, miten toimittajat heistä mediassa kirjoittavat, sillä niiden tarkoitus on tulla kerrotuksi eteenpäin, mielellään jopa sanalleen (Jacobs 1999, xi). Siispä, mikäli haluaa tarkastella yritysten pyrkimyksiä vaikuttaa kuluttajien mielipiteisiin, on tarkoituksenmukaista tutkia yrityksen kirjoittamia lehdistötiedotteita.

Tutkimus yhdisteli laadullista ja määrällistä tutkimustapaa. Materiaalia analysoitiin laadullisin menetelmin lähilukemalla ja luokittelemalla tekstiä kategorioihin. Luokittelujen perusteella aineistosta saatiin määrällistä tietoa, jonka avulla voitiin tehdä tarkempia päätelmiä Boeingin imagonkorjaustyöstä. Microsoft Excel toimi ensisijaisena apuvälineenä analyysin tekemisessä. Teemarakenteen analysoimiseksi lauseista eroteltiin teemat ja reemat, kuten myös ne erityistapaukset, joissa tema ei vastannut ennestään selvänä pidetyn elementin kanssa. Teemarakenteesta on olemassa joitakin luokitteluja, esimerkiksi Thompsonin (2004, 164) malli temaattisista järjestelmistä, joka kuitenkin esittää teemarakenteen kieliopillisesta näkökulmasta. Tässä tutkimuksessa halusin sen sijaan selvittää teemojen tyypit niiden aiheisällön perusteella, toisin sanoen sen, mihin toimijaan, ilmiöön tai konseptiin teemat viittaavat. Alustava luokittelu syntyi intuitiivisesti, sillä olin tutustunut tekstin teemoihin jo käydessäni aineistoa läpi pilottivaiheessa. Näin ollen ilmeisimmät teemat, esimerkiksi Boeing,

lentäjät ja turvallisuus, olivat jo tiedossa. Luokittelu täydentyi sitä mukaa, kun aineiston analysointi eteni. Teemaryhmä laskettiin kategoriaksi, mikäli ryhmään kuuluva teema esiintyi aineistossa vähintään kahdesti. Teema-analyysin jälkeen selvitin tiedotteissa esiintyvät imagonkorjausstrategiat lähilukumenetelmän avulla. Luokittelu perustui aiemmin esitellyn mallin strategiakategorioihin.

Keskeisimmät tutkimustulokset

Tuloksista selvisi, että Boeing tehosti imagonkorjaustyötään Ethiopian Airlinesin onnettomuuden jälkeen: sen lisäksi, että julkaistujen tiedotteiden määrä tuplaantui, Boeingin käyttämät imagonkorjausstrategiat lisääntyivät 24,45 prosenttiyksiköllä. Eniten käytetty strategia oli huomion kääntäminen positiivisiin seikkoihin niin ennen kuin jälkeenkin Ethiopian Airlinesin onnettomuuden. Boeing pyrki vahvistamaan ja korjaamaan positiivista kuvaa muun muassa korostamalla yrityksen solidaarisuutta ja empatiakykyä. Tämä ilmeni aineistossa surunvalittelujen esittämisenä sekä kertomalla, kuinka tapahtumat ovat järkyttäneet ja aiheuttaneet surua Boeingin työyhteisössä. Boeing painotti runsaasti myös yrityksen asiantuntemusta, työmoraalia, ja velvollisuudentuntoa, esimerkiksi vedoten siihen, että Boeing tarjoaa asiantuntija-apuaan tutkimuksissa. Myös hyvántahtoisuutta tuotiin esille, sekä muistutettiin yrityksen menneistä saavutuksista ja hyvistä teoista. Ennen Ethiopian Airlinesin onnettomuutta huomion kääntäminen positiivisiin seikkoihin oli pääasiallinen strategia, jota täydensivät huomattavasti vähemmän käytetyt vastuun siirtäminen lentäjille, tutkimusryhmän mielistely, tilanteen korjaamisen strategia (tässä tapauksessa lentäjien ohjeiden päivittäminen sakkauksenestojärjestelmää koskien), sekä vastuun kieltäminen, eli lentokoneen väittäminen turvalliseksi.

Ethiopian Airlinesin onnettomuuden jälkeen median, lentoyhtiöiden ja lentäjien sekä kuolleiden omaisten syytökset lisääntyivät ja muuttuivat vaativimmiksi. Boeingia syytettiin viallisen sakkauksenestojärjestelmän lisäksi muun muassa tiedon salailusta, riittämättömästä pilottikoulutuksesta sekä vajavaisista ohjekirjoista ohjaamoissa (Cheslow 2019; Rucinski 2019; Freed ja Hepher 2018). Tällöin Boeing otti positiivisten seikkojen painottamisen rinnalle entistä vahvemmin tilanteen korjaamisen strategian. Boeing lupasi tehdä parannuksia sakkauksenestojärjestelmään, pilottikoulutukseen sekä ohjekirjoihin. Näiden konkreettisten korjauslupausten lisäksi Boeing lupasi abstraktimmin myös varmistaa, ettei vastaavaa onnettomuutta pääse koskaan enää tapahtumaan. Nämä kaksi strategiaa muodostivat perustan Boeingin imagonkorjaustyölle toisen onnettomuuden jälkeen. Näiden lisäksi sidosryhmien –

Yhdysvaltain ilmailuhallinnon, tutkimustiimien ja Ethiopian Airlinesin – mielistelyä, vastuun kieltämistä ja siirtämistä pääasiassa lentäjille käytettiin myös melko usein.

Teema-analyysin tulokset puolestaan eivät olleet yhtä yksiselitteisiä. Aineistojen kokoero vaikutti siihen, että teemaluokkia oli vaikea vertailla keskenään, sillä jälkimmäisessä aineistossa oli huomattavasti enemmän luokkia. Oli kuitenkin nähtävissä, että siinä missä ennen toista onnettomuutta Boeingin käyttämät teemat viittasivat lähinnä konkreettisiin konsepteihin, kuten esimerkiksi *tietolähteisiin, lentäjiin ja henkilökuntaan ja lentoon*, toisen onnettomuuden jälkeen Boeingin käyttämissä teemoissa näkyi enemmän viittauksia abstrakteihin konsepteihin, kuten *arvoihin, vastuuseen ja Boeingin rooliin johtajana*. Nämä teemat ja niitä seuraavat reemat myös väistämättä sisälsivät tunnepitoisempia sanavalintoja. Korrelaatiota teemoista ja niiden yhteydessä käytetyistä imagonkorjausstrategioista aineistojen välillä löytyi ainoastaan kolmesta eri teemaluokasta. *Boeingiin yrityksenä* sekä *turvallisuuteen* viittaavat teema-reema -parit sisälsivät usein huomion kääntämistä positiivisiin seikkoihin. Kuten odotettu, *lentäjiin ja muuhun lentoyhtiöiden henkilökuntaan* viittaavat teemat yhdistettiin useamman kerran vastuun siirtämisen strategian kanssa. Teema-analyysissä paljastui myös, että *Boeingiin yrityksenä* viittaavat teemat olivat huomattavasti yleisimpiä teemoja. Teemaluokan sisällä oli myös huomattavissa vaihtelua: *me*-pronominia käytettiin yleisemmin tunteikkaammissa, ”humaaneissa” konteksteissa, kun taas *Boeing*-erisnimeä käytettiin useammin teknisiin asioihin ja toimintaan viitattaessa. Tämä voi kertoa siitä, että Boeing haluaa korostaa yrityksen inhimillistä puolta ja pehmeitä arvoja käyttämällä *me*-pronominia tietynlaisissa konteksteissa, kun taas yrityksen nimi pyritään yhdistämään ihmisten mielissä tehokkuuteen ja asiantuntijuuteen. Kuten mainittu, teema-analyysin tarkoituksena oli myös paljastaa, käyttikö Boeing temaattista asemaa hyödyksi merkitysten välittämisessä lukijalle. Tulokset kertoivat, että Boeing tosiaan hyödynsi tätä ilmiötä, sillä monet teemoista sisälsivät oletuksia tai väittämiä, joiden temaattisen aseman vuoksi niiden totuusarvoa ei välttämättä kyseenalaisteta. Väittämät liittyivät esimerkiksi 737 MAXin paluuseen lentoliikenteeseen tai Boeingin työmoraaliin, arvoihin ja menestykseen. Tulosten perusteella selvisi, että teemarakenetta hyödynnettiin tässä tarkoituksessa huomattavasti enemmän Ethiopian Airlinesin onnettomuuden jälkeen.

Kaiken kaikkiaan voidaan todeta, että kahden onnettomuuden jälkeisessä imagonkorjaustyössä oli jonkin verran eroa ja siihen myös panostettiin enemmän Ethiopian Airlinesin onnettomuuden jälkeen. Boeingin kannanotot lisääntyivät tiedotteiden julkaisujen määrän noustessa ensimmäisen kuukauden sisään kaksinkertaiseksi ja koko tarkasteluvälin ajalla kolminkertaiseksi. Tiedotteissa käytettyjen imagonkorjausstrategioiden määrä nousi, ja

kriisin edessä ja voimistuessa tilanteen korjaamisen strategiaa alettiin käyttää enemmän. Ylipäätään kaikkien imagonkorjausstrategioiden käyttö monipuolistui. Myös yrityksen käyttämät teemat monipuolistuivat toisen onnettomuuden jälkeen ja teemarakennetta alettiin hyödyntää enemmän ”itsestäänselvän tiedon” vaikutelman luomiseksi. Vaikka Boeing selkeästi tehosti imagonkorjaustyötään toisen lento-onnettomuuden jälkeen, viestintä oli edelleen enemmän reaktiivista kuin proaktiivista. Boeing ei myöskään tarkasteluvälin aikana missään vaiheessa ottanut tapahtumista täyttä vastuuta.