

**The “Reality” of Southwest:
A Content Analysis of Managing Organizational
Impression Tactics During a Season of ‘Airline’**

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Reality television captures audience’s attention through the “reality” experience and is produced to either entertain or to somehow educate. In 2003, the American-based Arts & Entertainment Channel set out to copy the British reality show ‘Airline.’ The show’s focus was a British international airline carrier who had allowed cameras to roam freely capturing the hairy experiences of travelers. Southwest is the main character in the American version of ‘Airline’ and the experience continues to pay off for the airline in terms of positive public relations. In order to investigate how such a seemingly negative portrayal of travel produces positive public perceptions of the organization, this study examined the show in light of Mohamed, Gardner, and Paolillo’s 1999 A Taxonomy of Organizational Impression Management. A content analysis was conducted to evaluate employees’ impression management tactics during both positive and problematic situations throughout the 18 episodes of the first season. The results indicate that the assertive tactics are consistently more effective in accomplishing and maintaining passenger satisfaction, and that defensive tactics should be used sparingly and only in situations where the organization needs to assert or maintain control of the situation at hand or its reputation.

INTRODUCTION

Impression management (IM) theory states that any organization must establish and maintain impressions that are congruent with the perceptions they want to convey to their publics (Goffman, 1959). From both a communications and public relations viewpoint, the theory of impression management encompasses the vital ways in which one establishes and communicates this congruence between personal or organizational goals and public perception. Public relations, when viewed from an impression management perspective, can be defined as strategic communication processes that help to manage, protect, and enhance the reputation of an organization, its members, and its services. The idea that ‘perception is reality’ is the basis for both the foundational concepts of public relations and the social psychology theory of impression management. Both are framed around the presumption that other’s perceptions of you or your organization become the reality from which they form ideas and the basis for intended behaviors.

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The examination of an organization's interactions with its publics and the effects of those interactions on perceptions bring the theory of impression management into play. The organization must be consistently driven by a clear vision of its goals and purposes to be able to actively translate them into effective impression management practices.

The purpose of this study is to examine Mohamed, Gardner, and Paolillo's (1999) *Taxonomy of Organizational Impression Management*, and its relevance and effectiveness in an organization's attempts to maintain goal-oriented impressions. The subject of the study is the reality series 'Airline,' which follows the exploits of Southwest Airline passengers and employees as they battle everyday issues of lost luggage, delayed flights, drunken passengers, and a multitude of other dramatic and sensitive situations. A content analysis of employees' actions toward passengers, the key public for Southwest, tested the validity of the OIM taxonomic chart and its effectiveness by examining whether actions taken by employees do indeed create the intended results according to the taxonomic chart. The study also sought to review and analyze the types of organizational impression management (OIM) tactics that were employed most often (direct assertive or direct defensive), in what types of situations (positive or problematic), and with what degree of effectiveness. By establishing the connection between a theoretical taxonomy and practical applications, both communications and public relations practitioners can benefit from a more prescriptive tool.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Goffman presented the concept of impression management in his seminal 1959 work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Impression management is viewed dramaturgically, explaining the motivations behind complex human performances within a social setting based on a play metaphor (Dillard et al., 2000). Goffman suggests that social establishments may be profitably studied from an impression management point of view where teams of performers cooperate to present their audience with a created definition of the situation (p. 238).

Goffman's work is written from a symbolic interactionist perspective, emphasizing a qualitative analysis of the interactive nature of the communication process (Barnhart, 1994). The actor, the organizational representative in this case, shaped by the environment and target audience sees interaction as a performance. The objective of the performance is to provide the audience with an impression consistent with the desired goals of the actor (Barnhart, 1994). The actor must cautiously maintain the constructed front to convince the audience of his/her appropriate use of behavior and consonance with the assumed role.

In regards to a team, the teams' performance serves to define the characteristics of the task and not that of the individual performer. Often, the purpose is to provide a positive definition of the team's service or product (Goffman, 1959). The team is part of an action group formed to achieve an end result. The end result relies on the ultimate goal of the organization or team and their ability to maintain constructed impressions. Dramaturgical discipline is necessary to act in ways that maintain the organization's

intended impressions. This discipline is a product learned behavior and a strong organizational culture.

Impression management has evolved from the micro to a macro-organizational perspective. In an effort to fill the void in literature, advance the IM theory and its utilization within organizations, as well as to stimulate further research Mohamed, Gardner, and Paolillo (1999) created a revised taxonomy of organizational impression management tactics. They drew upon the micro-level concepts of impression management and created macro-level taxonomy to illustrate how organizations attempt to regulate and control relevant information and to influence their publics to gain specific rewards. Organizationally, corporate actors who's legitimate right to operate is being challenged may embed self presentation strategies in their external discourse to control perceptions of their organization. An organization's legitimacy is derived "in a large part from having structures that are seen as appropriate" (Arndt, 2000, p. 494).

Dillard, et al's (2000) investigation of impression management practices implemented by the Ritz Carlton offers a prime example of organizational values and objectives that shape its culture. The Ritz has purposefully defined the impressions they want to portray through their *Motto, Credo* and *Steps of Service*. Their employees embrace the culture defined through these statements and therefore act in ways that maintain the appropriate impression to Ritz Carlton patrons.

Mohamed, Gardner, and Paolillo (1999) examine how organizations set out to purposely manage key audience impressions while conveying information about their products, services, and achievements through both conventional and newer media avenues. "Every organization has an interest in seeing its definition of reality accepted, for such acceptance is an integral part of the legitimation of the organization and the development of assured resources" (Pfeffer, 1981, p. 109).

The first distinction made is that between direct and indirect IM tactics. Direct tactics involve techniques in communicating about one's traits, abilities, and accomplishments. Direct tactics may be further divided into assertive and defensive tactics. Assertive tactics are used in situations in order to bolster the image in an opportunistic way, while defensive tactics are developed in response to an incident where undesirable qualities may be assigned to the actor. Goffman (1959) sees actors as using defensive tactics in response to a crisis situation to repair or minimize damage. Indirect tactics are taken from Goffman's techniques that "enhance or protect one's image by managing information about the people and things that one is simply associated" (p. 111).

Using a 2x2 design, the authors categorized tactics into direct versus indirect and assertive versus defensive, while at the same time realizing that, "none of these tactics are mutually exclusive since actors can easily use more than one at a time" (p. 111). Within the taxonomy, it is shown that organizations use direct/assertive tactics while presenting information to target audiences that create and enhance desirable images about the information directly related to the organization. Direct/assertive tactics

include: ingratiation, intimidation, organizational promotion, exemplification, and supplication. Each of these tactics has a specific intentional goal. See *Appendix B*.

Direct/defensive tactics are “used to protect the organization’s image by presenting information directly related to the organization to target audiences . . . to protect images created through assertive tactics, in order to fend off increased constituents demands and to avoid elevated dependence” (Mohamed, Gardner, and Paolillo, 1999, p. 119). These organizational tactics include: accounts, disclaimers, organizational handicapping, apologies, restitution, and prosocial behavior. See *Appendix C*.

In conclusion, Mohamed, Gardner, and Paolillo (1999) state that they have contributed to Tedeshi and Norman’s 1985 taxonomy by refining the terminology; making both general and specific distinctions between tactics. Their use of taxonomic blocks is a positive contribution to the practices of organizational impression management. They have taken the micro-level concept of impression management, as it applies to individuals, and applied it to the macro-organizational level. They believe that these micro-macro linkages can contribute to the study of IM by enabling researchers to advance hypotheses that can be empirically tested (p. 127).

SOUTHWEST AND ‘AIRLINE’

In the mid 1960s Herb Kelleher and Rollin W. King organized the idea for Southwest Airlines over cocktails while discussing the need for improved flight service between the cities of Houston, Dallas-Fort Worth and San Antonio. They conceptualized the unique hub-and-spoke airline pattern on a cocktail napkin. The existing airlines fought bitterly to keep Southwest, promising lower fares and on-time travel, grounded. After much legal warfare with Herb Kelleher as the legal front man, Southwest began commercial air service in 1971. Kelleher’s vision of the airline was based upon unconventional and sometimes risky propositions. Those risky propositions have paid off, as 2003 marked Southwest’s 31st consecutive year of profitability. Southwest has earned the reputation of the “United States’ most successful low-fare, high frequency, point-to-point carrier” (Southwest Airlines, 2005, para. 2).

With a past precedence for unconventional methodology, it is not surprising that Southwest was the only airline in America that agreed to the Arts and Entertainment Channel’s pitch for the reality show ‘Airline.’ When A&E approached Colleen Barrett, president and C.O.O. of Southwest, about the program, she reportedly said, “You’ve got to be kidding me.” But after Southwest’s publicity people convinced her it was a good idea, and she viewed the tapes of the U.K.’s show, she agreed (Fans of Reality TV, 2004, para. 5). Barrett recognized that she was taking a gamble but banked on the airline’s employees and their reputation for delivering quality customer service (Oldenburg, 2004). Today, after six seasons of airing, Southwest is soaking up the limelight of their reality show ‘Airline,’ sporting the tagline “We all have our baggage.”

The trust from Southwest executives in their employees stems from the long-time maintained reputation for supreme customer service in comparison to other airline competitors. Herb Kelleher created a culture that is centered on values that include humor, altruism, and "luv." Those values are first exemplified by how the organization treats its own employees. As Colleen Barrett has stated, "At Southwest, our employees come first" (Gimbel, 2005, p. 98). Employees' opinions and ideas are welcomed and the organization has always put their employees' wellbeing ahead of its own. In a 2001 article in *Fortune* magazine, Kelleher was quoted as saying:

Nothing kills your company's culture like layoffs. It's been a huge strength of ours . . . We could have furloughed at various times and been more profitable, but I always thought that was shortsighted. You want to show your people that you value them and you're not going to hurt them just to get a little more money in the short-term (p. 72).

The value Kelleher placed on employees over short-term financial fixes continues to pervade Southwest's leadership perspective. In January 2009, National Public Radio's Yuki Noguchi reported on companies that are going to great lengths find ways to cut costs during the current economic recession in order to retain employees. Southwest's vice-president of Human Relations, Jeff Lamb, was interviewed and stated, "There are a number of options you can choose before you do that. . . We haven't done it in 37 years, so the precedent certainly is that we're not going to use that as a means to cut costs" (Noguchi, 2009). On February 9, 2009, Southwest's CEO Gary Kelly discussed on CBS's "Sunday Morning," the negative effects of leaders who dole out perks to themselves at the expense of their employees by stating, "Certainly you want employees to feel like they are sharing the sacrifices with their leaders. It will not work if leaders treat themselves one way and their employees another way."

These organizational values passed on through generations of leaders have resulted in a strong organizational culture which can be seen by the simple fact the "it has employee turnover rates of 4 to 5%, in an industry where double those rates are typical" (Reichheld, 2001, p.13). Its commitment to customer service has been duly recognized by organizations throughout the United States and this valued culture is the reason for Barrett's confidence in its employees. As she said, "I never would have agreed to it if I didn't have great trust in our people" (Barrett, 2004).

It is important to note that although the Arts and Entertainment Channel approached the airline with the concept for the show, Southwest did not receive any monetary compensation nor were they granted any editorial control. The only editorial concession made to Southwest was that they could, at times, provide narratives to further explain situations caught on tape. A&E crews filmed for six months out of the year at four of Southwest's hubs: Los Angeles International (LAX), Chicago Midway, Baltimore/Washington International, and Houston Hobby airports. Hosted and produced by the Arts and Entertainment Channel, the show taped three seasons with each season consisting of 18 thirty-minute episodes, and now currently airs as re-runs. In its first season, 2003, the show gained over one million viewers and tripled Southwest's

online applications for employment each Tuesday following a Monday evening airing of an 'Airline' episode. In a 2004 *USA Today* article, vice president of documentary programming at A&E, Nancy Dubuc, discussed why the show appeals to the public on a personal level:

When you go to cocktail parties, there is always somebody talking about the long delay on their last flight. Everyone in the room wants to share their travel stories—the love-hate relationship we have with air travel. It's that common connection (The Associated Press, para. 3).

The show also allows the television viewing audience to create emotional and empathetic ties to Southwest employees. In the same 2004 article, president and COO, Colleen Barrett stated that, "the program might even make passengers behave better by showing them the stress that airline employees face every day" (The Associated Press, para. 5).

Through the use of the reality show format, Southwest has successfully accomplished portraying impressions of its organization that are congruent with its core values and working principles. Since its first season, the show has been recognized as a successful public relations and marketing tool for the company. In an online article featured in *Plane&Pilot*, retired TWA pilot Captain Dave Gwinn said, "Airline lets it all hang out, but it also shows Southwest employees solving the problems. I thought it was nuts [but] I quickly realized 'Airline' was one of the most brilliant advertising, public relations entities in decades" (Gwinn, 2004, para. 6).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to gain a clear understanding of OIM tactics used by Southwest employees, the frequency and degree of success with which the tactics are employed, the following research questions were asked:

RQ 1: Which OIM assertive tactics are used most frequently?

RQ 2: Which OIM defensive tactics are used most frequently?

RQ 3: Is there an association between the type of storyline (positive or problematic) and the use of certain types of tactics (assertive/defensive)?

Within the taxonomic chart, the direct and indirect tactics are broken down into specific action-based tactics. This study focused on the two types of direct tactics: assertive and defensive. As described and defined in the chart by Mohamed, Gardner, and Paolillo (1999), assertive tactics are opportunistic, intended to bolster the organizational image, whereas defensive tactics are intended to minimize or repair the organization's image in response negative occurrences. The situations shown on 'Airline' are either positive, giving employees the opportunity to bolster their publics' perceptions of Southwest, or problematic necessitating the use of tactics to minimize

risks or deflect potential reputation damage. Discovering the tactics used and with what frequency, facilitates a more practical understanding of how individuals instinctively employ them.

RQ 4: What level of passenger satisfaction is evident in the 2003-04 season of 'Airline'?

Passenger satisfaction was coded for in each segment. Passenger satisfaction may seem ambiguous in nature to determine; however, the coders agreed to an operational definition of satisfaction as, "at the end or resolution point of the storyline, the passenger(s) expressed satisfaction through either appearing happy or explicitly stating satisfaction with the service and/or situational resolution solution." It is understood that during a full season of 'Airline' more negative than positive storylines are featured. It is for entertainment purposes that the Arts and Entertainment Channel's producers choose storylines showcasing disgruntled passengers. It was important to determine the level of perceived passenger satisfaction as discovering the level of satisfied passengers helped to later determine the most effective tactics. Although it may seem counterintuitive to code for passenger satisfaction for both positive and problematic storylines, it was necessary to determine the overall audience perception of passenger satisfaction in terms of an entire season of the show.

RQ 5: Is there an association between customer satisfaction and tactics employed by Southwest Airlines personnel?

Contrary to the assumed perceived effects of negative storylines, the show has resulted in positive public relations for Southwest. It stands to reason that Southwest employees must employ tactics that pacify passengers in problematic situations and facilitate the maintenance of an overall positive organizational image. In finding whether associations exist between passenger satisfaction and type of tactic employed, the effectiveness of organizational impression management can be measured in terms of tactical effects on public perception and stakeholder satisfaction.

METHODOLOGY

A content analysis was conducted to analyze the uses of OIM tactics during one entire season of the Southwest reality show 'Airline.' This consisted of content analyzing 18 thirty-minute episodes from the first season. The total footage time analyzed was six hours and thirty-six minutes. A coding sheet was used for each episode, including all assertive and defensive tactics, types of storylines and segments within the stories themselves. For inter-coder reliability, two coders were trained and used in addition to the researcher, for a total of three coders. Each episode's sheet was coded with the episode number, storyline number, type of storyline, type of problem, and segment number for each line of episodic coding. The training session for the other two coders included a tutorial of the operational definitions of passenger satisfaction, employee effectiveness, and of each organizational impression management tactic. The coders were given a sheet with the working definitions of each OIM tactic to refer back to during the coding process. Prior to coding we viewed two episodes of 'Airline' to

become familiar with the show itself, how to define the tactics employed, and the pace of the show. Each segment was then coded for passenger satisfaction, the effectiveness of the Southwest employee in handling the situation, and the impression management tactic used.

Each storyline within an episode of 'Airline' was coded separately. There can be up to seven storylines per 'Airline' episode. The situation (either positive or problematic) was indicated for each storyline. If the storyline was problematic, then the type of problem was stated. The categories created included: delayed flights, missed/overbooked flights, lost/damaged luggage, inebriated passenger(s), and "other." This category included problematic situations having to do with tickets, "customers of size" (a Southwest term for passengers who must purchase another ticket because of their large physical size), passengers with medical issues, lost persons, and random events that included indecent exposure or in one instance a man who was denied boarding due to poor hygiene.

The final outcome was then recorded for passenger satisfaction and for the Southwest employee's effectiveness in handling the situation using the chosen OIM tactic. Finally, drawing from Mohamed, Gardner, and Paolillo's 1999 taxonomic chart, the primary direct tactic used by Southwest employees in each storyline segment was categorized. Many factors were considered in determining the unit of analysis. Each full episode consisted of up to seven storylines shown in segments throughout the show. These segments cut back and forth from each situation until the end of the show when all issues were resolved or came to a conclusion. It was determined that one unit of analysis consisted of the predominant direct OIM tactic employed by a Southwest employee (or employees) during each segment. A segment was defined as the cut-back to a complete conversation or interaction that occurred between an employee and a passenger within the larger storyline.

The final category coded for the use of assertive and/or defensive direct tactics. Assertive tactics include: ingratiation, intimidation, organizational promotion, exemplification, and supplication. Defensive tactics include: accounts, disclaimers, organizational handicapping, apologies, restitution, and prosocial behavior. In all, 300 segments were coded. The measures were analyzed to discover which types of direct tactics were used most frequently and whether those tactics achieved definitional descriptions according the chart. Finally, a composite of the overall success of Southwest in accomplishing satisfied passengers was measured to better understand the show's attainment of popularity and public relations success.

RESULTS

The results are presented in two sections. The first section consists of descriptive statistics. The second section addresses correlations found between types of storylines and tactics as well as tactical use and passenger satisfaction.

Descriptive Data

There were three coders, including the researcher. Employing the Holsti method, the coders achieved an inter-coder reliability of greater than 90 percent agreement, as seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Inter-coder Reliability

Variable	%
Passenger Satisfaction	100
Southwest Employee Effectiveness	100
OIM Tactic	91

The content analysis data was analyzed to reveal the frequencies of storyline types, the types of problematic situations, and types of tactics used. The type of storyline is measured in terms of frequencies and percentages. Out of the 300 segments in the first season, 26.3 percent of the storylines are positive and 73.7 percent problematic. Of the problematic storylines, 32 percent fall within the category of 'other' (and while this is a large percentage, the issues were too diverse to consolidate), 24.3 percent deal with flight-related issues, 11 percent include passengers who were intoxicated, and 5.3 percent with luggage-related issues. Tables 2 and 3 illustrate these frequencies and percentages.

Table 2. Frequency of Types of Storylines

Variable	F	%
Positive	79	26.3
Problematic	221	73.7
Total	300	100.0

Table 3. Frequency of Types of Problems

Variable	F	%
Flight	73	33
Luggage	16	7.2
Intoxicated	33	14.9
Other	96	43.4
Total	221	100.0

The types of tactics were measured first by differentiating between assertive versus defensive OIM tactics and then by the usage of each of the eleven specific tactics named in the OIM taxonomic chart. The frequency of the type of tactics used, assertive versus defensive, was first analyzed. This is a total measure, evaluating tactical use throughout the entire season in both positive and problematic storylines. The data shows assertive tactics employed at a rate of 60.3 percent, and defensive tactics employed at a rate of 39.7 percent. Next, each of the eleven OIM tactics was

measured in terms of their frequency. Within the assertive tactics, ingratiation is utilized the most with 22.3 percent; exemplification, 18 percent; organizational promotion, 16 percent; and intimidation, 4 percent. These first four total the 60.3 percent of all assertive tactic use. The assertive tactic of supplication was never employed. Out of the remaining 39.7 percent consisting of defensive tactic use, accounts make up the majority with 29.3 percent; restitution, 6.7 percent; apologies, 3.0 percent; disclaimers, .7 percent. The defensive tactics of organizational handicapping and prosocial behavior were never employed. Table 4 illustrated the breakdown of tactic types and Table 5 illustrates specific tactic frequencies.

Table 4. Frequency of Type of Direct Tactic

Variable	F	%
Assertive tactics	181	60.3
Defensive tactics	119	39.7
Total	300	100.0

Table 5. Frequency of OIM Tactical Use

Variable		F	%	% Within Tactic Type
Assertive Tactics	Ingratiation	67	22.3	37
	Intimidation	12	4.0	6.6
	Org. Promotion	48	16.0	26.6
	Exemplification	54	18.0	29.8
	Supplication	0	0	0
Defensive Tactics	Accounts	88	29.3	73.9
	Disclaimers	2	.7	1.7
	Org. Handicapping	0	0	0
	Apologies	9	3.0	7.6
	Restitution	20	6.7	16.8
	Pros. Behavior	0	0	0
Total		300	100.0	100

In looking at the variable of passenger satisfaction, the coding instrument allowed for this to be coded in three different ways: satisfied, not satisfied, or not applicable. The category of 'not applicable' applied to the substantial percentage of storylines that were "puff" pieces (labeled as such by the coders) that did not affect immediate passenger satisfaction. As Table 6 will show, the percentages are as follows: 37.7 percent of

passengers were satisfied, 42.0 percent were not, and 20.3 percent of the segments were “puff” pieces and did not apply to specific passenger satisfaction. The measurement of effectiveness of Southwest employees was coded for and analyzed along with passenger satisfaction, although research questions did not directly address employee effectiveness. The SPSS analysis showed a high percentage rate of Southwest employee effectiveness in handling problematic passenger situations through the use of OIM tactics. Results showed employee effectiveness at 72.7 percent and ineffectiveness at 11.3, leaving 16.0 percent that applied to segments not calling for employees to use any direct tactical skills.

Table 6. Frequency of Passenger Satisfaction

Variable	F	%
Satisfied	113	37.7
Not Satisfied	126	42.0
Not Applicable	61	20.3
Total	300	100.0

Cross-tabulations

Cross-tabulations were conducted with the data to examine the types of storylines and their relation to the types of OIM tactics employed. As seen previously, problematic storylines accounted for 73.7 percent, at a rate of almost three times that of positive storylines that accounted for 26.3 percent of the total segments shown. Numerically, out of the 300 segments coded, 221 were problematic and 79 positive. Within positive storylines, assertive tactics were used 96 percent, and defensive tactics used only 4 percent of the time. Alternatively, in problematic storylines there was a more even distribution of the different types of tactics. Here, defensive tactics were used 52.5 percent while assertive tactics were used at a rate of 47.5 percent. Table 7 illustrates the use of tactic type as related to type (positive or problematic) of story.

Table 7. Associations Between Type of Tactic and Type of Storyline

	Positive Storyline	Problematic Story.	Total
Assertive tactics	76 (96%)	105 (47.5%)	181
Defensive tactics	3 (4%)	116 (52.5%)	119
Total	79 (100%)	221 (100%)	300

Finally, the coding sheets were re-evaluated to find only final results of passenger satisfaction for each storyline. Out of the 95 storylines, 54.7 percent of the passengers ended up satisfied, 28.4 percent were disgruntled, and 16 percent were not

applicable, they were “fluff” storylines as explained later. Then the type of tactic used and passenger satisfaction were cross-tabulated to find any association between the two. Out of the 52 satisfied passenger end results, 80.7 percent were handled by assertive tactic use and 19.2 percent by defensive tactic use. Out of the 28.4 percent of the storylines ending with passengers who were dissatisfied, assertive tactics were used 51.9 percent and defensive tactics were employed 48.1 percent of the time. This indicates that a large majority of the situations resulting in satisfied passengers were handled with assertive tactics, while those passengers who remained dissatisfied were not as affected by tactic type. Refer to Table 8.

Table 8. *End Results for Passenger Satisfaction and Type of Tactic Employed*

Variables		End Type	
		Assertive	Defensive
End Result	Satisfied	42 (75 %)	10 (41.7%)
	Not Satisfied	14 (25%)	13 (58.3%)
Total		56 (100%)	23 (100%)

DISCUSSION

The results have shed light on the validity of the taxonomy of organizational impression management tactics and its usefulness in dealing with an organization’s publics. The tactics provide ways to create or maintain positive public impressions or minimize or repair an organization’s image when facing potentially damaging events.

RQ1: Which of the assertive tactics are used most frequently?

Assertive tactics were employed at a rate of 60.3 percent during the first season’s 18 episodes. It is important to note that assertive tactics were used heavily in both positive and problematic storyline situations. Of the assertive tactics, ingratiation was used 37 percent of the time. This may be because of its general definition of making the organization appear more attractive to its publics. The generality of the tactic allows it to be seen as being used in a variety of positive situations that include efforts made by the organization to endear itself to its publics. Assertive tactics are useful tools to foster and create impressions of attractiveness, competence, social responsibility, integrity, effectiveness, or successfulness. One of the most evident reasons for the frequent use of ingratiation is that it appears in positive storylines measured for passenger satisfaction as well as almost exclusively during “puff pieces.” Once again, “puff pieces” are those that are more public relations oriented and do not lend themselves to passenger satisfaction measurements as they do not apply to specific passenger situations.

An example from a storyline that was measured for passenger satisfaction includes the episode in which Mike, a Southwest manager at LAX, is called upon to deal with an elderly passenger who has defecated on himself. Mike finds the man in question in a wheelchair, and accompanied by his wife. Mike explains that he has been made aware of the situation, as other passengers have complained about the odor. The woman, weeping and embarrassed, tells him that her husband has Alzheimer's and cannot help himself. Mike not only comforts the woman, but also gathers wipes and gloves and helps her clean and change the man in time for the next flight. In many of the storyline's segments, ingratiation was used as Mike's actions conveyed the organizational value of altruism. At the end of the story, the woman is boarding the flight home with her husband as she expresses her gratitude to Southwest and to Mike for his compassionate assistance.

Another example from a "puff piece" in which ingratiation was used heavily is the episode featuring a pilot who is retiring after flying for Southwest for 25 years. Employees have arranged for the pilot's family and friends to be passengers aboard his last flight and for him to choose his final flight crew. When the flight lands, he is treated to a surprise party and welcomed by, Southwest co-founder, Herb Kelleher. Here ingratiation was coded for each time a segment about the storyline appeared as the actions of the organization helped to enhance organizational impressions.

RQ2: Which of the defensive tactics are used most frequently?

In total, defensive tactics were used 39.7 percent of the time. Ninety-eight percent of the defensive tactics employed occurred during problematic storylines. The defensive tactic of accounts was used most frequently. Accounts made up for 73.9 percent of the defensive tactics employed during the first season. Out of the 119 times defensive tactics were employed, accounts were used 88 times. This frequent use was due to the informative actions of the employees as they attempted to explain the predicament-creating event while trying to minimize the negative effects of the situation.

In one storyline, the parents of a toddler failed to bring proof of age for their child and have to buy another ticket to fly the family home. The Southwest employee uses the tactic of accounts as she explains the policy but then assures them that if they later send the proof of age in to Southwest the cost of the ticket will be refunded to them. Accounts do not ensure passenger satisfaction, as that is depends not only on the employee's actions but also on the passengers' disposition and personal situation. They are, however, used to minimize possible negative reactions to the predicament-creating event.

RQ3: Is there an association between type of storyline and type of tactic used?

There are two associations between type of storyline and type of tactic employed. The first association lies between positive storylines and assertive tactics. This association is substantial as assertive tactics were used 96 percent of the time during positive storyline situations. Although assertive tactics were used during

problematic situations also, they were not the majority tactic used. In positive situations, assertive tactics helped to boost the organization's image by taking advantage of opportunities to make a positive impression. It makes practical common sense that when the opportunity presents itself, an organizational agent will present positive impressions that reinforce the organization's values and competencies.

The second association is between defensive tactics and problematic storylines. This association lies in the fact that only in problematic situations do we see a regular use of defensive tactics. The defensive tactical use during positive storylines was only 4 percent. Within the first season's problematic storylines, defensive tactics are used 52.5 percent of the time. Once again, this makes practical public relations sense as the use of defensive tactics suggest that the organization is in a position in which it must defend its image and/or reputation and will want to do so only when necessary.

RQ4: What level of passenger satisfaction is displayed in the 2003-2004 season of 'Airline'?

The passenger satisfaction rate throughout the 18 episodes is measured at 54.7 percent. This is more impressive than it would initially seem. The "puff pieces" were excluded from this measurement, as they did not lend themselves to coding for passenger satisfaction. The "puff pieces" accounted for roughly 20 percent of the total storylines featured during the season's 18 episodes. Remember also, that problematic storylines outnumbered positive ones at a rate of three times. This indicates strong evidence to suggest that Southwest employees effectively used organizational impression management tactics in order to produce a passenger satisfaction rate of more than half. This percentage of satisfied passengers translates into the successful use public relations practices employed by Southwest employees in mostly negative situations to result in positive outcomes.

RQ5: Is there an association between level of customer satisfaction and tactics used by Southwest?

Of the percentage of storylines that ended with satisfied passengers, assertive tactics were measured and found to be used 80.7 percent of the time. It is evident that the use of assertive tactics that show the organization as caring, responsible, competent, and effective are seen to net better end results for passenger satisfaction, especially when dealing with problematic situations. Even in the toughest of situations, when assertive tactics are employed passengers are more likely to realize that employees are doing all they can to help remedy the situation.

CONCLUSIONS

The study showed that even in the face of negative situational occurrences, organizational actors have the ability to help maintain positive public perceptions through dissemination of information and reinforcing the positive attributes and values of the organization. The storylines were predominantly negative, and yet because of

Southwest's strong culture their employees consistently handled situations with the organization's key values in mind. These values influenced their actions and, in a majority of cases, resulted in a higher rate of passenger satisfaction. Assertive tactics were employed in 80.8% of the problematic storylines that ended in passenger satisfaction. Defensive tactics, other than accounts, should be reserved for when the organization must defend itself, its image, or put its larger publics' interests ahead of individual consumer interests. It is also wise to follow a defensive tactic with an assertive tactic, once again ending a message in a positive way that reaffirms the organization's goals and values.

As Benoit (1997) stated, "image is a central concept to the field of public relations" (p. 177). However, the field of public relations continues to search for a strong definitional concept of itself and its practices. The dilemma lies in other's recognizing public relations as a credible science of communication and planned action. Popular opinion seems to hold to the concept that the practice of public relations is a "fly by the seat of your pants" activity rather than one consisting of scientific and cultivated processes. Coombs and Holladay (2007) address common criticism of public relations as being manipulative and self-serving, as well as the misconceptions that at its core it is publicity. They make a case for the importance of professional work and scholarly research in the continuance of constructing a service-based definition of public relations in terms of serving stake-holder's interests.

The practices of public relations apply to both the day-to-day activities of an organization as well as to the inevitable occurrence of crises. This study has shown the relevance of the tactics as defined by the OIM taxonomy and has witnessed the tactics accomplish their explicit definitional intentions. Mohamed, Gardner, and Paolillo's 1999 taxonomic chart reveals how the principles and tactics therein apply to true organizational practices and are realistically functional for the maintenance of an organization's impression management goals. Both public relations practitioners and organizational actors can use and understand the OIM taxonomy. The chart defines tactics in such a way that they are easily understood and can be applied to reinforce positive impressions of the organization or to minimize problematic situations.

Finally, it is imperative to realize that organizational culture has the power to predict its impression management behaviors. As public relations practitioners, it is much easier to represent an organization whose interests and values are congruent with the publics it serves. 'Airline' allows the public to witness Southwest's culture, and the way in which it permeates the behavioral decisions of its employees. This culture allows for its employees to make assumptions about how to best handle some of the most trying situations involving their passengers with as much composure, humor, and competence as possible.

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APPENDIX A
CODING INSTRUMENT FOR EACH AIRLINE EPISODE:

<u>Column</u>	<u>Variable</u>	<u>Values</u>
/1-2	Show #: `	01-18
/3	Storyline #:	1-8
/4	Type of storyline:	1. Positive 2. Problematic
/5	Passenger Problem:	1. Delayed/missed/overbooked flight(s) 2. Lost/Damaged Luggage 3. Inebriated 4. Other _____ 5. No problem ("fluff" piece)
/6	End result (passenger satisfaction):	1. satisfied 2. Not satisfied 3. Not applicable
/7	End result (Southwest perspective):	1. effective 2. Not effective 3. Not applicable
/8	Segment #:	1-8
/9-10	Primary tactic	Assertive 11. Ingratiation 12. Intimidation 13. Organizational Promotion 14. Exemplification 15. Supplication Defensive 21. Accounts 22. Disclaimers 23. Organizational Handicapping 24. Apologies 25. Restitution 26. Prosocial Behavior

APPENDIX B

TABLE 1^a
Direct and Assertive Organizational Impression Management Tactics

Behavior	Definition/Description	Examples
Ingratiation	Behaviors that are used by organizational actors to make the organization appear more attractive to others.	Promotional campaigns by the armed services which portray their branch of the military as providing attractive career opportunities.
Intimidation	Behaviors that present the organization as a powerful and dangerous entity which is able and willing to inflict harm on those that frustrate its efforts and objectives.	A large manufacturer that threatens a small supplier with a reduction of orders unless it terminates its relationship with one of the firm's competitors.
Organizational Promotion	Behaviors that present the organization as being highly competent, effective, and successful.	An organization that attributes the phenomenal sales of a new product to its savvy marketing campaign.
Exemplification	Behaviors that are used by the organization to project images of integrity, social responsibility, and moral worthiness; this tactic may also have a goal of seeking imitation by other entities.	Fund-raising campaigns by the United Way which highlight the moral worthiness and social benefits that accrue from the charitable causes the organization supports.
Supplication	Behaviors by the organization that portray an image of dependence and vulnerability for the purpose of soliciting assistance from others.	Domestic firms that emphasize their vulnerability to foreign competition while lobbying for tariffs and other forms of trade protection.

^aThis table is based on the taxonomy of self-presentational strategies advanced by Jones and Pittman (1982).

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APPENDIX C

TABLE 2^a
Direct and Defensive Organizational Impression Management Tactics

<i>Behavior</i>	<i>Definition/Description</i>	<i>Example</i>
Accounts	Explanations of a predicament-creating event which seek to minimize the apparent severity of the predicament.	Top management downplays the severity of their firm's bankruptcy, stating that Chapter 11 really means, "There's still hope."
Disclaimers	Explanations given prior to a potentially embarrassing action in order to ward off any negative repercussions for the actor's image.	Notices by brokerage firms which warn prospective investors that "Past performance is no guarantee for the future."
Organizational Handicapping	Efforts by an organization to make task success appear unlikely in order to provide a ready-made excuse for failure.	Remarks by an aerospace manufacturer's CEO that it is unlikely to outbid a French firm for a foreign contract because it is subsidized by the French government.
Apologies	Admissions of blameworthiness for a negative event which include expressions of remorse and requests for a pardon.	A manager tells a customer, "We're sorry for the delay in shipping your order. We pride ourselves on timely deliveries, but we slipped up this time. Please forgive us."
Restitution	Offers of compensation which are extended by the organization to the offended, injured or otherwise harmed an audience.	Airline passengers who are bumped from a flight due to overbooking are provided with vouchers for free round-trip tickets to any domestic destination of their choice.
Prosocial Behavior	Engaging in prosocial actions to atone for an apparent transgression and convince an audience that the actor merits a positive identity.	A southern university that attempts to atone for past racial discrimination by offering an extensive array of minority scholarships and aggressively hiring minority faculty and administrators.

^aThis table is based on the taxonomy of impression management behaviors advanced by Tedeschi and Norman (1985).

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APPENDIX D

Table 1. *Inter-coder Reliability*

Variable	%
Passenger Satisfaction	100
Southwest Employee Effectiveness	100
OIM Tactic	91

Table 2. *Frequency of Types of Storylines*

Variable	F	%
Positive	79	26.3
Problematic	221	73.7
Total	300	100.0

Table 3. *Frequency of Types of Problems*

Variable	F	%
Flight	73	33
Luggage	16	7.2
Intoxicated	33	14.9
Other	96	43.4
Total	221	100.0

Table 4. *Frequency of Type of Direct Tactic*

Variable	F	%
Assertive tactics	181	60.3
Defensive tactics	119	39.7
Total	300	100.0

Table 5. *Frequency of OIM Tactical Use*

Variable		F	%	% Within Tactic Type
Assertive Tactics	Ingratiation	67	22.3	37
	Intimidation	12	4.0	6.6
	Org. Promotion	48	16.0	26.6
	Exemplification	54	18.0	29.8
	Supplication	0	0	0

Defensive Tactics	Accounts	88	29.3	73.9
	Disclaimers	2	.7	1.7
	Org. Handicapping	0	0	0
	Apologies	9	3.0	7.6
	Restitution	20	6.7	16.8
	Pros. Behavior	0	0	0
	Total	300	100.0	100

Table 6. *Frequency of Passenger Satisfaction*

Variable	F	%
Satisfied	113	37.7
Not Satisfied	126	42.0
Not Applicable	61	20.3
Total	300	100.0

Table 7. *Associations Between Type of Tactic and Type of Storyline*

	Positive Storyline	Problematic Story.	Total
Assertive tactics	76 (96%)	105 (47.5%)	181
Defensive tactics	3 (4%) 79 (100%)	116 (52.5%) 221 (100%)	119 300
Total			

Table 8. *End Results for Passenger Satisfaction and Type of Tactic Employed*

Variables		End Type	
		Assertive	Defensive
End Result	Satisfied	42 (75 %)	10 (41.7%)
	Not Satisfied	14 (25%)	13 (58.3%)
Total		56 (100%)	23 (100%)