

ABSTRACT

Framing the Corporate Crisis: language, representation and blaming strategies in the UK media and implications for Public Relations

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The media framing of a crisis event has a significant impact on the public perception of the organisation involved and its crisis response. Framing involves the intentional selection of certain aspects of the story and the subtle use of language to create bias and indicate blame. Media framing therefore needs to be examined by PR professionals involved in managing crisis communications in order to avoid public censure and reputational damage.

This paper examines the media framing of a significant corporate crisis, the BP Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill in 2010, by exploring the referential strategies used in media reporting of the event. Drawing on news reports from three UK media sources the analysis focuses on stakeholder roles, exploring how such roles are linguistically constructed. Linguistic strategies of topic choice, evaluation and naming devices are explored to determine how they frame the story and indicate the media's evaluation of the company during the crisis.

The analysis suggests that the media return to familiar, cultural storytelling tropes in framing the crisis, representing stakeholders in recognisable roles of villains, victims or heroes. These stereotypical roles of opposing sides, antagonists and protagonists, are recycled each time a crisis occurs and shape public perception.