



Review

Reviewed Work(s): Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: A Theory of Image Restoration Strategies. by William L. Benoit

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Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: A Theory of Image Restoration Strategies.

William L. Benoit. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995. 197 pp. \$14.95.

Over the past decade, image management has become one of the hottest research topics in the social sciences (cf. Giacalone and Rosenfeld, 1989, 1991). Yet general models of image management have been informed primarily by social psychology, to the exclusion of other research disciplines concerned with human discourse, especially human speech and communication studies. To provide a more integrative perspective on individual image management, Benoit proposes a "general theory of image restoration" grounded in recent literature from both communication studies and social psychology. Benoit's detailed review of these image management literatures provides a current resource for researchers, while his discussions of image restoration by highly visible organizations and individuals provide needed illustrations for managers. His incorporation of rhetorical criticism also lends a unique perspective for examining image management.

Benoit's introduction reveals that his take on image restoration is unique in two important ways. First, unlike most existing models, Benoit's theory of image restoration includes ideas from the study of rhetorical criticism. Rhetorical critics take a speech-oriented view of image restoration, examining prolonged discourse and relating image restoration specifically to human communication patterns. As Benoit notes, Ware and Linkugel's well-known theory of "apologia" discusses image restoration in terms of apologetic "postures" or "stances" in which two or more image management strategies are combined and used in complex "self-defense speeches." Rhetorical critics induce these types of image restoration strategies by examining entire speeches or discussions, rather than by looking at single image management statements, as do most psychological theories of image management.

In addition, rather than being grounded in experimental studies like most current image management models, the book is largely grounded in case studies of image restoration by highly visible public figures (i.e., politicians, religious leaders, sports heroes, and corporate leaders). These case studies are supported by public records (i.e., media reports) that describe both the image restoration discourse and audience reactions to that discourse. Together, Benoit's use of rhetorical criticism paradigms and case study evidence focuses attention on the content and processes of image management rather than on the form of image management, as social psychologists do.

In chapters 2 and 3, Benoit reviews extant work on image restoration. Scholars will appreciate his up-to-date review of literature and his detailed discussion of individual image management strategies. Chapter 2 focuses on the rhetorical criticism perspective of image restoration, which is popular

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in the communication literature. Benoit identifies three primary theories of image restoration from this perspective: (1) Rosenfield's theory of apologetic discourse, which proposes a four-stage process in image restoration speeches (i.e., a brief controversy, an attack on the opponent, a concentration of data in the middle of the speech, and a recycling of arguments from past speeches), (2) Ware and Linkugel's theory of "apologia," which suggests four image restoration strategies (i.e., denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence), and (3) Burke's theory of dramaticism, suggesting two image restoration strategies designed specifically to expunge guilt ("victimage"—or scapegoating—and "mortification"—or apology). These theories are largely based on content analysis of public speeches by highly visible people (i.e., Nixon's "Checkers" speech, Kennedy's Chappaquiddick speech, Nixon's Watergate speech, and Gerald Ford's pardon of Nixon).

In chapter 3, Benoit reviews theory and research on "accounts" (e.g., excuses, justifications, apologies), which is popular in the social sciences. He provides an extensive overview of seven major frameworks of accounts. Schonbach's model is the most extensive, containing over 100 different types of accounts, categorized broadly as (1) concessions, (2) excuses, (3) justifications, and (4) refusals. Chapter 3 also discusses the usage and acceptability of accounts. Benoit's literature review suggests that all types of accounts are used but that excuses and concessions are preferred. This review also suggests that all types of accounts are effective but that accounts that fit the severity of the offense are most effective. Benoit's discussion of account acceptability basically confirms Scott and Lyman's (1968) framework of accounts, which suggests that accounts will be accepted when they (1) outweigh the offense, (2) offer a motive acceptable to the audience, and (3) reflect ordinary social knowledge of reasonable behavior. While this chapter provides a thorough description of the accounts literature from social psychology, it excludes a large body of relevant organizational research on impression management. For example, Benoit's work could be further enlightened by recent findings about accounts used in routine managerial contexts (Giacalone and Rosenfeld, 1989, 1991; Staw, McKechnie, and Puffer, 1983) or crisis situations (Marcus and Goodman, 1991; Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail, 1994).

Chapter 4 outlines Benoit's integrative theory of image restoration based on his reviews of the social psychological and communication literatures. Grounded in this dual perspective, Benoit proposes a model defining five general image restoration strategies: (1) denial, (2) evading responsibility, (3) reducing the offensiveness of the act, (4) taking corrective action, and (5) mortification. While this model is more inclusive than previous frameworks, its typology is no more descriptive or comprehensive than that provided by Schonbach (1980). Alternatively, Benoit's image restoration strategies may be more useful as a framework for integrating notions about the image management *process* from rhetorical criticism with ideas about the *forms and content* of image management from social psychology and organizational behavior.

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In chapters 5–8 Benoit uses case studies of image restoration following major crises to illustrate his model. He discusses image restoration for (1) Coke and Pepsi in response to competitive advertising, (2) Exxon in the wake of the Valdez oil spill, (3) Union Carbide in the wake of the Bhopal gas poisoning, and (4) President Nixon in anticipation of negative reactions to his Cambodia speech. He offers several insightful comments on the effectiveness of image restoration based on these cases, such as “image restoration strategies can reinforce each other” (p. 139) and “some strategies may conflict” (p. 154). On the downside, however, these cases do not provide the best illustrations of his theory because they focus on how the *content* of image management (i.e., the use of supporting evidence) improves its effectiveness. Yet the content of image restoration strategies was not mentioned in his model. In contrast, he says very little about the effectiveness of the image restoration forms (denials vs. reducing offensiveness) that were the focus of his model.

The book’s strengths are its unique perspective on image management (i.e., including ideas from both social psychology and rhetorical criticism), its detailed, though not comprehensive, literature review, and its interesting case illustrations. Benoit’s integrative model of image restoration provides a starting point for expanding theories of image management beyond simple excuses and justifications.

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Front Stage, Backstage: The Dramatic Structure of Labor Negotiations.

Raymond A. Friedman. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994. 257 pp. \$27.50.

Those of us who are perpetual students of negotiation and the negotiation process are often struck by the dramatic discrepancy between what problems we choose to study in the laboratory and the dynamics of the process so easily noticed in “real life, real world” negotiations. The vast majority of research knowledge about negotiating behavior is derived

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