PAP's Image Restoration for the 2011 Singapore General Elections: A Case Study

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Abstract

This study attempts to look at the image restoration efforts of the People's Action Party (PAP) during the period leading up to the 2011 Singapore General Election (GE).

The PAP has constantly emerged victorious in every Singapore's GE, however 2011's fierce fight from the opposition and the numerous unhappy voices from the sea of Singaporeans has made it clear that their once well loved image was surely damaged. According to literature, when an image is damaged, there is a need to them repair this image. The dynamic framework of Benoit's Image Restoration Theory will thus be used to examine the actions of the PAP in dealing with the attacks and criticism before the election date.

This study content analyzed a five-month period newspaper coverage of the 2011 GE from two major Singapore newspapers, The Straits Times and Channel NewsAsia. Results showed the PAP, due to the nature of their err, chose a more accommodative strategy when dealing with the public. On the other hand, due to Singapore's unique political

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culture, the results on the use of "mortification" and "defeasibility" have also provided additional input into the current political literature, i.e. these strategies depend on the political culture.

The study concluded that the use image restoration strategies by the PAP were indeed more accommodative. Also the political landscape and culture of Singapore made defensive strategies more affective than Benoit would have suggested. Thus the PAP though still securing the lowest vote count in its election history, still manage to save its image and secure a win in the 2011 GE.

Keywords: image restoration theory, crisis management, Singapore, Singapore general election、content analysis

1. Introduction

Research Objectives and Research Problem

Ever since the British government granted Singapore full internal control during our colonized days in 1959, PAP has been the dominant party since then (Lee, 2008). Till today, it has not once lost a single General Elections (GE) (Singh, & Wheatly, 1989; Tan, 2009; Chan, 2011). This unique nature of Singapore has made many people question Singapore's government system. Chen (2011) says "The parliamentary republic of Singapore has been under international scrutiny for its stringent one-party rule by the People's Action Party (PAP) and suppression of the media and minority parties that oppose its control of the government" (p. 28). However Chan (2011) acknowledges that this system has indeed helped Singapore progressed from a malaria filled island to a financial hub. Some authors were not as kind, claiming that, "…to sustain the illusion of liberal democratic political contest within parliamentary politics, some opposition parties were permitted to exist. They were continuously harassed to keep them fractious and weak" (Tremawan, 1996, p. 155).

Yet on the other hand, other researchers argue that Singapore being an Asian state holds a different stand on democracy as compared to the west. Asians unlike the west are not individuals but rather a culture that has its roots in family, thus "balancing their interest with those of the communities to which they belong to" (Brems, 2011, p. 42). Murkherjee (2010) argues that a western model of democracy does not work for Asians because of Asia's strong cultural roots. It is common to see Asian politicians using these cultural roots i.e., respect for authority, acceptance of hierarchy, social order etc. which are that of balancing the interest of the community, during their governance. Lee Kuan Yew as quoted in

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1992 during a speech entitled " Democracy, Human Rights and the Realities" in Tokyo, said that "With few exceptions, democracy has not brought good government to new developing countries…What Asians value may not necessarily be what Americans or Europeans value. Westerners value the freedoms and liberties of the individual. As an Asian of Chinese cultural background, my values are for a government which is honest, effective and efficient." Thus looking at Singapore's democracy using the Asian value approach then greatly differs from if we were to take the western approach.

So did the 2011 GE marked the dwindling Asian value approach to democracy or where there underlying unhappiness with the PAP that led to their one time low election results The 2011 GE showed that the once dominant party, PAP, is no longer as untouchable as they were in the early years. This proved so with the results of the 2011's GE with the PAP winning 60.14% (Results, 2011) of the votes, the lowest in all their election history.   This is the first election where the opposition has been able to field candidates in all 84 constituencies and where the PAP will not be returning to power without any contest (Sentinel, 2011). As the ruling party of Singapore since the British granted Singapore full internal governance, it is therefore very important for the PAP to continue their legacy, thus making it important to analyse what happened by properly analysing the good and the bad of their 2011's campaigning strategies.

PAP election history from 1968 to 2006

Ever since independence from British colonial rule and the split from Malaysia, the PAP has fought and won every single general election. The 1968 GE held on 13th April had only one opposition party and 5 independent candidates contesting 7 out of the 58 constituencies. The PAP won all the seats that year. The 1972 GE on the 2nd of September saw an

increase in opposition parties. 57 out of 65 constituencies were contested but the PAP emerged victorious winning all 65 seats. Similarly in the 1976 GE, despite being contested by the same opponents, PAP won all seats. The 1980 election on the 23rd of December saw the entrance of the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP), however despite debates of the opposition over rights of the minority and care for the poor, the PAP still won all seats that year (GE 1968 – Singapore General Elections – Resource guide at National Library, Singapore, 2012; GE 1972 – Singapore General Elections – Resource guide at National Library, Singapore, 2012; GE 1976 – Singapore General Elections – Resource guide at National Library, Singapore, 2012; GE 1980 – Singapore General Elections – Resource guide at National Library, Singapore, 2012).

However the following GE's marked the end of the one party rule with SDP and Workers Party (WP) winning both Potong Pasir and Anson in 1984. Subsequent GE's saw the popularity of the PAP going downhill, with the opposition winning more seats in parliament (GE 1984 – Singapore General Elections – Resource guide at National Library, Singapore; GE 1991 – Singapore General Elections – Resource guide at National Library, Singapore. It was only in 1997 and 2001 that they managed to reverse these negative results (Singapore Parliamentary General Election 1997, 2012; Singapore Parliamentary General Election 2001, 2012). However, in 2006, fortunes once again reversed and voters cry for the opposition to be in parliament was clear (Chua, 2006). According to Singapore Parliamentary General Election 2006 (2012). The 2006 elections was also the start of the "internet election" as according to Gomez and Han (2010), this is the year with a significant presence of political bloggers. Also there was a hot debate over the issue of "vote against upgrading" where constituencies not under the PAP were "punished" with no government funding (Chua, 2006). The opposition this year was also stronger more prepared than they were previously, giving the PAP a good fight.

2011 Singapore General Election

7th May 2011 is the latest GE that happened in Singapore recently. It is said by critiques to be the fiercest fight for PAP since Singapore's independence (Lim & Sim, 2011). 2011's GE showed the opposition contesting areas that were previously not contested before (i.e. strong PAP areas like Marine Parade which is under ex Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong). Furthermore, opposition candidates are also of high caliber with "top corporate lawyers and several former high-ranking civil servants" (para 3) representing the opposition.

PAP's crisis – unhappiness of Singaporeans towards the PAP

What made this GE particularly difficult for the PAP was the raising unhappiness of the Singaporeans towards the PAP's policies and governing. There was a raising concern with the property prices of Singapore, the high cost of living as well as the in flood of foreign workers into the country. Political risk consultants also pointed that these issues i.e., cost of living issues, housing prices and the competition posed by foreigners in the job market, will be prominently featured during the 2011 campaign (Chua, 2011), showing the significance it played in the 2011 GE. The Straits Times also reported that these issues were the top concerns amongst Singaporeans (Lim, 2011). Similarly, the opposition also targeted strongly at these specific issues when attacking the PAP during the campaign period. These issues were also what weighed on voters minds when they cast their votes (Toh & Lim, 2011). Furthermore according to Benoit (2007) "policy is a more determinant of a voters vote to a candidate than character" (p. 224), therefore candidates usually target policies during a political campaign.

Immigration policy

Singapore's foreign immigration policy has made employment and entry into Singapore relatively easy. According to the Ministry of Manpower, before the changes made to the dependent privileges of work pass holders on 1st September 2012, foreigners need only to earn a monthly income of 2000 Singapore dollars to qualify for a S Pass i.e., a pass for mid skilled foreign workers (S Pass - before you apply, 2012). If their income was above 2800 Singapore dollars, they were allowed to bring their spouse, children, parents and parent-in-laws as well. There were also Long term visitor pass and Dependent's pass that allowed a foreigner's common-law spouse, handicapped children, step children and parents to enter Singapore (Long term visitor pass – Before you apply, 2012; Dependent's pass – Before you apply, 2012). This ease of entering and staying in Singapore has according to Lim and Sim (2011), made 36.6 percent of the 5.1 million population in Singapore made up of foreign workers. This is a 16.6 percent increase from the 4 million people 10 years ago. The United States of America has a foreign population of 12.36% in the year 2010 ("Table 40", 2010), and Taiwan has a foreign population of 2% in the year 2011 ("Foreign Residents", 2012; "Household Statistics Data", 2011). Therefore with over one quarter of the population being foreigners in such a small country, competition for housing and jobs, over-crowding of public transportation as well as the losing of national identity has left many Singaporeans disgruntled. Thus the lose immigration laws currently in place, that allows foreigners to easily work in Singapore, were one of the main issues raised.

Cost of living

The M shaped society theory by Kenichi Ohmae, which describes

the society fracturing into extremely rich and extremely poor, was becoming a prominent sight in Singapore's society. Despite being one of Asia's wealthiest nations, the median household income only rose 3.1% despite a GDP increase of 14.5 percent in 2010. "Singapore's bottom 10 percent of households with at least one working member had an average monthly income of S$1,400 last year, versus S$23,684 for households in the top 10 percent, according to the Department of Statistics" (Lim & Sim. 2011, para, 16). To further add to the burden of the poor, Singapore has a current inflation rate of 5.4% as of May 2012 (Koh, 2012), being one of the highest in Asia (Raghuvanshi, 2012).

Housing

With the high inflation rate and the forming of an M society, many young Singaporeans are finding it harder and harder to buy public housing as compared to their parent's generation. This frustration is also taken out on the loose foreign immigration laws set by the PAP. The undersupplied housing caused by the possibility of the influx of foreigners is also a reason why housing prices has increased dramatically. The home ownership percentage of Singaporeans thus dipped from 92% in 2000 to 87.2% in 2010 (Key indicators of resident household, 2010). The public was demanding answers as to why the Singapore government did not "anticipated the surge in demand for Housing Board (HDB) flats that has led to the record-high resale flat prices seen today" (Cheam, 2011, para. 1). Also, some have criticized the government from profiting from public housing even though it should be for the public good. The opposition party made use of this and demanded the PAP to reveal the price breakdown of building a flat (Kor, 2011).

2. Literature Review and Research Question

Crisis Management

To define crisis, Coombs (2007a) came up with the following working definition of a crisis:

"A crisis is defined here as a significant threat to operations that can have negative consequences if not handled properly." (p. 1)

Crises usually reveal the organizations weakness because most of them seldom prepare for them (Christensen, Fimreite and Laegreid, 2011). The public usually actively seeks for information in these times, relying on media or third party sources to "satisfy the human desire for closure" (p. 262). Therefore crisis management has become an important part aspect of an organizations planning, giving growth to the abundance of crisis management literature. In today's global society, it is an essential part of the organization planning process and affective crisis management will allow organizations to better cope with the characteristics of each crisis.

As crisis situations" puts a lot of pressure on the organizations to respond with accurate, complete information as possible" (Wilcox & Cameron, 2009, p. 262), how the organization manages this crisis will determine if it remains "an incident or whether it becomes a full-blown crisis" (p. 262).

Classifying PAP's crisis into crisis types

There are so many ways that researchers classify crisis. For the purpose of this research we will use Coombs clustering of crisis base on attribution. In his research, Coombs (2009) classify crisis base on attribution theory where the theory states that people search for the cause especially when it is a negative event. Using research, he "has identified three crisis clusters based upon attributions of crisis responsibility by crisis type" (Coombs, 2007, p. 167).

Base on Coombs clustering of crisis type, PAP's crisis can then be classified under preventable crisis as the three issues mentioned above has a strong crisis responsibility attributed to it. Firstly because the immigration policy, housing prices and inflation was not the result of anything in neither the victim of accident clusters. The policies were set and implemented by the PAP thus being solely responsible for the outcome. In this case, these policies (the product) were human-error product harm, which because the policies were defective, has caused potentially "harmful" results to Singaporean citizens. We can also classify this crisis into organizational misdeed as based on Coombs definition, organization misdeed is when management takes action knowing it will harm stakeholders. He gave the example of when an organization favour short-term economic gain over social values. This holds true for the PAP policies as many have criticise them for trading of income distribution for economic growth, resulting in a growing poor working class (Tan, 2012; Tan 2012).

After the clustering of crisis base on attribution, Coombs then suggested guidelines in managing the crisis of different cluster type (Coombs, 2005; Coombs, 2007a, Coombs, 2007b).
Coombs (2007a) suggest that the higher responsibility attributed to the crisis, it is best to use the accommodative strategies because they address the needs of the victims and the public views the organization as taking more responsibility. In Coombs' continuum of accommodative to non-accommodative strategies, rebuild crisis response strategies (compensation, apology) followed by diminish crisis response strategies (excuse, justification) are the most accommodative whereas deny crisis response strategies (denial, attacking the accuser, scapegoat) were seen as the most non-accommodative (Coombs, 2009). Also, Coombs (2007b) the use of deny response strategies helps to eliminate the negative effect of the crisis if the public accepts that there is no crisis, whereas expression

of concern via compensation or apologies serves as a strategy to "blunt feelings of anger" (p.171). Coombs Situational Crisis Communication Theory thus "holds that as the reputational threat and negative affect increases (both of which are functions of situational factors), crisis managers should utilize crisis response strategies with the requisite level of accepting crisis responsibility" (p. 171).

Thus back to the issue of the crisis faced by the PAP, with the public being the victim of the proposed policies, it is then inferred that the PAP needed accept crisis responsibility and to use more accommodative strategies to respond to their crisis

Communication during political campaigns

One must recognize that it is impossible for each voting individual to get to know the candidates in-depth and face-to-face. Therefore how the political candidates communicate and portray themselves is the only way in which voters can learn about the candidate and get information that will eventually influence their vote (Benoit, 2008). The campaign messages sent out during these events are important in shaping the minds of each voter.

Stages in a political campaign

According to Trent and Friedenberg (2000), there are four stages in a political campaign. The first stage is surfacing where strategies used by candidates is used to capture the attention of the public. Public gatherings, public polls to determine potential issues of concern in the coming election are also part of this stage. Candidates come to know what issues are the voters concerned about. This stage also let voters know about a candidates' personal style, goal, potential programs or initial stand on

issues. The second stage of the campaign is known as the primaries where within the political party itself, candidates are chosen. This is the stage also when candidates make promises about what they will do if elected and when voters can see how candidates carry themselves thus re-evaluating or determining their opinions about them. The third stage known as the nomination stage is not applicable to this GE as nomination stage are usually done during a presidential election. Lastly, the fourth stage known as the general election where speeches, parades, debates, political advertising etc. comes into place. The media will pay more attention to the campaign during this stage and information of the GE is widely available, even from talking to a friend. This is the stage where candidates start to tackle the issues concerning the voters.

The different stages in a political campaign affects the strategies used by candidates. Brady, Johnson and Sides (2006) as the election date draws nearer, there are greater campaign effort by the candidates. There is more media coverage, more interest of people to campaigns, more political discussions and more information about a candidate. The media is particularly a strong indicator of the nearing date of an election, as it will start increasing its report on the campaigns as well as focus on issues that will affect voting decision as mentioned early. The nearing of the election would thus affect a candidate or party's campaign message. Damore (2002) found that the tone of a campaign changes as election date approaches. At the beginning of the campaign, to establish themselves with the voters, candidates usually use positive message strategy. However towards the middle and end of the campaign when it is hard to alter a voter's perception, there is a shift of a candidate's attention to the weaknesses of the opposition so as to undermine them. Also, Damore (2005) found that incumbents would wait for their opposition to discuss issues pertaining to the election before they themselves comment and take a stand on the issues.

Political party image

Just like how politician's campaign messages are disseminated through media, so do political scandals and attack on issues by unhappy citizens and other political parties. As mentioned earlier that voters only know a political candidate through communication by the media or by others, a scandal or an accusation will greatly hurt the image of a candidate and influence the choice of a voter. As a voter has no way of clarifying directly with the candidate himself, they can only rely on these pieces of information. Also, because credibility affects the persuasiveness of a candidate, the damage done by these scandals and accusations will greatly affect the candidate's image, lowering the persuasiveness and trustworthiness of the candidate (Benoit, 2008).   Therefore it is also common to see candidates' attacking each other's character during an election campaign as politics is partisan by nature (Benoit, 1997).

So what exactly is this image? According to Lin (2006), she defines political party image as "the mental pictures that voters hold that are not associated with either group loyalties or party policies" (p. 28). The image one holds on a party is shaped by formative political experience, mass media, and activities of the political party as well as the politician him/herself. An analysis on Great Britain also found that political image is an important factor in electoral choice. This image is not permanent and changes overtime as the campaign progress (Stewart & Clark, 1992). This is supported by Lin's (2006) research on Taiwan's politics that a political image changes with political agenda and environment. When voters' perception of the politician is negative, voting intention declines, vice versa (Balmas & Sheafer, 2010). Therefore, political party image is particularly important to a political party as this mental picture held by voters determines their vote.

In the case of PAP where their governance and policies have cause

unhappiness amongst Singaporeans, this negative image might act as a mental short cut when voters are casting their votes on Election Day.

William L. Benoit: Theory of Image Restoration

Benoit addresses the question of what an organization can do when accused of suspected of wrongdoing. According to Benoit, he defines image as the perception or a person (group of organization) held by others (Benoit and Brinson, 1999). A good face or image is essential in allowing others to have a favourable perception of ourselves well on the other hand a bad image might "interfere with our interactions with others" (pg 2). When our image is threatened, there is a need in all human beings to want to offer explanations, defend ourselves, justify, rationalize, apologize or provide an excuse for our behaviour (Benoit 1995). Furthermore, the public draws conclusions about an organization based on the image that they portray. They use their limited perspective and fragments of the whole situation to judge the organization's image (Sayerhaft & Atkins, 1989).

In his theory of Image Restoration, Benoit assumes that "communication is best conceptualizes as a goal-directed activity" and that "maintaining a positive reputation is one of the central goals or communication" (pg 63). Also, an image is only at risk if the organization is believed by stakeholders to be responsible for the offensive act that has occurred. The two key elements here are that the act was undesirable and that the public believed that the organization was responsible for the action. That is, even if the organization was not responsible for the damages, if stakeholders and the public believed they were, image damage has been done (Benoit 1995).

Table 1

Benoit's Image Restoration Strategies

Strategies	Definition	Examples
Denial		
Simple Denial	The accused "denies that the offensive acts indeed occur or denies that he or she performed it" (Benoit, 1995, p. 75).	Health Minister Khaw Boon Wan has rebutted rumours that he only paid S$8 for his heart bypass surgery last year.
Shifting the Blame	The accused shifts the ill feelings the public have towards another person as well as proving to the public that he/she indeed did not commit the offensive act (Benoit, 1995).	Ms Tin said she found out it was one of her administrators, Ms Denise He, who had mistakenly made the post.
Evasion of Responsibility		
Provocation	The accused suggest that "the act in question was performed in response to another wrongful act which understandably provoked the offensive act in question" (p. 76)	LKY and Lee Hsien Loong sued Chee Soon Juan into bankruptcy due to his smear campaign on them.
Defeasibility	"The actor attempts to suggest that lack of information, volition, or	The government did not know that there will be a sudden surge of demand

	ability means that he or she should not be held fully responsible for the act" (Benoit, 1995, p. 76).	for HDB flats.
Accident	The accused states that the act happened because of unforeseeable circumstances (Benoit & Mchale, 1999)	Ms He commented on facebook without realizing that it is that of Ms Tin.
Good Intentions	The accused justify the offensive act by "motives and intentions" (Benoit, 1995, p. 76).	The workfare scheme was implemented to keep workers employed.
Reducing Offensiveness of Event		
Bolstering	To increase the public's positive feeling for the accused by relating positive attributes or calling upon his/her past actions (Benoit, 1995; Benoit & Mchale, 1999).	Prime Minister Lee says that the reason why Singaporeans live comfortably today is because of the government's schemes.
Minimization	The accused reduces "the amount of negative affect associated with the offensive act" (Benoit, 1995 p. 77).	Prime Minister Lee in regards to the lack of HDB, says that flat buyers can buy off the open market from owners who want to sell their

		HDB flats.
Differentiation	The accused distinguishes the offensive act from other similar but more abhorrent acts" (Benoit & Mchale, 1999, p. 268)	Prime Minister Lee denies having a one party rule, evident by how open the electoral set-up is to contests from other parties.
Transcendence	The accused places "the wrongful act in a broad, positive context to help improve the offender's image" (p. 268)	Lee Kuan Yew urges voters to look at fundamentals instead of the chaos brought about by the election.
Attack the Accuser	The accused attacks the accuser's credibility so as to diminish the damage done by the attack (Benoit, 1995).	PAP questions Wijeysingha's political agenda in light of video.
Compensation	The accused reimburses the victim of the offense so as to "offset the negative feelings arising from the wrongful act" (Benoit, 1995, pg. 78).	The implementation of the workfare special bonus to sooth the pain of the raising cost of living.
Corrective Action	The accused either rectifies the problem caused by the	Statements that the PAP will analyze the results

	offensive act or/and take action to prevent the offensive act from happening again (Benoit, 1995; Benoit & Mchale, 1999).	and learn from their mistakes so as to put right what is wrong.
Mortification	The accused admits offensive behavior and apologizes and seeks forgiveness from the public ((Benoit, 1995; Benoit & Mchale, 1999).	Apology of Prime minister Lee Hsien Loong at a lunch time rally

Field of research in Benoit's Image Restoration Theory

Researching on Benoit's Image Restoration Theory, Huang (2006) found that denial was a strong tool when dealing with a commission situation. Using a case involving the charges that Taipei Mayor Chen Shui-Bian visited Macau as a sex touring during the 1998 Taipei mayoral election campaign, she found that denial was the most frequently used strategy as well as the most positively accepted. Also, she found that when denial was combined with justification, the results were stronger. The use of denial together with shifting the blame has been found in a study by Jin (2010) as a strategy to provide immediate stress reduction to the angry public. When the public perceives the crisis to be predictable and controllable, they tend to become angrier at the organization than if it was otherwise. Denial should also be used with strong evidence as weak evidence lessens the influence of the strategy of denial as seen by the case of President George Bush when he provide weak evidence when denying allegations from the public (he did not create jobs) (Benoit, 2006).

However denial is not always the solution to save one's image. Ulmer (2001) has found that organizations tend to largely focus on denial of responsibility because they care more about their organization than the concerns of the stakeholders. He stated examples of Dow Corning as well as tobacco industries that have widely used denial as a strategy only to suffer from "public image problems, prolonged legal wrangling, and postponed crisis resolution" (p. 608). This is supported by Brinson and Benoit (1996) case study on Dow Corning's breast implant crisis, which found corrective action to be more appropriate and effective than the initial denial by the company. Hearit (2006) also describes denial as a strategy that is used when the organizations does not have any evidence that they are guilty, or due to liability reasons, has no choice but to deny the negative action. Benoit argues that "politicians often try to deny wrongdoings even when they have committed an offensive act" (Benoit, 2007, p.116). Then again this strategy would have implicated them into committing two offenses rather than one if they were to be found guilty. Also if the level of responsibility of the organization perceived by the public is high, denial as a strategy would not only not help, but in fact decrease the credibility image of the organization even further (Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer, 2003).

Hearit (1997) found that to use transcendence, the accused must be in the position to make sure the claim that the action was for social good and not for the benefit of the organization. Cultural context also plays a part according to the research done by Huang (2006). She found that Chinese political culture tend to use transcendence so as to "redefine the context so as to allow organizational or personal acts" (p. 200) to be understood and also because the Chinese culture "places a large emphasis on face and harmonious relationships" (p. 200).

Politicians on the other hand do not work the same way as a corporate organization. For example, mortification according to Benoit (1997) is much harder to use by a politician as compared to an entertainer. This is because usually when a politician admits his/her mistake, it involves live and death and/or saving or spending millions of taxpayer's money. Thus by admitting failure, the capability of a politician is thus undermined. This is why Benoit suggest even though politicians can still use mortification, it is definitely not the first item on their list of strategies. It is usually used after denial and shifting the blame has failed. Similarly, the use of defeasibility as a strategy by politicians also leads to the questioning of their ability (Benoit, 2006). In his study on President George Bush use of defeasibility in regards to the attacking of Iraq, Benoit found that people started questioning why the President would rely on bad intelligence in the decision to attack Iraq. Benoit argues that, even though defeasibility helps one free himself/herself from blame, it "does not portray him or her as in charge of the situation" (p. 299). Furthermore in the case of President George Bush, Benoit found that by using defeasibility for what is going wrong and then still claiming credit for what is going right, will appear very self-serving. However, this strategy may be the best one yet if mortification is not applicable. The use of corrective action was also rated the lowest rated strategy by the public in a study of Mississippi senator Trent Lott's political faux pas by Sheldon (2006), as compared to when used by a corporate organization, thus showing that what works for a corporate organization might not work as well for a politician.

Also, not all strategies defined by Benoit will result in a happy ending. Exxon's oil spill proved that despite finally using a correct strategy to the situation, previous bad choices in strategies would still affect how the public perceives the correct strategy. For example, even though Exxon took corrective action to clean up the oil spill, previous

strategies of shifting the blame, minimizing the problem and bolstering its image with statements that contradicts the media, did little to help it's image because the public already judged Exxon to be not credible. Poll by the public even showed that over three quarters of the public believed that Exxon could have done more, with only 14 percent believing that Exxon did all they could (Benoit, 1995). This shows that when strategies are used incorrectly, it will undermine the supposed results.

Furthermore, Benoit also says that how well one performs a strategy will also determine the outcome of the result. An accused can use an effective combination of strategies, but the correct portrayal of the strategy will ultimately determine the success of the image restoration. For example in Kenneth Starr's image repair discourse, his use of denial was not persuasive because they were weak and not well developed, or when he used bolstering to show his objectivity towards President Clinton yet his actions showed otherwise (Benoit & Mchale, 1999).

3. Research question

From the above literature review, it shows that Benoit's suggested strategies work in different ways and in different context. What might work in a corporate organization might not necessarily work for a politician. Also, different situation requires the choice of a different strategy because as it was mentioned earlier, "it depends".   The case study of Singapore's 2011 General election will thus be using Benoit's Theory of Image restoration as a framework to systematically examine and evaluate the actions of the PAP during the period leading up to the GE. Thus the questions addressed in this thesis would be:

RQ1: Using Benoit's Image Restoration theory as a framework, what response strategies were used by the PAP during the period leading up to the GE?

RQ 2: What was the most commonly used strategy by the PAP?

RQ 3.1: Did PAP choose a more accommodative strategy in dealing with the issues?

RQ 3.2: What strategy/ies was/were used in regards to the unhappiness of Singaporeans

with the immigration policy?

RQ 3.3: What strategy/ies was/were used in regards to the issue of cost of living?

RQ 3.4: What strategy/ies was/were used in regards to the issue of housing?

4. Methodology

Content analysis is a "method of studying and analysing communication in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables" (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 150). For this research we will be quantifying the data at a nominal level, where we will identify the strategies used by the PAP during the 2011 GE.

Sampling

In this research, media content will be sampled from the main English newspapers in Singapore as well as the news outlet appointed to report on the GE. They are The Straits Times and Channel Newsasia.com. The reason for choosing these two outlets is because of their large circulation rate as well as their comprehensive coverage of the GE. The Straits Times has a circulation of 365,800 and a total readership of 1.43million whereas Channelnewsasia.com has 36 million page views and 2.1 million unique visitors per month.Both newspapers, despite their neutral political stand comes from Singapore's 2 independent media company, that is Singapore Press Holdings and MediaCorp. Thus giving

us the media reports from Singapore's 2 main media companies.

No alternative media other than the two main media were choosen as the source of analysis as firstly this research aims to look at the PAP's image restoration discourse. It does not seek to understand the point of view from the opposition but rather this research aims solely at understanding the strategies used by the PAP. Therefore, the two mainstream media of Singapore should be suffice in helping us understand the PAP's 2011 GE image restoration discourse.

Time frame

The content of the articles must be GE related and between the chosen timeframe of January 1st 2011 to the day of the election, which is 7th May, which is the start of the first GE reporting till the day before Election Day.

Data Collection

For both news outlets, the online version of the articles will be sampled. That is, news taken from the Channelnewsasia.com GE website as well as digital copies of The Straits Time news article taken from LexisNexis Academic (http://lexis-nexis.com) which is a database that has access to 6000 national and regional news, business and legal sources and is a trusted database by academics. The guided search in LexisNexis Academic required three distinct steps, mainly identification of the newspaper, in this case is The Straits Times, followed by keying in the year of publication and lastly, choosing articles that fit both the timeframe and sample content.

Operationalization

Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis for this study will be news story/articles on the GE. We will be looking at the written/verbal text of the news story/article. According to Lynch and Peer (2002) this rules are to ensure the credibility as well as the uniformity of the analysis. The number of words, photography or graphics will not be taken into account, as this study is not focusing the attention on how the media sets the importance, frames and portrays the PAP but rather the study is focusing on the actions done by the PAP.

Variables

For this research the following independent variables will be present. That is, the treatment of the story, the topic as well as the issue being discussed. The treatment of the story is defined as the way the story is written and for this research it is divided into general news, feature, commentary and forum. As for topic, it is defined as the topic discussed in the news item and it is divided into clarification/rebuttal, PAP election strategy, PAP speeches as well as PAP reforms and promises. Lastly, issues being discussed is defined as what was being address by the PAP in the article and it is divided into immigration, inflation and inequality and housing. Benoit's 12 image restoration strategies will be the dependent variable in this research.

5. Data Analysis

The number of coders used in this study will be 2. Native speakers who grew up in Singapore will be used as coders. The researcher herself and another Singaporean student will be used as coders to code the data. All coders will use similar sheets of coding sheet to record the data. This

code sheets will then be inputted into SPSS and analyzed.

Reliability

A pilot coding will be done together to check for intercoder reliability. Coders will go through a coders training where ten percent of randomly chosen articles by SPSS will be coded. This is to ensure that the codebook is feasible and coding what is meant to coded (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). Also, the pilot coding ensures that Benoit's different image restoration techniques are interpreted accurately by all of the coders. A reliability score of .70 and above should be achieved when calculated using Cohan's Kappa. This minimum score is considered satisfactory (Lombard, Synder-Duch & Bracken, 2004).

Inter-coder Reliability test

For the actual coding, 10 percent of the dataset were randomly selected for the inter-coder reliability test using SPSS. That means, out of the 892 articles that were chosen to be analyzed, 89 were randomly selected by SPSS for use for the inter-code reliability test. The inter-coder dataset was then analyzed using ReCal, "an online utility that computes intercoder/interrater reliability coefficients for nominal, ordinal, interval, or ratio-level data" (Freelon, 2010, para 1). ReCal was created by Freelon for calculating reliability scores that has been proven to be accurate and used by researchers (Freelon, 2011). The online inter-coder calculator presented the results of the inter-coder reliability scores in Scott's Pi, Cohen's Kappa and Krippendorff's Alpha. However as mentioned earlier, only Cohen's Kappa score will be taken into account for this research. Cohen's Kappa is used to access qualitative data and is good to use when only two coders (of which one is the researcher herself) are involved in the coding process (McHugh, 2012), which is the case for this research.

All scores achieved were 0.7 above thus fulfilling the minimum reliability check.

6. Results

Answering the research question

RQ 1: Using Benoit's Image Restoration theory as a framework, what response strategies were used by the PAP during the period leading up to the GE?

RQ 1 seeks to understand the type of strategies used by the PAP in regards to this issue during this election. The strategies are coded based on the description and understanding of Benoit's Image restoration strategies. Table 2 provides information regarding the usage of each image restoration strategy as well as the total sum of the each strategy used.

Table 2. *Issues and strategies used*

	Cases	Denial	Shifting the blame	Defeasibility	Accident	Provocation	Good intentions	Bolstering	Minimization	Differentiation	Transcendence	Attack the Accuser	Compensation	Corrective Action	Mortification
Immi-gratio n	27	3	3	2	0	0	8	14	2	1	4	3	0	9	3
Cost of	57	2	8	2	0	0	5	32	2	0	9	13	9	28	4

living															
Housing	28	2	4	3	0	0	5	15	3	0	4	6	0	16	4
Others 1	29	1	0	1	0	0	3	13	3	0	5	2	0	12	5
Others 2	10	1	0	1	0	0	1	6	0	0	2	1	0	5	4
Total	80	9	15	9	0	0	22	80	10	10	24	25	9	70	20

Based on Table 2, we can then answer RQ1 of this research paper. The results from the content analysis have shown that the PAP has used all but accident and provocation as an image restoration theory when attempting to repair their image during the 2011 GE.

RQ 2: What was the most commonly used strategy?

From the Table 2 above, we can see that the most commonly used strategies are bolstering and corrective action. In repairing their image, the PAP used a total of 80 instances of bolstering followed by 70 instances of corrective action. Attack the accuser is the third most commonly used strategy at a total sum of 25 instances and this is followed closely by the used of transcendence, good intentions and mortification at a sum of 24, 23 and 20 respectively. The strategy shifting the blame then had a total sum of 15 instances. The strategies denial, defeasibility and compensation were each used a total of 9 times, minimization was used 10 times and differentiation, was the least commonly used strategies at 2 and there was no use of provocation and accident as a strategy by the PAP.

RQ 3.1: Did the PAP choose more accommodative strategies in dealing with the issues?

Based on Coomb's accommodative to non-accommodative strategies, rebuild crisis response strategies (compensation, apology) are the most accommodative, followed by bolstering crisis response strategies (reminder), diminish response strategies (excuse, justification) and lastly deny response strategies (denial, attack the accuser, scapegoating). Thus, as seen while answering RQ 2, the use of bolstering and corrective action was the most at 80 and 70 respectively, fitting into Coomb's spectrum of highly accommodative strategies. The use of other accommodative strategies like transcendence, good intentions and mortification was also often used with a sum of 24, 23 and 20 respectively. Other than the high use of attack the accuser (non-accommodative strategy), the use of other non-accommodative strategies like denial and shifting the blame is lower at 9 and 15 respectively as compared to the accommodative strategies.

RQ3.2: What strategy/ies was/were used in regards to the unhappiness of Singaporeans with the immigration policy?

The use of denial as a strategy was on 29th April when Minister Mentor (MM) Lee Kwan Yew denies the claims that foreigners are taking away jobs. He cited examples of how employment rose by 34% between 2006 and 2010 and how half of the 115900 jobs added were filled by Singaporeans while the reminding jobs wen to foreigners as the PAP has created more jobs then Singaporeans could fill (Ramesh, 2011). The PAP also strongly denied that they are looking out for foreigners more than they are for Singaporeans and that Singaporeans are now considered 2nd class citizens. The PAP cited examples of how the jobs going to the foreigners are usually jobs that Singaporeans do not want to do and also that these foreigners usually leave after their employment pass is due. Also, the PAP cited examples of how a company must have a certain amount of locals before they can hire foreigners thus protecting the employment of Singaporeans.

When using shifting the blame, the PAP pushed the blame of immigration to firstly the Singaporeans themselves and secondly to the competition globally. In regards to immigration woes, the PAP pushed the blame to Singaporeans for their low fertility rate and also how Singaporeans are the ones who are not willing to wait for housing and also not willing to do low end jobs but yet kept pushing the blame to foreign immigration. The PAP also shifted the blame of the woes of foreigners fighting for jobs with Singaporeans by blaming the global phenomenon and how it is the foreigners in other parts of the world that are competing with Singaporeans and not those that are in Singapore, thus shifting the blame to foreigners outside of Singapore.

Defeasibility was used by the PAP when Prime Minister (PM) Lee Hsien Loong held a rally on 4th of May and said that the issue of immigration and housing were things that that they were not able to predict. PM Lee said, " the world is undergoing "very rapid and massive changes ... and, very often, we have to add to incomplete information or under uncertain conditions" (Leong, 2011, para. 7). PM Lee claimed that the economy's sudden recovery resulted in the shortage of flats and the growth in Singapore's economy also meant that they had to bring in more foreigners to support the investments. These were things that were beyond their control.

The use of good intentions on the issue of immigration was mainly to justify the need of foreigners in Singapore. The biggest used of this strategy is on how stopping foreigners from entering Singapore would result in the lost of foreign investments and the moving of Multi-national companies away from Singapore thus resulting in the lost of jobs and potential incomes. The PAP emphasizes that factories will shut down and jobs will be lost if they were to tighten the immigration policies. The second use of this strategy is on how these foreigners (blue collars) are doing jobs that Singaporeans do not want to do and without them,

constructions and other heavy jobs would not be done. Thus to join in the "worldwide competition for growth and progress" (Chan & Chan, 2011, para. 10) the government has good intentions for allowing foreigners into Singapore.

The use of bolstering on immigration was the highest at 14 counts. The main type of bolstering use was on the generic achievement of the PAP over the years and how the current Singapore got to where it is today because of the PAP. However specific bolstering on the issue of immigration is seen when PM Lee bolstered the image of the PAP by saying that the PAP has prepared Singaporeans well for the race and in fact we are at an advantage with the skills sets that we have due to the PAP's policies for education etc.

The use of minimization of immigration is also done to down play the negative effects caused by the problems of having too many foreigners. The PAP says that there are Singaporeans who do wants more immigration laws to be looser because of their lack of manpower. The PAP also minimize the "having to compete with foreigners for jobs" unhappiness by stating that the government has job skill trainings for Singaporeans such as those in the Workfare Development Agency and National Trade Congress, that upgrades them and puts them in a better position when looking for a job, thus minimizing the competition mentality of Singaporeans with foreigners.

Differentiation was also used to tackle immigration and it is only here that differentiation was used throughout the campaign. On the 27th of April, MM Lee differentiated the problem of foreigners taking over Singapore when he said that most of the foreigners were people on a two-year permit that can be extended but who will have to go home eventually. These foreigners are thus just temporary staying in Singapore

and not "taking over" the country like what Singaporeans claims it to be.

The use of transcendence as a strategy to due with immigration issue is done by the PAP in such a way that they point this issue into a greater picture, which is the growth and prosperity of Singapore's future and how Singapore is to fit in in this competitive global environment. They also challenge Singaporeans to know how to integrate with foreigners. However the bulk of transcendence, as a strategy, is done by the PAP in pointing the issue to the overall nation building and future of Singapore.

The use of attack the accuser as a strategy is significantly little when dealing with the issue of immigration. The 3 times that the strategy was used was done generically when the PAP attacked the opposition's proposals as one that lack depth and insight.

The PAP claims to have introduce a series of measures to curb the issue of immigration and they will be implemented out these few years. They have also started to build more housing and improve transportation so as to deal with this issue. Further action will be taken by them to help integrate foreigners strongly into Singapore's society. These are the corrective action taken by the PAP in dealing with the issue of immigration.

The PAP on the 4th of May, 2 days before cooling off day and 3 days before polling day, also issued an apology. PM Lee in his lunchtime rally acknowledges and apologized for all the mistakes that PAP made which includes the issue of immigration.

RQ3.3: What strategy/ies was/were used in regards to the issue of the high cost of living?

The use of denial in dealing with the issue of the cost of living is first present on the 13th of April when there were rumours speculating that

there will be a Goods Service Tax (GST) hike after the election that will worsen the current cost of living problem in Singapore. PM Lee denies this rumours and also denies that the PAP is not doing much to ease the cost of living by once again stating examples of how the PAP has invested carefully and funded $3 billion into the grow and share package. The use of denial on the GST increase is also taken to the next level when the PAP gave out pamphlets to Singaporeans to assure Singaporeans that there will be no GST hike.

The PAP when using shifting the blame to deal with the cost of living, usually shifted the blame to the events happening globally such as the raise in oil prices that lead to the raise in product cost, the rise in cost of imported products, the political upheavals in the middle east, the tsunami and nuclear problems in Japan, debt problems in Europe and crisis in government finances in America. All these global problems together with inflation and the raise of food and oil prices led to the high cost of products in Singapore. Thus the PAP shifted the blame from themselves to that of the happenings of the world.

Defeasibility was used by Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) Teo Chee Hean when he said that the economy was unpredictable and no one would know it would go down and up so quickly. Also, the PAP was not the ones who are in control of the prices as the world market sets them.

Good intentions as a strategy was used to justify why the PAP "did not" do certain things to ease the cost of living in Singapore. The PAP proclaimed that there is no immediate shortcut in dealing with the cost of living in Singapore, thus instead of providing immediate relief to Singaporeans, PAP justifies that they want to look for long term relief by strengthening Singapore's economy and society for the future instead. Also, when questioned about their overseas investment instead of helping Singaporeans tie over, PM Lee says that these investments are invested

carefully so that there will be money to fund the $3 billion Grow and Share package. Other issues such as why a lot of the money is used on defence is also justified by the PAP for having needing to stand their ground and stare down the competition so that we can still have our sovereignty. The PAP also used the strategy to deal with the unhappiness in the hike in transport prices by saying that operational cost for providing excellent transportation service requires money and if Singaporeans were to rely on subsidies, these subsidies ultimately is taken from the tax payers, therefore justifying their good intentions of not subsidizing the increase in public transportation.

Similar to the issue of immigration, the use of bolstering by the PAP mainly focuses on their past deeds in bringing Singapore to what it is today, and how the government has provided help to Singaporeans when needed. The PAP also emphasizes how the policies that they have come up with have not only make the Singapore dollar stable during the financial crisis but also how the government has provided aids such as the Grow and Share package, workfare and utilities rebate, Resilience package etc. that has help tied Singaporeans with the cost of living and to save Singaporean jobs and the Singapore economy. They build their bolstering strategy on how the PAP has never let Singaporeans down and how much Singapore have progressed towards the years.

The PAP utilizes minimization as a strategy by assuring Singaporeans that they will always have the government to rely on when dealing with the cost of living problems. This is to minimize the negative impact as well as to ease the anxiety of Singaporeans regarding the cost of living.

The use of transcendence, as a strategy by the PAP in dealing with the cost of living, is mostly done by redefining the issue to the good

heartedness of Singaporeans and how Singapore's future should be worked on together (PAP and Singaporeans). This is done by PM Lee urging Singaporeans to help the poor and lower income in whichever way they can, as he believes that Singaporeans have a good heart and is able to make a difference. He also urges Singaporeans to take their part in building Singapore up together and to take great care of Singapore, as it is a precious jewel. The PAP also urged Singaporeans to work together rather then continuously discredit each other as this is for the future of Singapore. Similarly to immigration, the PAP transcends the problem of the cost of living to the greater social good, which does not aim at benefiting just the PAP but Singapore on the whole.

The use of attack the accuser by the PAP is mainly used to undermine the proposals of the opposition in improving the current negative impact of the cost of living. These proposals include setting up a needs based welfare system, raise income tax of the rich to 30%, increasing the pay of the low and medium income as well as to use $60 billion dollars of the reserve to fund the country. The PAP attack the oppositions lack of knowledge of the need for the reserves as well as how tax increase will only push talented individuals away from Singapore. They also undermine the opposition's credibility when they question where the money will come from if they want to set up a welfare system as well as increase the pay of the low and medium income. The PAP uses this strategy to show that the opposition has no clue what they are talking about with the law Minister K. Shanmugam saying that the proposals of the oppositions are crazy and aimed only at playing up the emotions of Singaporeans.

Compensation to Singaporeans due to the issue of the cost of living is done with the PAP distributing the Growth and Share package, which gives out about S$300 to S$4000 each year per household. Other ill

effects of the high cost of living is also dealt with through the Central Providence Fund (CPF), the easing of electricity bills, the extra bursaries available for children's education as well as conserving charges. The poor and low-income group who are hit hard by inflation were also getting Workfare Special Bonus and Comcare funds. These policies of the PAP are done to compensate the hardship that Singaporeans have to go through due to the issue of the cost of living.

The PAP uses the strategy of corrective action on the cost of living by trying to narrow the income gap as well as to provide relief to Singaporeans to ease the pain of the high cost of living. This includes easing electricity bills, personal income tax rebates and public assistance. They have taken steps and budgeted S$1.5 million to help the low income and the poor and also plan for a S$5.9 million worth of scholarships and bursaries to ease the cost of education. PAP's Tin Pei Ling also personally talked to the merchants and Hawkers and managed to get them to not increase the price for the next six months at least. Dr Vivan Balakrishnan, then Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports, also took action and managed to get coffee shop owners to drop their coffee prices by ten cents. The PAP also acknowledges that there is currently a high cost of living and is said to be taking steps to ease the burden of Singaporeans. Health Minister Khaw Boon Wan was also quoted saying "Immediate concerns we are aware. We empathise with them, we know that prices have been going up and we are actively working on them, and we already have solutions pushed up, and we will continue to forge new solutions" (Fox, 2011, para 2).

Similar to the issue of immigration, the use or mortification has PM Lee apologising for all the mistakes that the PAP has made which includes the current state of inflation and high cost of living.

RQ3.4: What strategy/ies was/were used in regards to the issue of housing?

PAP used denial on the 5th of May to deny accusations that HDB is making profits from the sales of flats when the HDB is suppose to be public housing. National Development Minister, Mah Bow Tan denies this accusation stating that the HDB loses up to S$1 billion a year due to the home ownership programme, thus not only showing that the PAP is not profiting from the sale of HDB flats but also the commitment the PAP has towards housing.

As for the strategy shifting the blame, the PAP mostly shifted the blame of the high housing prices to the economic growth. The PAP explained that the price of the HDB is based on the price of state land prices that is determined by the chief reviewer according to objective market conditions and established valuation principle, therefore because there is economic growth, the prices of the land will thus increase. Consequently the "person" to blame for the high prices is not the PAP but rather the growth in the Singapore economy.

The PM Lee in his apology on the 4th of May used defeasibility as well to deal with the housing issue. He stated that the PAP can have the best intentions and efforts but there are times when results of a situation could not have been predicted. The PAP thus claim defeasibility on not knowing that the economy will suddenly recover thus resulting in the high demand and high cost of housing.

The PAP used of good intentions, as a strategy, when they claim that they will not lower the HDB pricing currently because doing so will only devalue the current flats. If new flat prices were lowered, no one would want to buy resale flats thus causing their values to fall. PM Lee also mentions that the current property market is hot, thus the PAP did not

immediately lift the income ceiling for couples (i.e. only couples with income below a certain amount is able to buy public housing) to buy housing as this will only drive the housing pricing higher. Also, the PAP claims that the prices are high because these HDB flats are elegantly designed better built.

Other than the usual bolstering of the PAP past record, the PAP's Minister of transport Liu Tuck Yew also used bolstering to inform Singaporeans that because of the PAP strong and stable government, he was able to sell his house from S$110,000 to close to S$400,000, thus greatly benefiting him. All these happened because of he was able to invest in housing due to the PAP's strong governance.

The use of minimization by the PAP, on housing, was done by reducing the negative impact of the high prices and the lack of housing. This was done by assuring Singaporeans that though the current pricing is high, the houses bought are worth 10 to 20 times more than if it was built in Indonesia and 5 to 10 times more than if it was to be built in Malaysia. Thus when couples buy their HDB, they are actually buying it below the market price and will be able to sell it at a significant increase after 5 years. Furthermore, the cost of housing is also payable by a 20-year loan, which is still within the reach with the current Singaporean income. Also, to minimize the impact of the lack of housing, MM Lee also claims that couples who do not want to wait can actually buy off the open market from owners who want to sell of their HDB flats, thus minimizing the negative impact of the long waiting time.

As mentioned earlier, the use of transcendence by the PAP is usually done by placing the negative actions taken by the PAP into something of social goodness. Similarly, no particular use of transcendence was targeted specifically to deal with the issue of housing but rather the PAP

urged Singaporeans to look at who was able to serve and build Singapore better in the near future so that there will be economic growth and prosperity in Singapore. The PAP transcend this issue into a part that Singaporeans themselves have to actively participate in as well, which is to vote for the correct government, i.e. the PAP.

Attack the accuser as a strategy by the PAP to deal with the issue of housing is mainly by attacking the inadequate proposals by the opposition of lowering the current prices. This includes the opposition proposal of not upgrading and paying less for the land. The PAP undermined their credibility by claiming that doing so will devalue HDB flats or what National Development Minister Mah Bow Tan says "policies to crash the sector here" (Wong, 2010, para. 1), and restrict Singaporeans from enjoying the fruits of their labour, but it is also illegal to pay less for the land just so as to lower HDB flat prices.

Corrective action was taken by the PAP when they assured Singaporeans that they are currently building 22,000 flats in 2011, which is the most ever in Singapore's history. Also, housing grants are introduced to lower income households so as to provide them extra help in owning homes. The previous income ceiling to buy a 3-room flat and DBSS flat in Singapore was also raised so that more Singaporeans can afford their own homes. The income ceiling for the Build to order (BTO) flats were also raised from S$8000 to S$10,000, making more people eligible the government subsidy when buying it. PM lee assured Singaporeans that the PAP is doing all that they can to correct the negative impact of their housing policies that has caused Singaporeans to not be able to afford housing or has been waiting a long time to get their own place.

7. Discussion

Denial

Earlier in the literature it is found that the when the organization has high attribution to the negative event, a more accommodative strategy should be used. Denial however is placed under the deny crisis response strategy category, which is seen as the most un-accommodative set of strategies. This thus seems to contradict with Coomb's suggestion. In fact, Seeger, Sellnow and Ulmer (2003), also suggested that the use of denial would not help in a situation when the public perceives the organization to be highly responsible for the negative situation. The use of denial would in fact lower its credibility.   Thus for the case of the PAP, whom were the indeed the ones who drew up the policies, responsibility is definitely attributed to them. It was not possible for them to deny that they were the ones who made these policies. However as mentioned earlier, the use of denial when used with solid evidence works to provide immediate stress reduction to the angry public and is most positively accepted (Huang, 2006; Jin, 2010). The use of denial by the PAP is usually accompanied by statistics and figures to back up their denial, as seen from MM Lee using statistics to back up his claim against the immigration problem   (Ramesh, 2011). Furthermore in Table 1.4, Coomb also mentions that denial is best used when dealing with rumours. An example of how the PAP used denial is with dealing with the GST increase. Back in 2006, after the 2006 elections, GST raised from 5% to 7% on the 1st of July 2007 so as to finance and help the lower income group (Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore, 2012).   Thus there were major rumours that such an action will happen again. Therefore, the PAP took the effort to not only deny such a claim but also took an extra step to give out pamphlets to assure the public that the hike will not happen.

Thus for the 80 cases that was coded, we have seen that when the PAP uses denial, sufficient evidence is taken out to deny the accusation,

therefore making this strategy feasible. Like what Benoit (2006) mentioned, the use of denial should be used when strong evidence is present, in this case, the statistics and hard copies of policies are substantial evidence in denying that the PAP is favouring foreigners.

Shifting the blame

Similarly for shifting the blame, it is an un-accommodative strategy found under the deny crisis response strategies. Coombs (2007b) says that this group of strategies is to prevent the organization from suffering any damage from the event. In this case, the PAP uses this strategy to spare it any reputational harm. Benoit (1995) describes that because there is a need for the public to attribute the problem to something, this strategy thus allows the organization to put this negative attribution onto something else, which is why this strategy is largely used on the issue of the cost of living and the blame is usually shifted to the current global economy, which is logical as many other countries were also suffering from the global economic crisis at that time. Like denial, the use of shifting the blame by the PAP also provided sufficient statistics that clearly showed the reasons why the PAP cannot be held responsible for some of the negative outcomes.

Provocation

Benoit (1995) defines provocation as "the act in question was performed in response to another wrongful act which understandably provoked the offensive act in question" (p. 76). Thus, for this situation to happen, the opposition must have had done something for the PAP to be able to use this strategy. However this did not happen, thus there was no presence of the strategy provocations in this analysis.

Defeasibility

The use of defeasibility like mortification shows a sign of a lack of capability when used by a politician. Benoit (1997) found that when politicians use these strategies, it leads to the questioning of their ability. This might explain why the use of defeasibility is not many in this GE and also left to the very end of the campaign period.

However, in this research, it is found that unlike what Benoit says about the use of defeasibility, defeasibility seems to be a good defence in the case of the cost of living as Singapore does indeed import most of their goods and products, such as machineries, food, consumer goods, mineral fuels etc. (Economy Watch Content, 2010) as it is a country with no natural resources (Adam, 2010). Thus, indeed defeasibility might help free PAP from the blame of the hike in prices without the negative undermining of their credibility, also because bolstering was used to remind people that the PAP's grow and share package and other subsidies were implemented to ease the hike in cost. This suggests that when using defeasibility, it is important to claim defeasibility on issues that are well accepted by the public to be the norm or to be true. Also, the use of defeasibility and bolstering together might serve to erase the weakness attribution, which comes along when using defeasibility as a strategy. Together they seem to tell the public that "I could not have done anything to stop it, but I tried my best to cushion the blow for you".

Accident

Above we have established that the strategy accident is when "the accused states that the act happened because of unforeseeable circumstances" (Benoit & Mchale, 1999), thus, the absence of this strategy in dealing with the issues is logical because we have already established that the crisis met by the PAP is clustered into Coomb's (2007)

"preventable crisis: strong crisis responsibility" category under human-error product harm and organizational misdeed where harmful actions were knowingly taken. Therefore it is not possible for the PAP to state that these policies drawn up knowingly were a result of an accident thus the absence of this strategy in this campaign.

Good intentions

Good intentions according to Benoit (1995), is to justify the offensive action and is a form of evasion of the negative responsibility. Coombs (1999) also mentioned that the use of justification should be used when crisis damage is minimal and also when there is a history of similar crisis, which has or has negative prior relationship reputation. In terms of dealing with the three issues (immigration, cost of living, housing), the PAP uses this strategy to mainly justify the actions of the PAP in letting the high number of foreigners into, as well as the slow move in lowering the prices of public housing. This issue was not an issue that occurred just during the election but rather these 3 issues has caused unhappiness of Singaporeans with the PAP ever since the 2006 GE thus like what Coombs (1999) mentioned, this is a crisis which has had prior negative relationship. Therefore it is thus appropriate for the PAP to have used this strategy as prior to the 2011 GE, Singaporeans has already been unhappy about these issues and were getting more and more "disgruntled" with the PAP (Ngerng, 2013, pp. 22)

Bolstering

It is not surprising to find that the PAP in this election as well, heavily used bolstering. Bolstering as a strategy is used to increase the public's positive feeling for the accused by relating positive attributes or calling upon his/her past actions (Benoit, 1995; Benoit & Mchale, 1999).

Thus the use of bolstering is a very logical strategy to use as the PAP has been the only party to rule Singapore since the British granted Singapore full independence. Furthermore, Chan (2011) has also mentioned that the PAP has transformed Singapore from a third world country to the financial hub it is today. The use of bolstering is thus used to remind Singaporeans of the achievements of the PAP that has resulted in the prosperity of the current Singapore and also reinforce the previous relationships that the PAP had with Singaporeans previously. It is done to assure the angry public that they have done well before and they will do well again. This can be seen in the newspaper article "GE: MM Lee says Singapore is not Disney World", where "Mr Lee stressed that the secret of Singapore's success has been selection by merit, the candidates' capabilities and strength of character. And he added that his generation of leaders laid the foundations that created today's Singapore during the period 1959 to 1990" (Ramesh & Saad, 2011).

The large use of bolstering towards the end of the campaign (i.e. 16 times on the 4th of May, 9 times on the 3rd of May and 6 times on the 6th of May) can be largely attributed to the PAP's realization that the current Singapore generation is no longer what it used to be. Senior Minister Goh Chock Tong acknowledges on the 18th of April that the election "ground is not so sweet" (Siow, 2011, para. 1). This is because of the pain caused by the high cost of living, which involves the livelihood of the people. Furthermore, this election has many young voters who would be voting for the first time. PM Lee describes this group of young voters as a group that "has a different perspective of the world - they are more idealistic, questioning and looking for causes and values to uphold" thus they are "unlike older ones who will vote based on instinct and loyalty" (Saad & Mukherjee, 2011, paras 3-4). Therefore there was a heavy need for the PAP to constantly bolster their image and remind this group of people just how much the PAP has done. The main message was how the PAP has

nurtured this group of people via good education policies, how the government has increased the number of jobs in Singapore, the significant progress of getting Singapore out of recession and how the PAP has a track record of getting more rights then wrongs.

Minimization

The use of minimization is due to reduce the negative effect of the offensive act (Benoit, 1995). Thus, if the PAP is able to convince the public that the offensive act is not as bad as it seems, negative feelings will be reduced. However, Benoit (1995) also noted that if the public views the organization as trying to understate the problem, it could turn for the worst Thus, it is important for the PAP to use this strategy appropriately. The use of this strategy on immigration was appropriate as there was this mentality that that they were taking the jobs of Singaporeans (Banyan, 2012). PM Lee minimized this problem when they spoke about how the PAP has already equipped everyone with excellent skills that will give them a head start in the work force. They further minimized this negative association when he cited examples of how there are Singaporeans who want more foreigners because of the lack of manpower. The PAP also appropriately downplayed the problems associated with the cost of living and housing by assuring Singaporeans that they always had the government to turn to as well as how the housing in Singapore is worth so many times more than that in other countries, thus being a more valuable asset. The truth behind these claims i.e. Singapore is indeed known to have top-notch education (Yong, 2012), the government's giving out of cash to ease cost of living etc. was important in making sure that Singaporeans do not feel as if the PAP is understating the problem.

Differentiation

The use of differentiation is used only on the issue of immigration. Differentiation as defined by Benoit (1995) is used to make the offensive act appear less offensive by changing "the context in which an idea is understood" (Hearit, 2006, p. 82). The use of this strategy seems logical when dealing with immigration as Singaporeans have the mentality that foreigners are taking over their homeland (Banyan, 2012; Huang, 2013). Thus, there was definitely a need for the PAP to redefine this context so as to change this mentality and make the allowing of foreigners into Singapore a temporary thing (LKY saying that they will eventually have to go home when their working pass ends) instead of something permanent.

Transcendence

As mentioned earlier, the use of transcendence by the PAP is usually done by placing the negative actions taken by the PAP into something of social goodness. In the case of the PAP, the bulk of transcendence, as a strategy, is done by pointing the issue to the overall nation building and future of Singapore. This is similar to what Hearit (1997) found which was that accused must be in the position to make sure the claim is for social good and not for the benefit of the organization. In this case, the common social good is the prosperity and future of Singapore and not the image of the PAP. For example, the PAP transcended the issue into a part that Singaporeans themselves have to actively participate in as well, which is to vote for the correct government, i.e. the PAP. That is, if Singaporeans want to make sure that the country will grow and flourish, then they themselves have to actively take part in taking care of this "precious jewel" (Lim, 2011, para 36).

Also, as Damore (2002) has found that at the end of the campaign it is harder to alter the vote of the voters, it is thus important for the PAP to

use transcendence to redefine the context of the election to not about whom you like but rather about the future of Singapore's economy.

Attack the accuser

Early we have established that attack the accuser is a non-accommodative strategy and according to Coombs, should not be present in a large number. However, the high use of this strategy is due to the fact that the most, in fact all opposition parties attacked the PAP on their failure in its immigration policies, cost of living as well as the housing problems. This can be seen in the "GE: Income gap, housing, foreign talent par for course at opposition rallies", where it is reported that "Widening income gap, affordable housing, plight of the elderly and foreign talent were once again the order of the evening again and again at opposition rallies across the island on Monday night" (Rajaram, 2011). Therefore, according to Benoit (1995) where attacking the accuser is used to undermine the accusers credibility and shifting the attention away for itself, the use of attack the accuser as strategy by the PAP is thus used more of a strategy to defend itself from the numerous accusations by the opposition. The PAP attacked the opposition by claiming that they are offering bad proposals and empty rhetoric that are aimed only at playing up to the publics emotions and for political gain without actually caring for the future of Singapore. The PAP also attacked the opposition for coming up with last minute compilations of issues and topics that they have no clue about. One thing that was found beyond the scope of our study was the surge in attack the accuser towards the end of the campaign, particularly during the initial campaign period on the 30th of April, which is a day after nomination day on the 28th of April. This is when political parties start to rally and are able to attack each other. Furthermore, according to Damore (2002), when it is hard to alter a voter's perception of a political party, the use of attack the accuser is usually used to

undermine the opposition. Just like how the opposition uses this tactic to undermine the PAP, the PAP, be it in response or as part of their political attack plan, also retaliates using this strategy. Thus, the use of attack the accuser as a strategy by the PAP, echo's the findings of Damore (2002), as the PAP uses it by focusing on undermining the suggestions and credentials of the oppositions.

Compensation

Compensation is used to reimburse the victim and act as a sort of bribe (Benoit & Mchale, 1999; Benoit, 1995). The use of compensation was only used on the issue of the cost of living. This is done by giving distributing cash and offsets to the population and some to the poor. The poor and low-income group who are hit hard by inflation were also getting Workfare Special Bonus and Comcare funds. These policies of the PAP are done to compensate the hardship that Singaporeans have to go through due to the issue of the cost of living. This goes hand in hand with Coombs (2007a) suggestion that compensation strategy should be used when there is a strong attribution of crisis responsibility and when a victim suffers serious harm. In this case, the poor suffered greatly with the high cost of living, making everyday living difficult.

However, some might suggest otherwise. The use of compensation, only in the issue of the cost of living might be debatable. Some sceptical Singaporeans suggest that the Growth and Share package given to Singaporeans was a way to buy votes (Saratogas, 2011). Like that of the result of Benoit and Mchale (1999) and Benoit (1995), the act of compensation acts as a source of a bribe. Thus in this case, the use of compensation on the issue of the high cost of living seems appropriate. Furthermore, the general populace have been supportive of these compensation packages, as 97% of them had signed up for it. ("2.4m

Singaporeans get $2b in growth dividends, Medisave top-ups", 2011).

Corrective Action

The heavy use of corrective action, an accommodative strategy (Coombs, 2007b), should be used when it is the fault of the organization. However, the high use of corrective action as a strategy might not have been wise if we were to take the results of the research of Sheldon (2006), where she found that the public rated corrective action as the lowest action by the government in dealing with the crisis. Corrective action was used a total of 70 times during the period where the content was coded. The use of corrective action appears to be an action that is needed by the PAP to lessen the negative impact on Singaporeans such as the grow and share packages to ease the high cost of living as well as the building of more flats and reviewing the current immigration law. In this case, the possible reason for the being rated the lowest in the study by Sheldon (2006) is because the public underrates the use of corrective action perhaps because of its necessity. For example, the public saw the lowering of public housing prices as "Finally, the PAP government has realised that they need to get back to the basics in implementing the public housing policy" (PAP returning to basics of offering affordable flats for SGs, 2013). To Singaporeans, these were the problems that were going on and the actions that the PAP took to solve these problems is seen as part of the job scope of the government and not an additional action

Mortification

Mortification and defeasibility were as mentioned by Benoit (1997; 2006) to be strategies used only when the rest of the strategies seem to have failed. He found that when politicians use these strategies, it leads to the questioning of their ability. An interesting thing found while doing research was that the use of mortification is indeed only prominent

towards the last stages of the campaign period. The strategy was used heavily together with defeasibility on the 4th of May, when PM Lee in his lunchtime rally on the 4th of May apologized to all Singaporeans for the mistakes that the government has made in the last five years (Leong, 2011). This seems to suggest that the PAP feels that rest of the strategies are not working well for them. However because we do not have any evidence as to whether the rest of the strategies were failing, we can only guess that this was the reason why the PAP who has never apologised before finally apologised 2 days before polling day.

Yet from the analysis of the results, unlike what Benoit (1997; 2006) claims, the use of mortification did not in fact undermine the PAP's capabilities but in fact was admired by Singaporeans. In his speech he said, "When these problems vex you or disturb you or upset your lives, please bear with us. We're trying our best on your behalf. And if we didn't quite get it right, I'm sorry but we will try and do better the next time" (Lim, 2011, para. 5). PM Lee also said "But when it happens, then we should acknowledge it; we should apologise, take responsibility, put things right. If we have to discipline somebody, we'll do that, and we must learn from the lessons and never make the same mistake again," (Leong, 2011, paras 4-5). The humility and the taking up of responsibility by the PAP did not seem to have caused people to question their capability but gained them points. In Straits Time's Review and Forum section, Singaporeans replied to PM Lee's apology with some being sceptical but most having admiration for him. A particular Mr Low gave the following comment in that section "I think the Prime Minister addressed a lot of issues. The fact that he actually apologised for some policies being not up to scratch - that's admirable. It's what we want to hear. No government is perfect. We acknowledge some weaknesses of the party. The apology stood out for me. Many people think the PAP is arrogant, but the apology gives it a softer touch." Perhaps it's because

the PAP is not known to have apologise in their years of being the leaders of Singapore, therefore the continuous apology by PM Lee was an unexpected surprise to Singaporeans. Some Singaporeans feels that it's a new face of the PAP from being arrogant to humble, thus showing promising signs that the PAP is finally willing to listen to the electorate (Wong, 2011; Ng, 2011; Low, 2011; Tan, 2011), while others felt that PM Lee by promising to right all the wrong is putting his integrity on the line, thus deserving admiration (Mao, 2011).

Comparison of strategies between the three issues of concern

Looking at Table 2 again, and taking away the strategy bolstering (as we have already established the reason for the large use of it), as well as dividing the number of times a strategy is used by the number of cases coded to achieve the percentage, it is found that the issue of the cost of living and housing had a high score on both end of the accommodative continuum with 49.1% of the coded articles on the cost of living and 57.1% of the issue of housing having coded corrective action (accommodative) whereas 22% and 21% respectively having coded attack the accuser (non accommodative). This seems to pain a misguided picture. However, as mentioned earlier, understanding that the all the opposition was targeting at just one PAP on these issues could suggest for the high non-accommodative score. In general, all 3 issues were tackled with highly accommodative strategies that Coombs (2007a) recommended.

Yet, something to especially take note of is the issue of the cost of living and how the high usage of highly accommodative strategies where present. For the issue of the cost of living, not only was it the only issue which the PAP used compensation as a strategy, the high use of corrective action and mortification could also be seen. A possible reason for this phenomenon could probably be explained by the fact that the cost of

living is affected by both immigration and high housing prices. These 2 factors (immigration and high housing prices) ultimately played a part in affecting the cost of living in Singapore. That is, because of Singapore's attractive living environment by making it easier for foreigners to come in, this in turn affects the economics of living in Singapore with housing and other essential goods made more expensive because more people want the same things. From this, the cost of living seems to be the outcome of the 2 other issues, further consolidating the accusation that PAP is to blame (Tan, 2013). Thus as what Coombs (2007a) would suggest, when the responsibility of the crisis is highly attributed to the organization, it is best to use accommodative strategies, in this case, the presence of the high use of highly accommodative strategies.

Future Implications for the PAP

Despite their image restoration efforts, we must still note that the PAP, despite winning the GE, still achieved the lowest votes in its election history. A possible explanation for this phenomenon could be due to the fact that firstly, the opposition though did not win the elections managed to contest in all but Tanjong Pagar GRC thus enabling and giving voters a chance to vote for them other than the PAP. This shows that despite image restoration strategies working for the PAP to a certain extent, the actions of the PAP taken in dealing with the three issues over its next term is still critical in making sure that they maintain their governance status. Secondly, there was a loud cry of change within the younger generation of voters, with them having a desire to change and "balance economic and social development" (Ngerng, 2013, pp. 86). Thus, despite winning the 2011 GE, the possible reasons for the low vote counts seem to be a warning signal from Singaporeans to the PAP. It is not a celebratory win but a win that the PAP needs to analysis carefully for them to succeed in their next election.

The above findings suggest to us that the PAP having a unique governance relationship with Singaporeans has helped the party to use certain Benoit's image restoration theory successfully. However they must still note that these strategies though might work this time round might not work the second time around. For example, the use of mortification was successfully possibly because it is the first time the PAP has ever apologised for any of the problem caused because of their governance. Subsequent use of mortification in the following elections might, I predict, not do as well according to research done by Benoit (1997). Also, the use of bolstering can only go so far as the generation of voters is changing. The new generation of voters, unlike their parent's generation, did not go through the period where the PAP successfully made Singapore into where it is today. Thus, the use of bolstering might not work on them as well as it did on their parent's generation. Nevertheless, these aside, because of PAP's strong use of evidence when denying, minimizing, shifting the blame, justifying etc., towards the three issues, these has also proven Benoit's theory that how well one performs a strategy will ultimately affect the outcome of the results, thus the PAP should continue in this direction when choosing to use those strategies.

Contribution to the current political field of public relations

The use of Benoit's Image restoration strategies when affected by different context and circumstances do result in different outcomes. This is particularly true for mortification and defeasibility, which seems to be largely used together by the PAP (seen on the 4th of May). Unlike what Benoit has suggested, the use of these 2 strategies did not yield negative response from the crowd but instead had them supporting the PAP instead. This is largely attributed to the fact that the PAP has seldom, if not never apologise thus making this the first time. The unprecedented apology by

the PAP makes the use mortification and defeasibility effective just as it did the unprecedented speech by Queen Elizabeth when she made a rhetorical response to criticism about the monarchy when Princess Diana died (Benoit & Brinson, 1999). This suggest that the use of mortification and defeasibility though might make a leader look incompetent, if used selectively is able to win back the trust of the public.

The use of bolstering by the PAP is also significantly high in this research despite Coomb's (2007b) suggesting that bolstering should be used to aid the primary crisis responses instead of being used as a replacement. However, this high use of bolstering can be largely attributed to the fact that firstly, the PAP did indeed have a record of building up Singapore and secondly, there were a significant number of new voters this time round, who did not grow up seeing how the PAP made Singapore to where it is today. Therefore, the high use of bolstering besides serving as a positive reminder to Singaporeans about the PAP's efforts, it is also a strategy to inform and educate the new generation of voters who brought Singapore to where it is today. Yet, bolstering when used together with transcendence seems to not only serve as a reminder and transcend the issue to the greater good of Singapore, but rather as a subconscious threat to Singaporeans that they might risk losing everything if they were to vote for the opposition, after all, the future prosperity of Singapore does include Singaporeans themselves. Thus, perhaps in this case of the PAP, where generations of Singaporeans are so used to the stability and comfort that the country has provided, this subconscious threat does make an impact in their decision. However, this might also be due to the special nature of Singapore's governance and the attitude of Singaporeans (i.e. PAP led Singaporeans to become a first world country). Thus, politicians should take these into account when using bolstering and transcendence. That is, the background of your political party and the integration of it with the public.

The case of the PAP clearly demonstrates that though political image restoration rules do apply, the unique nature of Singapore's political landscape does play a part in changing the outcome of these strategies. Singapore being a country that has been ruled by the PAP since it's independence thus reacts differently as compared to countries that had a change in governance over the years.

8. Conclusion

While researches on political campaigns are abundant, the 2011 GE proved to be a political event unique to Singapore. It is a GE that Singapore has never seen before. Thus in this content analysis of the PAP image restoration strategies throughout the 2011 GE, the study seeks to firstly understand the strategies that were used, secondly to identify the most common strategy use both in regards to individual issues so as to understand the role of accommodativeness, and on the whole as well as understand the role of each strategy and it's relationship to the campaign timeline.

To sum up all the findings, the PAP in the 2011 used all but accident and provocation as strategies in repairing their image. During the GE, the PAP did choose more accommodative strategies when dealing with their crisis. Yet, the use of non-accommodative though used had its reasons. The findings also showed that certain strategies did depend on the campaign timeline. Mortification, defeasibility and attack the accuser were significantly higher after nomination day.

This research also contributes and gives insight to the current political image restoration literature. Currently much of the research of political discourse has been done on countries with changing governance. However the unique political nature of Singapore and its long one party

rule has made exceptions to the results of previous literature. While Benoit suggest not using mortification and defeasibility as it undermines the political figure's credibility, forums in Singapore have showed that in the case of the PAP it works, as it is the first time they were using it. Also, while Coomb's suggest that we bolstering should be used as a secondary aid instead of the main strategy, the PAP's heavy reliance on it too contradict this suggestion. As the only political party to have brought Singapore into where it is today, the large use of this strategy is thus logical. Thus these examples shows how the countries political culture and landscape plays a part too when using each image restoration strategy.

To conclude, this research has made use of Benoit's Image restoration framework to do a content analysis on the PAP during the 2011 GE. While we might not know for sure how each strategy plays a part in the restoration, we do know that it managed to secure PAP's win.

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人民行動黨在 **2011** 年新加坡大選的

形象修復個案研究

陳清慧[*]

摘要

本研究以內容分析法，引用 Benoit 的形象修復理論，探討人民行動黨在 2011 年新加坡大選中，面對移民政策、生活成本與住房等三大議題的形象修復策略。

研究結果顯示，因危機事件性質偏向「可預防事件群」，因此人民行動黨使用了大量較順應型的形象修復策略，例如尋求支撐與修正行動。另外，本研究也發現，因新加坡政治環境的獨特性，導致「後悔道歉」和「無力控制」這兩種策略的同時使用，此一現象與 Benoit 之主張有截然不同的結果。

本研究的結論是，新加坡獨特的政治環境以及文化，導致 Benoit 所建議應該少用的一些策略，在這次的大選中反而有了正面的效果。所以，雖然人民行動黨在這次的大選中得到最低一次的得票率，但他們還是順利地在 2011 年的大選中修復了自己的受損形象。

關鍵字：形象修復策略、危機管理、新加坡、新加坡大選、
內容分析法

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