

Public Abstract

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Title:A Quantitative Analysis of Image Repair Strategies in Political Sex Scandals

High-profile sex scandals involving American politicians during the latter half of the 20th Century through to modern day have captured a significant amount of public and media attention. While such scandals have ended many political careers, there have been surprising instances of the rehabilitation and recovery of an offending politician's image and career, the success of which has proven difficult to predict. Research performed to date on the success of sex scandal image repair strategies have largely involved case studies, and particularly with respect to Benoit's Image Repair Theory, have been almost exclusively qualitative in nature; research into this topic has failed to comprehensively include an analysis of strategy effectiveness using public opinion polling, which is commonly employed in similar political science research. Consequently, conducting a polling-based quantitative assessment of image repair strategy effectiveness in the context of political sex scandals is appropriate. Specifically, using Benoit's Image Repair Theory framework as a foundation, a statistical analysis of emotional and cognitive responses to a politician and his sex scandal crisis response messaging with respect to each of the five image repair strategies as well as scenario context (e.g., moral versus criminal) is performed. Suggestions for the overall effectiveness of particular sex scandal response strategies is produced and discussed.