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**The United States in Crisis:
President Barack Obama Tested by Sandy**
MA thesis

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Abstract

In late October, 2012, the United States was hit by a “superstorm” Sandy and President Barack Obama was presented with a challenge in the midst of the last leg of the presidential election campaign that could have had an impact to either make or break his re-election as the head of the nation. The purpose of the present thesis is to examine President Barack Obama's crisis communication strategies and tactics during the crisis induced by Hurricane Sandy at the end of October 2012. The research concentrates on the President's selected crisis communication strategies and tactics in the context of the presidential election that were only about a week away when the hurricane struck.

Exploring this subject matter is believed to be valuable because it was the first major crisis the President had to manage and, because it happened during the last leg of the election campaign, the natural disaster could be seen to entail some political implications. Therefore, the President's communication and management during the crisis might be viewed as forming opinions about and attitudes towards him that could have influenced the election results.

The first chapter of the thesis introduces the theory of crisis communication and focuses on the two most well-known approaches in the area of crisis communication – image repair discourse and discourse of renewal. The significance of leadership as a key element in crisis communication is also underlined. The chapter ends with a contextual overview of Hurricane Sandy and its impact on the then current situation in the United States. The second chapter presents the corpus of texts analysed in the present thesis. The corpus consists of nine speeches given by the President before, during and after the hurricane struck. In addition, a wider context is provided through news reports that appeared in the U.S. media at the time. The aim of this is to provide a more comprehensive picture of the situation that the President had to manage. The third chapter examines the themes and patterns that emerged from closely reading, dissecting and analysing the speeches.

The thesis accentuates five recurring themes and patterns in the President's speeches: crisis management and communication, emphatic display of co-operation, authority and demonstrations of expert knowledge, political leadership during the campaign period, and discourse of national unity and narratives of heroism. The analysis conducted in the present thesis and the conclusions drawn give reason to believe that President Barack Obama's chosen crisis communication strategies and tactics tried to demonstrate his skills and abilities to handle a very serious and difficult situation. The President did not only have to deal with the storm itself as a disaster but also with the presidential elections and the wider context of President George W. Bush's mishandled and mismanaged crisis induced by Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

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Introduction

On October 29, 2012, the United States was hit by a tropical cyclone Hurricane Sandy, or the “Frankenstorm” or the “superstorm” as it was dubbed by the media. The hurricane affected altogether 24 states, although New Jersey and New York were the two states that suffered the most destruction and damage. Sandy is reported to be the second-costliest and one of the deadliest hurricanes in recent U.S. history, causing destruction, property damage and the deaths of more than 200 people. The hurricane did not only cause chaos, anxiety and distress, it also shook the 2012 presidential election which was only about a week away when the storm struck. Several news articles commented on the pivotal role of the storm in the midst of the election campaign:

To be clear: Yes, we know that that Hurricane Sandy is a disaster and a tragedy for millions of people. But, it happened in the final week of the campaign so removing it from the political context is both naive and wrongheaded. (Cillizza 2012, *The Washington Post*)

In the tight race, the candidates have few opportunities left to blitz through the most competitive states, trying to build momentum and make a final pitch to undecided voters. The president's handling of the storm could sway those late-breaking voters. If Obama is perceived as a strong leader who shows command in a crisis, some undecided voters may be compelled to back the president. But a botched response or a sense that he's putting politics over public safety could weaken his support at a point in the race where there's little chance to reverse course. (Pace 2012, *The Huffington Post*)

[T]he campaign had entered an unpredictable moment. Like the financial meltdown in October 2008, Sandy gives voters a window into how the president performs under the pressure of the office. And for that alone, it has the potential to affect the election, even if only marginally. (Stein and Siddiqui 2012, *The Huffington Post*)

Four critical swing states are expected to be hit by the storm – North Carolina, Virginia, Ohio and New Hampshire. (Bendery and Peeples 2012, *The Huffington Post*)

'In a campaign you have to recognize that these real-world events provide a prism through which voters judge candidates,' said Tad Devine, the longtime Democratic strategist who served as a senior adviser to Al Gore and John Kerry's presidential campaigns. (Stein and Siddiqui 2012, *The Huffington Post*)

The above-mentioned quotes are just a few of the numerous other reports that underline the critical link between the tight presidential election race and the 'perfect' storm that could have had the power to change the course and outcome of the election. How did President Obama manage the crisis? What were the implications of his communication strategies during the crisis? These questions propose an interesting topic to explore as the significance and value of studying the crisis communication and Obama's leadership during the disaster lie precisely in the momentous time period.

Boin and 't Hart have aptly rephrased German sociologist Ulrich Beck's idea of crises and leadership in today's society by emphasising that

we live in a “risk society”, in which concerns about personal safety and health as well as collective security have risen to the top of the social and political agenda. The risk society is characterised by a substantial gap between citizen expectations and leadership efforts in preventing and containing crises. It nurtures a culture of concern in which political and bureaucratic leaders do not seem to measure up to increasingly urgent demand for effective crisis prevention, preparedness, and response. This social-psychological and political climate makes it very hard – perhaps even impossible – for leaders to emerge from crises unscathed. (Boin and 't Hart 2003: 546)

The present thesis therefore examines President Barack Obama's crisis communication and leadership before, during and after Hurricane Sandy hit the United States of America in late October. The focus of the present thesis is on three research questions:

1. How did President Barack Obama manage the crisis communication before, during and after Hurricane Sandy?
2. What kind of crisis communication strategies and tactics did the President use?
3. What kind of image was presented of the President through the chosen strategies and tactics?

The thesis addresses the proposed questions via exploring, dissecting and analysing nine speeches President Barack Obama gave during the time period of late October to the middle of December, 2012. The length of the speeches varies, from a few minutes to more than ten minutes, as do the places in which the audiences are addressed – a few of the speeches were delivered in the White House, while several other addresses were given at the response and rescue offices, such as the Red Cross and FEMA headquarters, and in the affected areas of New Jersey and New York City. One speech was slightly different from others – it included fragments of the President's speech in New Jersey, direct address from the White House, and images of the disaster and destruction in the background. The speeches are seen as relevant object of study because, as Schaefer (1997: 97) asserts, “[s]peeches to the nation are the most prominent and potentially influential weapon in the President's political arsenal” as well as being “a crucial part of presidential leadership strategies”. Presidential speeches are believed to be a significant way of strengthening and/or improving the President's image, to shape the public's opinion and to gain support for himself and for his policies (Schaefer 1997; Welch 2003).

The thesis is structured as follows. Firstly, the theoretical framework that is deployed to study the subject matter at hand is introduced. The chapter begins by defining the complex and slightly ambiguous notion of 'crisis', which forms the building block for the following theories of crisis communication as well as its stages and general strategies. This leads to the two most well-known and utilised theories in the area of crisis communication – image repair discourse and discourse of renewal – and to the role of leadership during a crisis, which is believed to be one of the key elements in crisis communication. At the end of the chapter, a contextual overview of Hurricane Sandy is provided. The second chapter of the thesis presents the selected corpus of the nine speeches that were closely read, examined and analysed from the theoretical point of view to answer the proposed research questions.

The chapter also provides a wider context through news reports that appeared in the U.S. media at the time to provide a bigger picture of the situation that the President had to manage. The third chapter of the thesis dissects the speeches into five thematic sections and analyses those emerging themes and patterns in light of the theoretical framework of crisis communication, image repair discourse and discourse of renewal. Finally, a conclusion is drawn based on the theoretical framework and the five themes and patterns discussed in the analytical part of the present thesis.

Based on the analysis, it could be concluded that President Barack Obama chose crisis communication strategies and tactics to appear in control of the situation and able to manage the crisis even in the midst of the presidential election campaign. His tactics and strategies in the speeches analysed show his leadership skills and abilities and aim to present him as a strong, confident and compassionate leader who is in touch with the situation and doing everything he can to relieve the crisis.

Theoretical Framework: Crisis, Communication, Leadership and Sandy

This chapter forms the theoretical framework for the present thesis. Firstly, the concept of crisis is examined that leads to one of the main theoretical building blocks of the present thesis – crisis communication. The second section explores two of the most important and well-known theories in the area of crisis communication – image repair discourse and discourse of renewal. The next section looks into one of the most significant element in crisis communication, which is the role of a leader in the midst of the chaos to restore peace and order. The fourth and final section provides the specific context of the crisis induced by Hurricane Sandy.

1. Crisis and Communication

The following section gives an overview of the meaning of crisis and the various characteristic elements of it, all of which have negative effects and could make a bad situation even worse if they are not handled effectively and efficiently. This leads to the second part of the section that demonstrates the value of communication before, during and after the crisis by explaining the stages within the crisis and drawing attention to the important and relevant actions that should be taken during each stage of the crisis to ensure a successful ending to a troublesome situation.

1.1 The notion of crisis

Before the complex and multi-faceted concept of crisis communication can be defined and

explained in more depth, the first part of the phrase needs to be looked at to have a full understanding of crisis communication. What is a crisis? How can the concept of “crisis” be defined? According to Rockett (1999), definitions can be elusive, yet people need some kind of a definition or a conceptualised meaning to comprehend the world around them and the various phenomena in it. Rockett (1999: 37) quotes an experienced police officer who noted that “I can't define a disaster, but I know one when I see one”, which indicates that a “precise definition is less important than overall conceptualisation” (ibid.). However, to try to comprehend reality in general and the topic at hand in particular, the notion of crisis ought to be defined to avoid misconceptions and misunderstandings.

To pick a random dictionary, such as Merriam-Webster (2013), and search for the term “crisis”, one encounters a number of similar yet slightly different definitions of the same concept, mainly varying due to the different areas in which the term is used. Thus, Merriam-Webster (2013) presents people with three different entries under the term. The first entry includes the areas of personal health and well-being, while the second entry involves a more general understanding of the term. The third entry incorporates a situation or event on a larger scale – “a: an unstable or crucial time or state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending; *especially*: one with the distinct possibility of a highly undesirable outcome; b: a situation that has reached a critical phase”. As multiple dictionary entries demonstrate, crises can occur in various areas such as in politics, business, economy, nature, medicine but also in people's private lives in the forms of identity crises, mid-life crises or some other kind of family crises, although the latter ones have slightly different characteristics than the crisis described and examined in the present thesis.

For the purposes of the present research, and in the research area of crisis communication, the term “crisis” is largely equated with the third entry in Merriam-

Webster dictionary. In the research field, Ulmer et al. (2007b: 7, emphasis in the original) define crisis as a “specific, *unexpected*, and *nonroutine* event or series of events that create high levels of *uncertainty* and *threaten* or are perceived to threaten /.../ *high-priority goals*”. This would encompass a threat to the well-being and/or the safety of individual people in particular and/or of the community in general. Moreover, crisis is often used interchangeably with the concept of “disaster”. In Rockett's (1999: 42) words, crisis is “a matter of emotion”, while “disaster is something that, at first sight, appears to be obvious and unquestionable”. Rockett (1999: 43) also points out that a force of nature, such as an earthquake or a hurricane, is not a disaster per se, but becomes one when people are hurt or otherwise affected, in which case “‘natural’ disaster transforms to the technical and social”.

As with many other definitions, the meaning of disaster is largely dependent on people's perceptions of the event and its surrounding circumstances. Likewise, the media coverage can play a part in influencing people's understandings of events and in the process of sensemaking as well through news reports and powerful visual images of an event (Rockett 1999; Coombs and Holladay 2011; Houston et al. 2012). Additionally, Furedi (2007) states that the meaning of disasters has been modified over time because people's comprehension of the world and nature has changed. The changing meaning of disasters is mainly connected to the understandings of what the causes of a disaster are. Before the developments in science, “catastrophes were attributed to the supernatural” (Furedi 2007: 483), or in other words, they were believed to be the acts of God. With the growing scientific knowledge, the disasters were seen as the acts of Nature. Nowadays, even the acts of Nature are attributed to the “Acts of Men and Women” and “[i]n the aftermath of a disaster today, the finger of blame invariably points towards another human being” (ibid.).

For these reasons, the present work uses the notions of crisis and disaster somewhat interchangeably as well, as the research is built around the crisis communication and

leadership in the context of a “natural” disaster, thus involving both concepts. That is to say, Hurricane Sandy can be seen to encompass the visible destruction in terms of a disaster that has struck an area with large-scale palpable effects on people's feelings and emotions as attributed to the notion of crisis by Rockett (1999).

Returning to the examination of crisis, numerous researchers (e.g. Fearn-Banks 1996; Coombs 2002, 2007; Spence et al. 2007; Ulmer et al. 2007a; Liu et al. 2011; Coombs and Holladay 2011; Houston et al. 2012; Mayhorn and McLaughlin 2012) have mainly emphasised the two traditional elements of a crisis – the unexpected and negative nature of it. Weisæth et al. (2002), however, elaborate further on the essential characteristics of a crisis by extending the number of key components of a crisis to six. These include “(1) a severe threat to important values /.../; (2) a complex combination of infrequent events; (3) reduced control; (4) high uncertainty; (5) lack of information; and (6) time pressure” (Weisæth et al. 2002: 37).

All of these elements could be said to accentuate the need for crisis communication by the company, organisation or other pertinent group or individual who is in control to manage the difficult and complex situation that a crisis generates. In addition, these characteristics take into account not only the critical situation itself but also the people who face the crisis as victims or as decision makers who are trying to resolve the problem(s). The situation of reduced control and uncertainty can cause stress and anxiety which might be magnified by the lack of adequate and important information to help with the decision-making. The difficult situation could also worsen rather quickly as the time pressure has a powerful effect, forcing people to think, decide and act quickly.

In addition to Furedi (2007) who emphasises the changing nature of disasters by distinguishing between three types of disasters, Weisæth et al. (2002) also make a distinction between disasters, although in more general terms, bringing out two types –

natural and man-made disasters, of which the former refers to the acts of God and the latter to the human-induced crises. Nonetheless, Weisæth et al. (2002: 35) also echo Furedi's (2007) assertion by noting that the “disasters previously classified as natural are today considered, to an ever increasing degree, to be human induced” as those type of disasters are believed to be the result of climatic changes brought about by the improper and deficient environmental policies. Moreover, the impact of a natural disaster “depends to a large extent on the breakdown of man-made products” (Weisæth et al. 2002: 35) which means that the existence, lack and/or the quality of technology, or in other words, man-made products, determines the full magnitude and outcome of a “natural” disaster. This, in turn, could be seen as one of the reasons behind tornadoes, tsunamis and, in connection to the present thesis, hurricanes. As disasters are now more than ever seen to be caused by people themselves, the need for communication during the crisis situation appears to be a crucial part of companies', organisations' or individuals' prowess to deal with the situation and restore faith in them.

1.2 Crisis communication

Everbridge (2009: 2) has aptly presented a metaphorical representation of the nature of a crisis by stating that “[a] crisis is like a living organism: it grows, it changes, it evolves over time. Each crisis has a beginning, middle, and end. Just as a crisis isn't static, what we say, who we tell, and how we reach them varies during every stage of the crisis lifecycle.” Not only does the apposite metaphorical representation accentuate the nature of crisis, it also forms a connection between a crisis and the necessary communication during the crisis as the key to overcome the difficult situation. It also draws attention to the value of communication not only during but also before and after the crisis, because the situation changes throughout the crisis and thus the communication needs to be formed and

modified according to the occasion as well. Therefore, crisis communication could be defined as several communicative processes that are

designed to reduce and contain harm, provide specific information to stakeholders, initiate and enhance recovery, manage image and perceptions of blame and responsibility, repair legitimacy, generate support and assistance, explain and justify actions, apologize, and promote healing, learning, and change. (Reynolds and Seeger 2005: 46)

Chandler (cited in Everbridge 2009: 3; see Figure 1) distinguishes between six specific stages in a crisis: warning, risk assessment, response, management, resolution, and post-crisis recovery.



Figure 1 (Everbridge 2009: 3)

The stages are of high importance not only as a whole but also separately because “every stage dictates your audience's information requirements and your response” (Everbridge 2009: 3), referring to the essential element of communication in crisis situation:

1. Warning – in case of some crises, there is a rather distinct warning phase (e.g. hurricanes, earthquakes) and “[c]ommunication during this stage is often precautionary and intended to heighten awareness” (Everbridge 2009: 3);
2. Risk assessment – when a crisis emerges, the people in charge have to make quick

and decisive decisions about how to deal and proceed with the situation. In this stage, “[c]ommunications are primarily geared toward assembling team members, appraising executives and officials of the incident, and advising local law enforcement and other similar organizations of the situation” (ibid.);

3. Response – in this stage, the people in control notify the public or the relevant groups of people about the accident, disaster or other type of incident as well as provide “instructions, and calling first-responders into action” (Everbridge 2009: 4);
4. Management – “[d]uring this phase, the crisis gets better and moves toward resolution or gets worse with deepening layers of complexity” (ibid.), and the development of the crisis determines the various different responses to the situation. During this time, the communication incorporates updates on the situation, additional instructions, and public statements from the people in charge of the crisis management;
5. Resolution – this stage involves communicating the resolution to the crisis to the public or other relevant groups of people “in the form of all-clear alerts and messages of reassurance” (ibid.);
6. Post-crisis recovery – communication in the last phase encompasses help, guidance and counselling if necessary, and an attempt to return to normalised post-crisis situation.

Although the presented stages and specific actions in each stage are not examined in President Barack Obama's speeches in detail, they are underlined here to show the general framework and timeline of communication during the critical situation. This step is deemed necessary to provide full comprehension of the aspects of crisis communication in order to

have a better understanding of the specific theoretical approaches in the area of crisis communication, two of which are explored for the purposes of the present thesis in the next section.

2. Theories of Crisis Communication: Image Repair Discourse and Discourse of Renewal

Crises can challenge organisations' or individuals' reputation, credibility, success and future endeavours. The key is to decide how to approach the problem at hand through crisis communication, and what kind of strategies and tactics to use. Keeping this in mind, the following section explicates two crisis communication theories – image repair discourse, which is often also referred to as image restoration discourse, and discourse of renewal to present the various possibilities that can be utilised in crisis communication in order to minimise the damage and maximise the positive outcome.

2.1 Image restoration

As crises can have very negative and damaging effects, organisations, companies or individuals might have to restore their image and reputation during the crisis, and especially afterwards. The theory of image repair discourse, or in other words image restoration discourse, proposes five main categories of repair strategies, most of them with additional sub-categories (Benoit 1997; Benoit and Henson 2009). The five main categories are denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing the offensiveness of an event, corrective action, and mortification. All of the categories and their subdivisions concentrate on the various possible messages that could be delivered by the leader or spokesperson mainly after the crisis, but also during it. One significant aspect of the theory lies in the

perceptions that the public or other relevant groups of people have because “perceptions are more important than reality” (Benoit 1997: 178). In this sense, it is critical to realise that the question is not whether the organisation or people are *in fact* responsible for the crisis, but whether they *are considered to be* responsible by the public or any other relevant audience. That is to say, it means that whether the organisation or individual is in fact responsible for an act with negative outcome is, surprisingly, largely irrelevant – what is important is the perceived threat or risk to one's image that leads to an attempt to “take restorative action” (Benoit and Brinson 1999: 146). The above-mentioned five general tactics with sub-categories for delivering image restoration messages are (Benoit 1997; Benoit and Henson 2009):

1. Denial – the strategy includes simple denial and shift of blame. The former means that the accused denies that the negative act had even happened, that the organisation or individual was behind the act, or that the act caused harm or discomfort for anyone. The latter involves blaming someone else for the negative act.
2. Evasion of responsibility – the distinction is made between four sub-strategies: provocation, defeasibility, accident, and good intentions. Provocation indicates that the negative act was a response to someone else's act as “a reasonable reaction to that provocation” (Benoit 1997: 180). Defeasibility refers to the lack of information of and/or control over the situation and could therefore not have been avoided. The act could also be said to have happened as an accident. Lastly, the accused can insist that the act was done with good intentions.
3. Reducing offensiveness of event – this strategy incorporates six variants. Firstly, bolstering which involves the accused to stress their positive image, characteristics

and (past) actions in an attempt to minimise the negative effect of the offensive act. Secondly, the accused might use minimisation by trying to make the extent of the damage seem less harmful and negative. The third sub-strategy is differentiation, “in which the act is distinguished from other similar but more offensive actions” (Benoit 1997: 181). The fourth version, transcendence, includes trying to place the act in a more positive and approving context. The fifth variant is to attack the accuser by minimising their credibility. Lastly, there is a possibility of offering compensation to the people who have been or feel that they have been hurt by the wrongful act.

4. Corrective action – the strategy involves a promise to improve the situation and correct the problem(s). In addition, this could include not only a promise in relation to the current situation but also the prevention of recurrence of similar kind of problems in the future.
5. Mortification – the last strategy denotes the simple confession of failure and asking for forgiveness.

Although these strategies and tactics are perhaps more often used in the business and organizational contexts, the theory has been applied in other areas as well, for example analysing crisis communication during natural disasters, such as examining President Bush's attempt to manage the crisis induced by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 (Liu 2007; Benoit and Henson 2009). It should also be noted that while the image repair strategies might seem relevant only in relations to crises with *clear-cut* and *evident* blame, Furedi emphasises Pieterman's words who has argued that

a recent shift to /.../ *precautionary culture* has led to a shift in the moral reaction to misfortune for which no one is to blame to one where damage is regarded as a disgrace for which someone has to pay. (Furedi 2007: 485, emphasis in the original)

This indicates the relevance of image repair discourse tactics in crisis communication even if the organisation or individual does not see itself or himself/herself entirely responsible for the occurrence, poor response, escalation and/or outcome of the crisis – they may still be held responsible in one way or the other by the public, which is why they might utilise at least some of the proposed tactics to minimise the risk of damaging their image. Moreover, it could be argued that as crises entail uncertainty, unexpectedness, risk and threat, one can never be fully certain of the outcome of a crisis and thus, the crisis communication ought to incorporate the strategies that involve the possibility of negative results that attract criticism. In this sense, it refers to being prepared and anticipating problems in case the situation takes a turn for the worse. This is precisely why crisis communication strategies of image repair discourse are valuable to study, even if there is no explicit or evident indication of responsibility or blame. Because one should expect the unexpected, there is a high probability that at least some of these tactics could be found in the majority of crisis communication cases. For this reason, the theory is seen as an appropriate approach to apply in examining and analysing President Barack Obama's speeches during Hurricane Sandy.

In addition to the aforementioned five image repair strategies proposed by Benoit (1997), Garnett and Kouzmin (2007) assert two additional tactics to maintain one's reputation, such as forming alliances and ingratiation, the latter referring to crisis managers praising the stakeholders for their actions and help to win public's favour, receive approval and support. Even though these two tactics are differentiated by Garnett and Kouzmin (2007), in terms of the framework presented by Benoit (1997), the two tactics could actually be seen to fall into the category of bolstering as they all try to accentuate the positive traits and actions of the organisation or individual whose image and reputation are

under threat.

The most suitable strategy or strategies to deal with the situation and communicate with the relevant audiences is chosen depending on a number of different factors, such as the type of crisis, core values of the organisation or individual, perceived liability by the organisation or individual, opinions believed to be held by the pertinent audiences, and so on (Benoit 1997; Benoit and Brinson 1999; Liu 2007; Benoit and Henson 2009).

2.2 Crisis as an opportunity

As mentioned above, crises are most often negative and devastating by nature, causing uncertainty, disruptions and disorder in people's everyday lives. However, crises can also be viewed as positive situations by offering opportunities to grow stronger than before – as Roux-Dufort (2000: 26) notes, “crisis is a privileged moment during which to understand things differently”. In the same sense, Ulmer et al. (2007b: 4) refer to crisis as a “dangerous opportunity”.

The beneficial aspect in crises involves the possibility of learning not only from past crises (Fearn-Banks 1996; Roux-Dufort 2000; Jaques 2009) but also from the crisis one is struggling with at that specific moment. Ulmer and Sellnow (2002), Ulmer et al. (2007a; 2007b) and Ulmer (2012) accentuate the opportunity of renewal that certain type of crises can generate. According to Ulmer and Sellnow,

there is an opportunity to replace the discourse of apology and defence with a more optimistic discourse of rebuilding and renewal. In this case, due to the type of crisis issues of responsibility, harm, victimage, and blame may be subordinate to a more optimistic discourse that emphasizes moving beyond the crisis, focusing on strong value positions, responsibility to stakeholders, and growth as a result of the crisis. (Ulmer and Sellnow 2002: 362)

However, the renewal could be a rather difficult crisis communication option if the reputation of the organisation or individual was not very valued or respected before the crisis, in which case they might be viewed as opportunists. The strategies for the discourse of renewal would be most effective when the organisation or individual had “reservoir of goodwill, positive reputation, or credibility” (Ulmer et al. 2007b: 52) prior to the crisis which help them in surviving the crisis with positive outcome.

Additionally, Ulmer et al. (2007b) discuss seven specific possible positive aspects and outcomes that a crisis can engender, originally proposed by Meyers and Holusha (1986). Firstly, heroes are born which may indicate both the official leaders as well as ordinary people who become role models by taking action to help others and by trying to minimise the destruction of the crisis. Secondly, change is accelerated, which indicates the opportunity to make changes in the organisation and in its management (Ulmer et al. 2007b). This could include improving the decision-making processes, making changes in the hierarchical structure of the organisation or making changes in certain regulations and guidelines to prevent future difficulties or too severe outcomes of any other crisis that might strike the organisation. The third positive facet of a crisis creates an opportunity to confront the problems and concerns that might have been too subtle or otherwise unnoticeable to realise had the crisis not hit the organisation, because the problems, as Ulmer et al. (2007b: 46) assert, “are typically the ones that created the crisis in the first place”. This refers back to the second outcome, in which one learns from the situation and its impact to make positive changes for the future. The fourth aspect accentuates the learning process in a crisis because people change, obtain new knowledge and skills to utilise during the next crisis situation (Ulmer et al. 2007b). All this leads to the next two positive outcomes – devising new strategies and developing early warning systems that both indicate readjustments to enable “to foresee and manage a potential future crisis”

(Ulmer et al. 2007b: 46). Finally, by making changes in the systems and/or regulations, new competitive advantages might appear that would make the organisation or individuals more effective and efficient (Ulmer et al. 2007b).

It could be argued that one of the most valuable and significant of the seven above-mentioned potential positive outcomes of a crisis is perhaps the emergence of heroes. It is certainly the most pertinent for the objectives of the present research because President Barack Obama could be seen as not only the leader of the nation but also as an emerging hero. Ulmer et al (2007b: 50) note that often “we expect our leaders to be almost superhuman in their ability to solve problems and create positive outcomes”. Therefore, the next part looks more thoroughly into leadership as the key element in crisis communication to either overcome the imminent difficulties or fail to succeed.

3. The role of leadership during a crisis

According to Ulmer et al. (2007b: 50), “[w]e look to our leaders for direction, for inspiration and motivation, and for comfort”. As mentioned above, one of the positive outcomes of a crisis could be the rising of heroes as effective leadership during the chaotic and uncertain time of crisis may lead to positive and elevated view of the leader. As Boin and 't Hart argue,

People experience crises as episodes of threat and uncertainty, a grave predicament requiring urgent action /.../. It is natural inclination in such distress to look to leaders to 'do something'. When crisis leadership results in reduced stress and a return to normality, people herald their 'true leaders'. Successful performance in times of collective stress turns leaders into statesmen. But when the crisis fails to dissipate and 'normality' does not return, leaders are obvious scapegoats. (Boin and 't Hart 2003: 544)

In relation to the crisis communication theory of discourse of renewal, Ulmer et al. (2007a: 131) point out the role of the leader in communicating the positive side of the crisis, referring to opportunities of renewal – leaders are able to “establish themselves as models of optimism and commitment in hopes of inspiring others to imitate and embrace their view of the crisis as an opportunity”. Moreover, poor leadership, on the other hand, could lead to the deterioration of the crisis and even worse outcomes than could have been predicted. Therefore, leader's knowledge, abilities and skills are essential during the troubling, disruptive and stressful time of crisis in which the leaders either achieve success or fail. In the midst of the turmoil, “leaders can fall back on values, ethics, and virtues to determine how to respond” (Ulmer et al. 2007b: 57).

What is more, Rockett (1999: 41) draws attention to “the demands of society for appointment of blame”. When crisis occurs and the problems escalate to an unexpected degree, people more often than not need a way to cope with their negative emotions such as fright, anxiety, sadness and anger (Jin 2010). In such traumatic and troubling situations, most people tend to cope with their emotions by looking for a scapegoat to relieve the anxieties (Rockett 1999; Boin and 't Hart 2003; Coombs 2007; Malhotra and Kuo 2008; Boin et al. 2010; Jin 2010). In addition, crises, as Boin and 't Hart (2003: 545) maintain, are often the result of “erroneous policies and bureaucratic mismanagement”, again stressing the fact that people can and will look for someone to blame “for causing the crisis, failing to prevent it, or inadequately responding to it” (Boin et al. 2010: 706). Waugh Jr. (2006) and Boin et al. (2010) refer to this phenomenon as the blame game.

Waugh Jr. as well as Malhotra and Kuo (2008) also point to the fact that in the political sphere, the mishandling of a crisis situation could turn out to be costly when people “have a chance to express their frustration and anger at the polls” (Waugh Jr. 2006: 11). Malhotra and Kuo (2008) note the possibility of giving credit and electorally rewarding the

incumbent leaders or politicians as well, in case of effective and successful crisis management. This underlines the importance of the specific crisis context which has an impact on the crisis communication strategies and tactics as well as on the role of the leader in the midst of the chaos. As the present research deals with President Barack Obama's crisis communication during Hurricane Sandy, it is deemed necessary to provide a contextual overview of the kind of crisis the President had to manage.

4. The Context of Hurricane Sandy

It was late October and less than two weeks until the 2012 presidential elections in the United States of America when the weather forecasters issued a severe warning of a tropical cyclone that was moving towards the United States. Blake et al. (2013: 1) report that “Sandy was a classic late-season hurricane in the southwestern Caribbean Sea”, a storm that has also been dubbed by the media as the “Superstorm Sandy” (The Associated Press 2013) and the “Frankenstorm” (Borestein 2012) because of its rather unique nature as it merged with another winter storm just before Halloween, hence the prefix 'Franken' in the latter nickname, alluding to the well-known Frankenstein's monster. The hurricane made landfall in Jamaica October 24, 2012, then moving towards the eastern part of Cuba, after which it moved towards the central and northwest part of the Bahamas. From there on, Sandy grew in size and “underwent a complex evolution” (Blake et al. 2013: 1) while moving towards the United States of America which was struck on October 29, 2012. The New Jersey and New York coastlines became the main areas being affected, although altogether 24 states were affected by the storm to a greater or lesser degree.

It is estimated that the damages of Sandy are near to 50 billion USD, which is believed to make it the second-costliest destructive storm to hit the United States, the first one being

the infamous Hurricane Katrina in 2005 (Blake et al. 2013; Porter 2013; The Associated Press 2013). Overall, there were “at least 147 direct deaths recorded across the Atlantic basin due to Sandy, with 72 of these fatalities occurring in the mid-Atlantic and northeastern United States” (Blake et al 2013: 1). It is also reported that this is “the greatest number of U.S. direct fatalities related to a tropical cyclone outside of the southern states since Hurricane Agnes in 1972” (ibid.). In addition, Porter (2013) also points out that there have been reports of “at least 87 other deaths that were indirectly tied to Sandy, from causes such as hypothermia due to power outages, carbon monoxide poisoning and accidents during cleanup efforts”. The powerful impact of the hurricane is also shown by the fact that The World Meteorological Organization has replaced the name 'Sandy' in the list of tropical storm names with 'Sara' because, as McCarthy (2013) points out, “[t]he organization retires a name when a storm has been exceptionally destructive”.

Talking about Hurricane Sandy, one inevitably draws parallels with the previous major disaster, Hurricane Katrina, because it was not only one of the deadliest and costliest natural disasters in recent U.S. history, as stated above, but also because the outcome of it turned out to be rather unexpected and shocking to both the residents in the New Orleans area and the authorities as well, namely to the federal authorities and the Bush administration. The crisis communication as well as the relief and response efforts of the latter attracted widespread criticism as these were deemed poor and inadequate, and George W. Bush in particular suffered a setback in his political career (Kettl 2006; Waugh Jr. 2006; Comfort 2007; Garnett and Kouzmin 2007; Liu 2007; Malhotra and Kuo 2008; Pennings and Grossman 2008; Benoit and Henson 2009; 't Hart et al. 2009; Boin et al. 2010). As Waugh Jr. (2006: 10) notes, “[p]oliticians and administrators may pay a high price for failing to deal with the disasters adequately or simply for appearing ineffectual in the days and weeks after”.

Liu (2007), for example, points out three distinct problems in relation to the federal government's response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005: the main focus at the time was on the anti-terrorism campaign which meant that there were not enough funds and attention to deal with a natural disaster; in terms of manpower, there were not enough people to respond to the crisis; and “the federal government did not have an actionable national disaster plan” (Liu 2007: 41). Moreover, according to Benoit and Henson (2009: 41), the response “from all levels of government was far too slow and poorly coordinated”. From the perspective of leadership, George W. Bush was seen as out of touch, inadequate, and not compassionate and caring enough – as 't Hart et al. assert,

[a]s the crisis escalated, he had to deal with a growing chorus of bitter, threefold criticism regarding the perceived lack of preparedness; the chaotic, ineffective government response; and his own apparent lack of concern and passivity in the face of unprecedented community distress and allegations of racism as having contributed to the miserable situation in the poorest and hardest-hit areas. ('t Hart et al. 2009: 487)

Since Hurricane Sandy was the first major crisis that President Barack Obama had to encounter while being the leader of the country, and as the disappointment, anger and frustration about Hurricane Katrina are probably still alive, it could be argued that the President did not only have to manage the present disaster but also had to deal with the memories of the previous one, attempting to reassure Americans that this time it is going to be different and that this time the administration and other officials will not fail the nation and its citizens. As Boin et al. (2010: 708) emphasise, “[i]n formulating their strategy, leaders have to negotiate a deeply entrenched tension: they must consolidate, restore and show faith in the security and validity of pre-existing social, institutional and political arrangements”. The past failure with and bitter memories of Hurricane Katrina have also been brought up by numerous news reports dealing with the current crisis of Hurricane Sandy, indicating not only the significance of past success or failure but the political nature

of a natural disaster as well (e.g. Nakamura and Tumulty 2012; Pace 2012; Stein and Siddiqui 2012).

The context and nature of crisis, the essence and importance of communication during a crisis, and the value of strong leadership could be best summarised with a felicitous quote by Boin et al. who accentuate that

[t]he management of urgent threats to core societal values, critical infrastructures and the safety of citizens is an elementary function of government. It requires political and administrative leadership /.../. Effective crisis leadership entails recognizing emerging threats, initiating efforts to mitigate them and deal with their consequences, and once an acute crisis period has passed, re-establishing a sense of normalcy. These are no easy tasks in a time of new threats and increasingly vulnerable societies. (Boin et al. 2010: 706)

Faced with the crisis induced by Hurricane Sandy, President Barack Obama was presented with a challenge to manage the crisis at hand while also bearing in mind the wider context of the forthcoming presidential elections as well as the legacy of the failed crisis communication and management by George W. Bush during the previous disaster of Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Selected Corpus and the Wider Context through the U.S. Media

This chapter introduces and describes the corpus of the present thesis to answer the proposed research questions and draw a conclusion in light of the chosen theoretical framework of crisis communication, image repair discourse and discourse of renewal. The corpus was collected by keeping in mind the proposed research questions that aim to investigate the President's crisis communication: how he managed the crisis, what kind of strategies and tactics he used, and what kind of image was presented of him through those tactics. In addition, a wider context is provided through the commentary in the news reports published in the U.S. media at the time to get a more comprehensive picture of the situation that the President had to manage and of how the President was presented and judged in the media.

The corpus of the present thesis consists of nine speeches President Barack Obama gave before, during and after Hurricane Sandy:

1. President Obama Speaks on Hurricane Sandy (28.10.2012a¹) – the President discusses the impending natural disaster, the preparations and planned response. There are several FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) officials by his side, most notably the administrator of FEMA, William Craig Fugate who also says a few words during Obama's address.
2. President Obama Makes a Statement on Hurricane Sandy (29.10.2012b) – the second speech before the hurricane hit also addresses the preparations to respond to the storm and advise people to take necessary precautions and follow the given

¹ The speeches are referred to in the analysis by the letters of the alphabet that are indicated in the present list.

- instructions to minimise destruction and the impact on their health and safety.
3. President Obama at Red Cross (30.10.2012c) – the first speech after the hurricane had struck, in which the President talks about the relief efforts and intended actions to restore the normality of everyday life. As the title indicates, the address is given at the Red Cross and the President is surrounded by the officials and other workers of the Red Cross.
 4. President Obama Tours Areas Damaged by Hurricane Sandy (31.10.2012d) – the speech is delivered in New Jersey with the state's Governor Chris Christie, who also addressed the audience before giving word to the President, and other relevant officials, including William Craig Fugate. The speech focuses on continued response and rebuilding efforts, reassuring the public that although there is lot of work to do to return to normality, everything will be alright and the people in the affected areas are not left to deal with the damage alone.
 5. Helping the Survivors of Hurricane Sandy (02.11.2012e) – this address could be seen as the most exceptional case of the nine speeches as it contains fragments of the President's speech in New Jersey, direct address from the White House, and the President's background narration together with the footage and images of him touring around the devastated and destroyed areas and meeting with the people affected by the hurricane.
 6. President Obama Speaks at FEMA Headquarters (03.11.2012f) – as the title already suggests, the speech is given at FEMA headquarters where the President gave an update on storm relief, recovery and rebuilding efforts. Again, William Craig Fugate is by the President's side as well as the Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano, Defence Secretary Leon E. Panetta, Energy Secretary Dr. Steven Chu, Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, Housing and Urban

Development Secretary Shaun Donovan, Education Secretary Arne Duncan, Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner, Small Business Administration Administrator Karen Mills, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Navy Adm. James A. Winnefeld Jr., Deputy Chief of Staff Alyssa Mastromonaco, Deputy Assistant to the President for Homeland Security Richard Reed, and officials.

7. Weekly Address: Recovering and Rebuilding after the Storm (03.11.2012g) – every Saturday morning, the President addresses the nation via a video about the most topical issue(s) of a given week (Whitehouse 2013), and during that specific week, the focus was naturally on Hurricane Sandy.
8. President Obama Tours Storm Damage in New York City (15.11.2012h) – the speech is made in New York City, as the title indicates. The essence of the address is similar to the speech that the President delivered in New Jersey – it concentrates on the continuing response, relief and rebuilding. Next to the President are the state's Governor Andrew Mark Cuomo, the Mayor of New York City Michael Bloomberg and Shaun Donovan who recently had been appointed to specifically oversee and concentrate on the rebuilding process.
9. President Obama Speaks on the Ongoing Response to Hurricane Sandy (12.12.2012i) – a month and a half after the storm and almost a month after the previous speech, the President addresses the nation from the White House to reassure the public that although this devastating event took place, the victims are not alone, the nation will rebuild and will become even stronger together.

President Barack Obama's speeches were closely read, examined and analysed to uncover and underline the common themes and patterns that frame Barack Obama's nine addresses to the nation. The themes and patterns that emerged are noticeable and pertinent

in terms of the chosen theoretical framework of crisis communication, image repair discourse and discourse of renewal.

President Barack Obama's Hurricane Sandy crisis communication speeches reflected the previously presented strategic stages in crisis communication timeline by Chandler (cited in Everbridge 2009): giving warning and providing instructions; risk assessment, response and management during the acute phases of the crisis; and resolution and offering reassurances in the post-crisis recovery stage. In more specific terms, five distinct yet intertwined themes and patterns emerged from the speeches: (1) crisis management and communication, (2) eloquent display of co-operation, (3) authority and demonstrations of expert knowledge, (4) political leadership during the campaign period, (5) and discourse of national unity and narratives of heroism. Before examining the five themes and patterns in closer detail, a wider framework and context of the crisis presented by the U.S. media, notably by *The Washington Post* and *The Huffington Post* among a few other sources is provided. This step is considered relevant because the views presented in the media could be seen to have an influence on the public's feelings and opinions, thus most probably affecting President Barack Obama's crisis communication tactics and strategies to assert himself in a more favourable light in the eyes of the media and, in turn, in the eyes of the public as well.

In light of the theoretical approaches of crisis communication, image repair discourse and discourse of renewal, the five themes and patterns as well as the overall tone of Obama's speeches entail significant insights into his tactics. As with the themes and patterns, the elements of image repair discourse and discourse of renewal could also be seen as intertwined in his speeches. From Benoit's (1997) categories and sub-divisions, three tactics could be uncovered from President Barack Obama's speeches: defeasibility, bolstering (and a slight indication to transcendence in one aspect), and corrective action. In

addition, the two additional tactics of forming alliances and ingratiation to restore and maintain one's image proposed by Garnett and Kouzmin (2007) could also be discerned in his speeches in which he constantly accentuated the people and agencies with whom he collaborates and also highly praised in every speech he made during the crisis. As these two tactics are seen to indicate bolstering in Benoit's (1997) terms, the discussion incorporates these two tactics under Benoit's (1997) bolstering. This could be done because, as with many other aspects of Obama's crisis communication strategies, themes and patterns, they are all very much intertwined. Therefore, discussing one of them inevitably involves mentioning or specifying others as well.

Nakamura and Tumulty (2012) emphasise that “[r]arely, if ever, has a president had to deal with such a major disaster so close to Election Day, and any misstep or move that appears politically motivated could cost Obama with voters”. Petri (2012) also points out that one needs to be careful about the decisions and actions as these involve a risk of “looking too presidential, and everyone knows that looking too consciously presidential around election time is a low-down dirty move”. These two quotes highlight the situation in which the President was about a week before the elections, requiring appropriate crisis communication to manage the situation while trying not to seem opportunist and “too presidential”, as Petri (2012) stresses.

There were antithetical opinions about Barack Obama's effectiveness and success in his crisis communication and disaster management. Loyal and devoted supporter of Obama, MSNBC newsreader and political commentator Chris Matthews made an unfortunate comment by saying that he is “so glad we had that storm last week” (Starr 2012), indicating that the hurricane had a positive effect on Obama's election campaign and re-election. New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who had previously been known for being impartial and independent in terms of political affiliations (Hernandez 2012; Stein

and Johnson 2012), had now publicly aligned himself with President Obama and claimed his endorsement for Obama's re-election (ibid.). In addition, Obama also received profuse praise even from a Republican New Jersey Governor Chris Christie who had previously criticised the President about his other political stances (McGregor 2012; Weiner 2012a). *The Washington Post* reported in its article on October 31, 2012, that

[f]or a day at least, Hurricane Sandy appears to have done for President Obama what he has not been able to do for himself. In a campaign notable mostly for its negativity, the historic storm provided Obama with a commander-in-chief moment a week before Election Day. The president gained a rare moment of bipartisan praise, with Democratic and Republican governors alike commending the performance of the federal government. And the storm put on pause, for now, the sense that rival Mitt Romney had all the momentum in the home stretch. (Nakamura and Tumulty 2012)

As Bendery and Peeples (2012) argue, “being the commander in chief has its perks” because “[w]hen it comes to showcasing one's leadership, looking presidential in the midst of a natural disaster can go further than any campaign appearance”.

What is more, Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley stated that “[u]nder this administration, FEMA has been a much more professional agency,” and “[g]one are the days of 'heck of a job, Brownie,' when they show up after the disaster hits and help you bail water,” (Nakamura and Tumulty 2012), a statement that refers to Bush's premature praise for the then FEMA Director Michael D. Brown who was seen to handle the disaster response for Hurricane Katrina extremely well at the time. However, he resigned later due to the inadequacies and poor management as the crisis eventually turned into a disastrous fiasco and the previously mentioned political 'blame game' presented its first casualty. In addition, Brown criticised Obama's reaction and response to Sandy, claiming that “[m]y guess is, he wants to get ahead of it — he doesn't want anybody to accuse him of not being on top of it or not paying attention” (Petri 2012), and that “Obama was playing politics with the storm by responding so urgently so no one could second-guess him” (Nakamura

and Tumulty 2012).

Moreover, there were also others who criticised the President's response and attempts to manage the crisis. For example, Staten Island Borough President James Molinaro in particular even called “on residents to hold back donations to the American Red Cross” (*The Huffington Post* 2012) because of their slow and inadequate relief efforts. The disappointment and disapproval of the situation was also visible amongst the public (Kirkham and Knafo 2012; Kowsh et al. 2012; Pearson 2012), for example, Kirkham and Knafo (2012) note that someone had put an upside down flag in the stairway as “a signal of distress”. As it is seen from the aforementioned excerpts, there were both positive and negative attitudes towards and opinions about the President and his capabilities to manage the crisis. The following analysis explores the above-mentioned nine speeches through the five recurring themes and patterns of crisis management and communication, emphatic display of co-operation, authority and demonstrations of expert knowledge, political leadership during the campaign period, and discourse of national unity and narratives of heroism.

President Barack Obama Communicating through Hurricane Sandy

The following chapter analyses the five themes and patterns that emerged from exploring President Barack Obama's nine speeches. The themes and patterns are presented in separate subsections, although they are entwined to a great extent, and they are examined, dissected and analysed in light of the theoretical framework of crisis communication, image repair discourse and discourse of renewal.

1. Crisis Management and Communication

The first and most noticeable element in Obama's crisis communication involves giving various instructions, especially before the hurricane struck, but also afterwards to inform people where and how to get help. His approach of instructing also involved alerting and warning people of the kind of storm that was about to hit them. Likewise, he also gave a word of caution and instructed people to follow the given instructions: “you need to take this very seriously and follow the instructions of your state and local officials, because they are going to be providing you with the best advice in terms of how to deal with this storm over the coming days”, and emphasising once again that “[i]t's going to very important that populations in all the impacted states take this seriously, listen to your state and local elected officials” (A). In his second speech before the storm, the President seemed to be even more sombre, perhaps because he had received new information about the imminent disaster and impending problems, which is why his warnings and instructions seemed to be even more serious, even though the essence of his message, in fact, remained the same as before:

So the most important message that I have for you right now is, please *listen to what your state and local officials are saying*. When they tell you to evacuate, you need to evacuate. Do not delay. Don't pause; don't question the instructions that are being given, because this is a serious storm and *it could potentially have fatal consequences if people haven't acted quickly*. (B, emphasis added)

The first speech also warns people to be prepared and remain vigilant in order to survive the storm, while the second speech included a word of caution to evacuate when people have been ordered to leave so they would not put the first responders and other search-and-rescue teams at risk. Although seen and heard giving instructions, not very many of his instructions, however, were actually *specific enough* to know how to survive and how to help oneself, with the exception of a few. He mostly instructed people to listen to the instructions given by their state and local officials, not providing any overview of these instructions or listing at least some of them to have some kind of idea what, how and when to do. It could be argued that it would have been highly pertinent as he made televised speeches that the majority of people probably watched. In his first speech, one of the only remarks germane to the situation was made by Craig Fugate, the administrator of Federal Emergency Management Agency, who was one of the specialist officials beside the President and Fugate was the one who drew attention to a webpage where the public can get information about taking protective measures. The address of the webpage was later once again emphasised by the President himself as well.

The President also gave a more specific instruction while touring in New Jersey on October 31, and at the FEMA Headquarters as well as during his Weekly Address, both on November 3, in which he drew attention to the FEMA's phone number in case any kind of assistance is needed (D, F, G). Both the President as well as Fugate encouraged people to help others and look after their neighbours and friends, all of which was told to the public as if instructions or orders: “there may be elderly populations in your area. Check on your neighbor, check on your friend. Make sure that they are prepared” (A), as the President

stressed.

In all nine speeches, the President expressed his profound gratitude and admiration for the various organisations and agencies as well as for individual people who were involved in the response, rescue and recovery efforts, some of whom he praised *before* the storm had even struck. For instance, in his very first speech, he stated that he wanted to “thank all the members of the team for the outstanding work that they're doing” (A), while his third speech, right after the hurricane had hit, but the storm was not over, emphasised his gratitude for the “outstanding work” of Red Cross, and the “extraordinary work” Governor Christie, Governor Cuomo and Mayor Bloomberg did (C). However, the storm was not over and thus the praise could be seen as a bit premature, and cause Bush's “heck of a job, Brownie” moment that might later land Obama in trouble if the people were not seen to be doing a 'heck of a job' after all. Yet, it might be considered that the President praised the officials for their co-operation and for their efforts to boost their self-assurance and fortitude. What is more, by praising the officials, the President would also have been able to show and assure the public that everyone involved are doing the best they can to respond to the disaster and that they are in control of the situation. Even though the real assessment of their work and efforts would be come after the crisis was fully over, and the outcome and results were evaluated.

Based on the discussion above and in terms of Benoit's (1997) strategies and tactics, some elements of defeasibility could be discerned. At times the President refers to the public as having some level of control over the situation that he was lacking: “this is a serious storm and *it could potentially have fatal consequences if people haven't acted quickly*” (B, emphasis added), “keep in mind folks who are not following instructions, if you are not evacuating when you've been asked to evacuate, *you're putting responders at danger*” (B, emphasis added), and that “if the public is not following instructions, that

makes it more dangerous for people and it means that *we could have fatalities that could have been avoided*' (B, emphasis added). The last assertion is quite significant because he was constantly emphasising throughout his speeches that people ought to follow the given instructions and listen to the officials on what to do and how to help themselves. At the Red Cross, he asserted that

it is very important for the public to continue to monitor the situation in your local community, *listen to your state and local officials, follow instructions*. The more you follow instructions, the easier it is for our first responders to make sure that they are dealing with true emergency situations. *So better prepared individual families are for the situation, the easier it is going to be for us to deal with it.* (C, emphasis added)

And in New Jersey, he accentuated his gratitude for the first responders, while at the same time drawing attention to and, in some ways, reproofing the general public by saying that

I want to thank all the first responders who have been involved in this process – the linesmen, the firefighters, the folks who were in here shuttling out *people who were supposed to 'get the hell out' and didn't.* (D, emphasis added)

Therefore, transmitting some of his ability to control the situation and control the behaviour of the people in the affected areas, he is reducing his power over some elements of the circumstances as the situation might escalate to an unexpected level and the outcome could be unpredictable. In other words, he seemed to shift some of his responsibility for the well-being and safety of the people in the affected areas to the people themselves. In this sense, he stressed that people ought to look after themselves as well, it is not the responsibility of the federal or local authorities alone. In addition, after the hurricane had hit, he stressed several times that “we're going to have a lot of work to do. I don't want anybody to feel that somehow this is all going to get cleaned up overnight. We want to make sure that people have realistic expectations” (D) and that “[i]t's not going to be easy.

There's still going to be, believe it or not, some complaints over the next several months. Not everyone is going to be satisfied” (H). This could be seen to indicate that the situation was perhaps more severe and the outcome more surprising than anticipated, possibly meaning that there were elements over which even he did not have control.

However, the President's attitude and crisis communication strategies quite visibly did not include any direct indication of blaming any agency or official, even though as mentioned, there is a tendency for a blame game and there were reports that a number of people were frustrated and angry about the slow and inadequate response (Kirkham and Knafo 2012; Kowsh et al. 2012; Pearson 2012). Yet, he did not overtly or covertly blame anyone. Quite the opposite – as seen above, he praised everyone involved profoundly and repeatedly throughout his speeches. Thus, it seems that even *if* he did find some inadequacies in some agencies' or officials' work, he chose not to address his criticism or blame through his public speeches. Perhaps it was a strategic move not to get involved in the blame game because it might have hurt his image in the end as much or maybe even more than the image of the accused ones. And he did have more at stake and more to lose in case the criticism backfired and cast a shadow over his abilities and skills as the leader of the nation and as the leader of the crisis management team. After all, presidential elections were just around the corner. Thus, instead of blaming someone, Obama opted for stressing and lauding the co-operation between various agencies and officials.

2. Emphatic Display of Co-operation

Another very visible and highlighted element in the President's speeches was his emphasis on co-operation between the federal, state and local agencies and officials. Just a few examples include Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Department of

Defence, the Department of Energy, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Red Cross, and more specifically New York Governor Cuomo, New York City Mayor Bloomberg and perhaps most notably New Jersey Governor Christie (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I). At the FEMA Headquarters on November 3, for example, Obama stressed that he had

just completed *not only* a meeting with our team here at FEMA and all of our Cabinet officers who are involved in the recovery process along the East Coast, *but we also had a conference call with the governors of Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, as well as many of the municipalities* who have been directly affected by this crisis and this tragedy. (F, emphasis added)

According to Stein and Siddiqui (2012), “[a]s an adviser to the president noted, reacting quickly and casting a ‘wide net’ in terms of those he consults with are both lessons learned from crises past”. Furthermore, Weiner (2012b) quotes pundit and pollster Dick Morris according to whom “Romney was, in fact, leading before Sandy and that his chances blew away in the storm with its famous bipartisan photo of Governor Chris Christie with Obama”. In his opinion, Hurricane Sandy was the decisive element in the election campaign because Obama was able to show his leadership skills and abilities in a crisis situation that happened to be a campaign period. Romney, on the other hand, could not only continue with his presidential campaign but he also faded slightly into the background since it would have been inappropriate to campaign during that time, yet he could not take control in the situation either because he was not the leader of the nation and would have appeared rather opportunist.

Obama praised the emergency services for their excellent work and efforts, perhaps prematurely as indicated in the previous section, and he emphasised assured co-operation in all and every level in responding to the disaster, as mentioned above. However, not everyone agreed with his stance as some of the public in the most affected areas felt as if they had been betrayed and abandoned (Kirkham and Knafo 2012; Kowsh et al. 2012;

Pearson 2012). It seems that President Barack Obama had perhaps commended the response teams and agencies too early and too eagerly and had made promises he was perhaps not able to keep, as there were unsatisfied and disappointed people in the affected areas, even though Obama very explicitly praised everyone for their good work.

Consequently, his demonstrations of co-operation could be viewed as a facet of his bolstering strategy (Benoit 1997), and in Garnett and Kouzmin's (2007) more specific terms, ingratiation and forming alliances – to show that even during the election time, people come together to work hard and respond to the crisis as best as they can. And it is especially noteworthy in connection to his collaboration with the Republican Christie who is known to be a vocal critic of the President and his politics, indicating that at times like those, political affiliations do not matter. In his speech on November 2, 2012, the President maintained that “[i]n this country, we look out for one another. We have each other's backs. Because *despite our differences*, we are Americans first, and that's what Americans do” (e, emphasis added). While touring New York City, he pointed out that the recovery process is

going to *require everybody focused* on getting the job done. We're going to have to *put some of the turf battles aside*. We're going to have to *make sure that everybody is focused* on doing the job as opposed to worrying about who is getting the credit or who is getting the contracts or all that stuff that sometimes goes into the rebuilding process. (h, emphasis added)

Through these two statements, the President not only accentuated and lauded the bipartisan co-operation, he was also able to draw attention to the general unity of the nation during troublesome times, while establishing himself as a capable leader.

3. Authority and Demonstrations of Expert Knowledge

President Obama clearly showed in his speeches that he is not out of touch with the

situation, unlike President Bush had been seen during Hurricane Katrina. This aspect is also noted by the media as it was claimed that “Obama advisers say they've learned the lessons from President George W. Bush's widely criticized response to Hurricane Katrina” (Pace 2012). However, as *The Huffington Post* (Stein and Siddiqui 2012) reports, “[a]ides to the president are reluctant to discuss the political implications of Hurricane Sandy and its aftermath”. Obama demonstrated his capabilities, knowledge and being in touch with the situation through perhaps small yet significant pieces of information, such as when the storm was about to hit, which areas would be most affected, what kind of impact the storm most probably has on power, transportation and other aspects of ordinary life, and so on (A, B, C, D, E, F, G).

His authority was also presented by small but confident and decisive words and actions. In several speeches he mentioned being in touch with the relevant people at the state and local levels. In the very first speech, already before the crisis, he stated that he “just had a phone call with the governors of the potentially impacted states, as well as some of the major cities in the region” (A). In the second speech, right before the hurricane, he asserted that

I've spoken to all the governors in all these states. They have issued *emergency declarations*. Those *have been turned around quickly here in the White House*. We have *prepositioned assets* so that FEMA personnel are working closely with state and local governments.” (B, emphasis added)

This indicates that he was taking action already before the hurricane struck to be prepared and ready to start the response, rescue and recovery efforts as soon as possible. In addition, he exerted his authority to accentuate that too long power cuts will not be tolerated and those in charge of getting the power back on need to act and not get stuck in bureaucratic hassle:

And so *my instructions to the federal agency* have been, do not figure out why we can't do something; *I want to cut through bureaucracy*. There's *no excuse for inaction* at this point. *I want every agency to lean forward* and make sure that we are getting the resources where they need – where they're needed as quickly as possible. (C, emphasis added)

Cutting through the red tape is also mentioned in several of his later speeches as well, for instance at the FEMA Headquarters (F) – “we don't have any patience for bureaucracy, we don't have any patience for red tape, and we want to make sure that we are figuring out a way to get to yes, as opposed to no”, as well as during his Weekly Address from the White House (G).

What is more, in addition to being in authority, he also showed his hands-on approach in managing the crisis. This was reflected not only in his visits to the affected areas of New Jersey and New York, but also in his speeches, insisting that “I told the mayors and the governors if they're getting no for an answer somewhere in the federal government, *they can call me personally at the White House*” (C, emphasis added). In his Weekly Address on November 3, 2012, Obama pointed out that “I *toured* New Jersey on Wednesday with Governor Christie, and *witnessed* some of the terrible devastation *firsthand*”, and “[t]hroughout the week, I've been *in constant contact* with governors and mayors in the affected areas” (G, emphasis added).

4. Political Leadership during the Campaign Period

While all of the speeches President Obama gave before, during and after Hurricane Sandy provided him with various moments and facets of showing himself as not only the leader of the nation in name only, but also in the very sense of the term 'leader'. The most notable occurrence of his strong leadership appeared after his second speech, right before the storm was about to hit, when a reporter asked the President about the upcoming elections and the

possible impact of the storm to his campaign, to which Obama responded:

I am not worried at this point about the impact on the election. I'm worried about the impact of families, and I'm worried about the impact on our first responders. I'm worried about the impact on our economy and on transportation. The election will take care of itself next week. Right now, our first number-one priority is to make sure that we are saving lives, that our search-and-rescue teams are going to be in place, that people are going to get the food, the water, the shelter that they need in case of emergency, and that we respond as quickly as possible to get the economy back on track. (B, emphasis added)

Whether this very meaningful question was deliberately proposed to give the President a small campaign-like moment, or was it a coincidence, is hard to determine, but the fact remains that it was a significant moment considering the circumstances and the wider context of the situation. What is more, at the end of no other speech given during the crisis was Obama asked anything by the public or by the reporters. This moment gave Obama a great opportunity to show compassion and to show that he cared about the people potentially affected by Sandy, not about the politics in general and about his political career in particular. After the hurricane had hit, the President again asserted at the FEMA Headquarters that his full and undivided attention is on the disaster relief, as opposed to focusing on the election campaign:

I can assure you everybody on this team, everybody sitting around the table has made this a number-one priority, and this continues to be my number-one priority. There is nothing more important than us getting this right. /.../ We are going to put not just 100 percent, but 120 percent behind making sure that they get the resources they need to rebuild and recover. (F, emphasis added)

In addition to the aforementioned illustrations of his leadership skills and mentality, he also accentuated the importance of 'sticking together' in spite of any disagreements or differences – “we set aside whatever issues we may have otherwise to make sure that we respond appropriately and with swiftness” (B). His words were also supported by his actions, especially his very public and praised collaboration with Christie. The same kind

of attitude echoed in his speech when he visited New York City in the middle of November, 2012:

during difficult times like this, we're reminded that *we're bound together* and we have to look out for each other. And a lot of the things that seem important, *the petty differences melt away*, and *we focus on what binds us together* and that we as Americans are going to stand with each other in their hour of need. (H, emphasis added)

Furthermore, one of his characteristics as a strong leader is his ability to appear personal and compassionate which was demonstrated in all of his speeches. The best example of his compassion and care is perhaps presented in the speech that he made right after the storm, in which he offered his condolences and support by saying that

I want to talk about *the extraordinary hardship* that we've seen over the last 48 hours. *Our thoughts and prayers go out to all the families who have lost loved ones. /.../ [T]his is something that is heartbreaking for the entire nation. And we certainly feel profoundly for all the families whose lives have been upended and are going to be going through some very tough times* over the next several days and perhaps several weeks and months. The most important message I have for them is that *America is with you. We are standing behind you, and we are going to do everything we can to help you get back on your feet.* (C, emphasis added)

The final part of the assertion also mirrors the discourse of national unity that is strongly connected to the previously mentioned themes and patterns and will be discussed more properly in the next subsection.

In terms of Benoit's (1997) image repair discourse tactics, there are yet more traces of defeasibility, referring to the lack of control over some aspect of the situation which could be seen as an underlying element in connection to his leadership strategies during that time. Obama never claimed that he did not receive enough or relevant information about the disaster to respond to it as he demonstrated in his speeches that he knew even small details about the storm's path, impact and so on. However, after the hurricane had struck, some of his assertions did suggest that there was some uncontrollable element in the

situation, citing the Mother Nature as forceful and unexpected – “I think all of us obviously have been *shocked* by the force of Mother Nature as we watch it on television” (C, emphasis added).

Moreover, another Benoit's (1997) strategy, bolstering, could also be discussed under this theme as it involves his show of compassion and care for the people in the affected areas. Already before the storm had even struck, he was portrayed as caring and sympathetic, stressing that “[o]ur thoughts and prayers go out to all the people who are potentially affected” (B). His portrayal of being in touch with the situation, personally involved and referring to a number of small details of the response, rescue and repair process could also be seen as part of his bolstering tactic to show that he knew what was happening in the affected areas. Thus, it provided him with a positive image of his involvement in and, in a sense, contribution to the response and repair actions.

In addition, his words were also reinforced by his actions when he visited not only the Red Cross and the FEMA Headquarters, but also toured the most affected areas of New Jersey and New York City, showing himself with the relevant experts and partners of co-operation. These details were the key to demonstrate his image as the caring, responsive and hands-on leader, quite opposite to the image of President Bush during Hurricane Katrina crisis communication. The fact that Obama stressed that nothing is more important to him than managing the crisis indicates that he seemingly distanced himself from the election campaign and the politics of election, which could be seen to contribute to his bolstering strategy as well, making him appear in a positive light. This, in turn, could actually benefit his political career, and thus it could be suggested that he was thinking of the politics in the midst of the disaster after all.

5. Discourse of National Unity and Narratives of Heroism

The discourse of national unity is especially intertwined with the previous theme of leadership. In all nine speeches, there were imbedded emphases on national unity and very specific and rather detailed stories of heroic acts by several members of the public. For example, in Barack Obama's speech before the storm, he asserted that

[i]t's going to be a difficult storm. *The great thing about America is when we go through tough times like this we pull together. We look out for our friends. We look out for our neighbors.* And we set aside whatever issue we may have otherwise to make sure that we respond appropriately and with swiftness. And that's exactly what I anticipate is going to happen here. (B, emphasis added)

The speeches made right after the hurricane had hit and the later appearances incorporated several narratives of heroic acts by the public as well as by the emergency officials who had done more than what was listed in their job descriptions. For instance, the story of Lieutenant Gallagher who, like a lot of other responders, went “above and beyond the call of duty to respond to people in need” (H). Some of the stories were repeated or at least mentioned in several speeches. At the Red Cross, President Obama incorporated a few stories together which also entailed the element of national unity and a sense of patriotism.

The final message I'd just say is *during the darkness of the storm, I think we also saw what's brightest in America.* I think all of us obviously have been shocked by the force of Mother Nature as we watched it on television. At the same time, we've also seen nurses at NYU Hospital carrying fragile newborns to safety. We've seen *incredibly brave firefighters* in Queens, waist-deep in water, battling infernos and rescuing people in boats. One of my favourite stories is down in North Carolina, the Coast Guard going out to save a sinking ship. They sent a rescue swimmer out, and the rescue swimmer said, 'Hi, I'm Dan. I understand you guys need a ride.' *That kind of spirit of resilience and strength, but most importantly looking out for one another, that's why we always bounce back from these kinds of disasters.* (C, emphasis added)

Another significant narrative entailed the aforementioned NYPD Lieutenant Kevin

Gallagher and the Moore family who had lost two sons during the disaster – the police officer had helped the family during the difficult time. Obama offered his condolences to the family “as a father, as a parent”, but also highly praised not only Gallagher but the Moores as well, for they had asked the President to publicly praise Gallagher for his help and support, even in their time of grief (H).

His national pride and confidence is rather clearly connected to his leadership style of compassion and believing in national unity to come through and survive any hardship. Furthermore, the fact that he knows these small details about something that had happened in various affected areas seem to show his close and personal involvement in the rescue and recovery efforts in terms of being in control, having hands-on approach and being in touch with the developments of the crisis to quickly and effectively react and respond.

Therefore, his discourse of national unity and narratives of heroism could be seen as another tactic of bolstering, referring to some positive aspects in the devastating situation. With his stories about heroism and people helping one another and coming together, he could be seen as drawing attention to the positivity, hope and confidence in the crisis as national unity is the key to survive the disaster. For example, he emphasised in his speech at the Red Cross that “people all over the country who have not been affected, now is the time to show the kind of generosity that makes America the greatest nation on Earth. And a good place to express that generosity is by contributing to the Red Cross”, as well as that “during the *darkest* storm, I think we also saw what's *brightest* in America” (C, emphasis added), after which he brought his examples of heroism by several people and insisted that it is a severe situation, yet it also brings forth the positive and praiseworthy nature in people. In this sense, he seemed to contrast the destructive disaster of nature with the benevolence of fellow Americans. At the end of the same speech he also stressed that

[t]his is a tough time for a lot of people /.../. But America is tougher, and we're tougher because we pull together. We leave nobody behind. We make sure that we respond as a nation and remind ourselves that whenever an American is in need, all of us stand together to make sure that we're providing the help that's necessary. (C, emphasis added)

Similar words and stress were echoed throughout his speeches (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I). The constant emphasis on national unity and heroism that was generated by the storm, and by other crises in more general terms, might also be viewed in some ways as a tactic of transcendence which “attempts to place the act in a more favorable context” (Benoit 1997: 181), i.e. the crises bring out the best in people and they realise how strong and capable they can be in spite of the frightening, destructive and serious situation.

The third image repair strategy of corrective action could perhaps be discussed under the present section and together with the discourse of renewal as these are in some ways related to one another. His strategies of corrective action and discourse of renewal were largely embedded in the discourse of national unity in which he emphasised the strength and courage gained and demonstrated during this devastating time, and what will be done to rebuild the community and restore calm. In other words, the speeches incorporated a somewhat positive sense of the crisis in terms of how this crisis will make the nation stronger, how they will all learn from it, and that during times like those, people have the opportunity to come together as a community and as a nation to help one another:

That's who we are. We're Americans. When times are tough, we're tougher. We put others first. We go that extra mile. We open our hearts and our homes to one another, as one American family. We recover, we rebuild, we come back stronger – and together we will do that once more. Thanks, God bless you, and God bless America. (G, emphasis added)

This week, we have been humbled by nature's destructive power. But we've been inspired as well. For when the storm was darkest, the heroism of our fellow citizens shone brightest. (G, emphasis added)

And during difficult times like this, we're reminded that we're bound together and we have to look out for each other. And a lot of the things that seem important, the petty differences melt away, and we focus on what binds us together and that we as Americans are going to stand with each other in their hour of need. (H, emphasis added)

In addition, in his address on the ongoing response and recovery efforts, the President asserted that “I want everyone affected by the storm to know this: You are not alone. We will *recover*. We will *rebuild*. We will *come back stronger* together” (I, emphasis added). The remarks on rebuilding and active recovery works are noted in several other speeches as well (F, G, H). What is more, after the disaster had hit, Obama declared in New York City that he had assigned a new person to be in charge of the rebuilding process because FEMA will be dealing with the recovery process and not so much with the rebuilding. Shaun Donovan, previously the head of the New York Housing Authority, was the chosen person to be appointed for the task (H). This step notes the sign of renewal in spite of the tragic and devastating event and accentuates the positive outcomes proposed by Meyers and Holusha (1986, cited in Ulmer et al. 2007b: 45-46). In other words, this might be viewed in terms of new evolving strategies, appearance of new competitive edge as well as in terms of the accelerated change. As the President asserted in New York City about the upcoming rebuilding process,

[o]n the federal level, because this is going to be such a big job, I wanted to assign *one particular person who would be in charge from our perspective, who would be our point person* – because *FEMA basically runs the recovery process, it doesn't focus on the rebuilding*. For that, we've got to have all government agencies involved. (H, emphasis added)

What is more, learning from the crisis and making changes based on the new knowledge and skills is also very visibly demonstrated in his address at the Red Cross in which he stated that

And part of *what we're trying to do here is also to see where are some resources that can be brought to bear that maybe traditionally are not used in these kind of disaster situations*. For example, there may be military assets that allow us to help move equipment to ensure that pumping and getting the flooding out of New York subway systems can proceed more quickly. There may be resources that

we can bring to bear to help some of the private utilities get their personnel and their equipment in place more swiftly so that we can get power up and running as soon as possible. (C, emphasis added)

Moreover, as mentioned above, he emerged as a leader and a hero during this crisis, yet he was not the only one – his embedded narratives reveal several heroic acts during the disaster, which all point to the heroes even amongst the public. For example, in New Jersey, President Obama told a story of a 15-year-old boy who had helped her disabled mother, “making sure that she was okay, and taking on extraordinary responsibilities for himself but also for his mom” (D). His praise for the FEMA, the Red Cross, several Governors and other officials could also be argued to be a part of the emergence of heroes. As he stated in his speech in New York City, “I want to thank the *outstanding leadership* that's provided *by state and local officials*” (H, emphasis added), among the numerous praises for the help and co-operation. It could also be suggested that the change in people is also visible through the narratives of heroism and other acts that bring the nation together, some of them already mentioned above.

All in all, it seems that in spite of the media's reports on the slow, ineffective and inefficient crisis response, rescue and repair efforts, President Barack Obama's crisis communication strategies did not overtly draw too much attention to the criticism received by the public and by the media. Instead, his communication revolved around a few strategies of image repair and restoration, and mostly emphasised the opportunities for renewal through praise, national unity and narratives of heroism to demonstrate the positivity, helpfulness and courage shown by everyone involved in and/or affected by the disaster induced by Hurricane Sandy. For not taking part of the blame game and demonstrating his leadership skills and abilities during the crisis through his communication strategies and tactics, President Barack Obama seemed to be able to show himself as a very compassionate, capable and hands-on leader of the nation. As *The*

Washington Post indicated at the time, “Hurricane Sandy could just be the turning point in Obama's campaign, contributing to his success and re-election” (Eskew 2012). How much influence his communication strategies and actions during the crisis had on the presidential election and his re-election, depends, to a great extent, on one's point of view. However, some presumption could be made based on the examination and analysis of President Obama's speeches together with the general contextual background information provided by the U.S. media at the time. The President appeared to use the strategies and tactics that would show him in a positive light – in control of and in touch with the situation, and as a strong, capable and compassionate leader of the nation. In terms of the number of possible image repair discourses, three tactics could be discerned from the President's speeches – defeasibility by pointing out some uncontrollable elements in the crisis situation, bolstering in order to emphasise his positive image and actions, and corrective action to reassure the public of repairing and rebuilding the affected areas. In connection to the latter, the President also seemed to rather strongly emphasise the more positive side of the crisis in which people can show great strength of character and courage but also learn from the situation and make positive and beneficial changes.

Conclusion

In the midst of the tight presidential election campaign in 2012 between President Barack Obama and the Republican candidate Mitt Romney, the United States was hit by a “superstorm” that was the second-costliest and one of the deadliest in recent U.S. history. Hurricane Sandy presented the President with a tough challenge, but it also gave him an opportunity to demonstrate his skills and abilities in crisis communication and to show himself as a strong leader of the nation. As it was indicated in the U.S. media, the storm had a political flavour to it that could have either strengthened or weakened Barack Obama's prospects of re-election. Therefore, the value of the present thesis lies in the study of the President's crisis communication strategies and tactics at that momentous time period, how he presented himself through the use of the chosen tactics, and their possible implications for the election.

The first half of the theoretical chapter of the thesis concentrated on the theory of crisis communication and on its general stages, while the second half presented two theories in the area of crisis communication to approach the chaotic, uncertain and complex situation that a crisis induces – image repair discourse and discourse of renewal. These led to the emphasis on leadership during crisis as people look to the leaders for guidance, compassion, care, comfort and strong leading skills and abilities, especially during times of devastation, destruction and trauma to restore peace and order. The final part of the theoretical framework gave an overview of the situation generated by Hurricane Sandy, its impact on the country and people, and its possible influence on the 2012 presidential election in general and Barack Obama's re-election in particular.

The second chapter of the thesis introduced the selected corpus for analysis and discussion. The corpus consists of nine speeches the President gave before, during and

after the hurricane, ranging from the time period of October 28 to December 12, 2012. The speeches were examined, dissected and analysed in light of the theories of crisis communication, image repair discourse and discourse of renewal.

By exploring the speeches, five recurring themes and patterns emerged in relation to the aforementioned theoretical framework. The themes and patterns were treated in separate sections, even though they were intertwined in demonstrating the complete picture of President Barack Obama's crisis communication strategies and tactics. The five themes and patterns were: crisis management and communication, emphatic display of co-operation, authority and expert knowledge, political leadership during the campaign period, and discourse of national unity and narratives of heroism.

Firstly, the President's crisis management and communication seemed to rely on giving instructions to listen to the state and local authorities who would provide people with relevant and important information on how to protect themselves and survive. Through the instructions, he alerted and warned the public of the imminent storm and its possible outcome. Moreover, his strategy also entailed praising the agencies and officials involved in the response, rescue and repair efforts, some of whom he lauded already before the hurricane hit to perhaps reassure the public that the most qualified and capable people are in charge of the critical situation. In other words, it could be argued that by doing this, he tried to communicate confidence.

Secondly, in every step of the crisis communication, the President accentuated the collaboration between the various agencies, departments and individuals, and that everyone involved acted in a spirit of co-operation to ensure the most effective and efficient response and rescue operations and repair processes. Thirdly, the President demonstrated his authority and expert knowledge to appear as a hands-on leader and in touch with the situation – he knew when the storm was due to strike, which were the most probable areas

to be affected, what kind of negative consequences and outcomes the storm would have on people's everyday lives and so on. He also stressed that the bureaucracy and the red tape would not be tolerated during the crisis and if any state or local official had a problem, they could call him personally at the White House.

The fourth theme examined his skills and abilities as the leader of the nation during a crisis situation and in the midst of the presidential campaign period – he emphasised that he does not care about the elections and during the tragic situation, nothing is more important to him than to manage the crisis as best he can. His strong leadership could also be discerned from his addresses in which he was shown as being personal, compassionate and caring. The final recurring theme in his speeches entailed discourse of national unity and narratives of heroism in which he drew attention to the strength and resilience of the Americans who come together as a nation in tough times to help and support one another.

The aforementioned five themes and patterns could be seen to have incorporated three strategic and tactical elements of image repair discourse – defeasibility, bolstering, and corrective action, all of which were used to insert small pieces of image restoration details into his addresses. In terms of defeasibility, the President tried to assign some control over the situation and responsibility of response and preparedness efforts to the people in the affected areas. He stressed that people have to listen to the instructions and when they have been ordered to evacuate, then they ought to do it so they would not put first responders at risk and there would not be fatalities that could have been avoided.

Through the display of co-operation and positive actions, he tried to strengthen the positive feelings and opinions towards the administration in general and himself in particular, which all referred to the elements of bolstering strategy proposed by Benoit (1997). They also referred to the two additional strategies to maintain one's image, proposed by Garnett and Kouzmin (2007) – drawing attention to the strong co-operation by

forming alliances and ingratiating himself with the leaders of various agencies as well as with important officials and even states' governors. It could be suggested that all of it was done to win the public's favour and gain support and approval.

Obama's third image repair strategy included corrective action to assure the public that order and normality will be restored and the destructive areas will be rebuilt. The latter could be seen to be connected to the discourse of renewal – his addresses very visibly emphasised the elements of the discourse of growth, rebuilding and renewal as an opportunity to see positive facets in a crisis, offering educative value and moving beyond the destructive and devastating situation with newly obtained strength and wisdom. These elements came out very visibly in his discourse of national unity and narratives of heroism, in which he emphasised that even in the midst of the disaster, the Americans stand together, help one another and demonstrate strength and courage, but will come through the crisis even stronger than before. In this sense, the President managed to communicate positivity and optimism, encourage and inspire hope.

Through the demonstrations of authority and expert knowledge, the President was able to show himself as in control of the situation and in touch with every aspect of the crisis which, in turn, appeared to accentuate his capabilities and strength as a leader who can effectively and efficiently manage the crisis. His addresses seemed to reassure the public of a sense of stability and hope, reinforcing a perception of him as being compassionate and caring but also strong and determined to successfully overcome the crisis. Moreover, he was depicted through his speeches as putting the storm ahead of politics, indicating that his first priority was managing and coming through the crisis, not thinking about his political career and the presidential election.

It could be indicated that the above-mentioned crisis communication strategies and tactics that President Barack Obama used in his addresses during the crisis of Hurricane

Sandy were chosen to strengthen the President's image and to present him in a positive light in the midst of this tragic and negative event. Moreover, it could be supposed that his strong leadership skills and abilities in a crisis situation helped him to appear in control of the situation and ready to face the challenge of managing the crisis, especially considering the circumstances of the presidential election, bitter remembrances of Hurricane Katrina, and the opinions reflected in the U.S. media. Therefore, the President's chosen approach of managing the crisis might be considered a contributory factor in the success of winning the election and securing him a second term as President of the United States of America.

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RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL
INGLISE FILOLOOGIA OSAKOND

Pilvi Käiro

**Ameerika Ühendriigid kriisis: Sandy paneb president Barack Obama proovile
(The United States in Crisis: President Barack Obama tested by Sandy)**

Magistritöö

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Annotatsioon:

Käesolev magistritöö uurib Ameerika Ühendriikide presidendi Barack Obama kriisikommunikatsiooni võtteid ja meetodeid orkaan Sandy poolt põhjustatud kriisi ajal 2012. aastal.

Töö teoreetiline peatükk annab ülevaate kriisi ja kriisikommunikatsiooni olemusest ning käsitleb süvitsi kahte kõige tuntumat käsitlust kriisikommunikatsiooni valdkonnas – imago parandamine ja tugevdamine ning kriis kui võimalus uuendusteks. Lisaks rõhutatakse juhi rolli ja olulisust kriisi ajal. Esimese peatüki lõpus tuuakse välja ka orkaan Sandy tähenduslikkus tol ajahetkel ning selle katastroofi mõju rahvale. Töö teine peatükk keskendub töös kasutatud korpuse kirjeldamisele, mis koosneb üheksast Barack Obama kõnest nii enne kui pärast katastroofi kui ka selle kõrghetkel. Selles peatükis antakse ka ülevaade Ameerika meedias avaldatud kontekstuaalsest raamistikust, mis toob esile nii presidendivalimised kui ka George W. Bushi orkaan Katrina aegse ebaõnnestunud kriisikommunikatsiooni 2005. aastal. Töö kolmas peatükk analüüsib põhjalikult Obama kõnedest esile tulnud viit teemat: kriisijuhtimine ja -kommunikatsioon, tõhus koostöö, autoriteet ja asjatundlikkus, poliitiline juhupositsioon, ning rahvuslik ühtsus ja kangelaslikkus.

Analüüsi tulemusena selgub, et presidendi valitud kriisikommunikatsiooni strateegiad ja taktikad püüdsid jätta temast mulje kui tugevast ja võimekast liidrist sel raskel ja murettekitaval perioodil. Tema strateegiad rõhuvad mõningal määral inimeste endi vastutustundele ning oma tervise ja heaolu jaoks vajalike ennetavate meetmete rakendamisele. Lisaks on tema taktikates näha jooni oma kuvandi ja maine tugevdamisest, mis väljendub tähelepanu juhtimises erinevate organisatsioonide, osakondade ja inimeste vahelisele tublile koostööle. Kolmandat maine parandamiseks kasutatud strateegiat, parandavat tegevust, võib pidada seotuks vaatenurgaga, et kriis võib olla ka positiivne olukord ja sündmus, mis võimaldab ellu viia tuleviku jaoks olulisi, tulemuslikke ja positiivseid otsuseid. Võib oletada, et tänu hästi ja sobivalt valitud kommunikatsioonistrateegiatele ja väljapaistvatele juhtimisomadustele keset orkaan Sandy poolt tekitatud kaost ja ebakindlust suutis president Obama kindlustada endale ameeriklaste jätkuva poolehoidu, mis võis oma osa mängida ka tema võidu puhul 2012. aasta presidendivalimistel.

Märksõnad:

Ameerika Ühendriigid, orkaan Sandy, kriisikommunikatsioon, President Barack Obama

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