

BP is a British multinational oil and gas company, the fifth largest energy company in the world. On April 20, 2010, BP's Deepwater Horizon oilrig in the Gulf of Mexico exploded, killing 11 workers and leaking 4.9 million barrels of oil into the Gulf over the next 87 days, making it the largest accidental oil spill in history. BP's inadequate attempts to cap the flow led to destruction of beaches, marine and wildlife habitats, and the health and livelihood of local residents in the Gulf States. After a September 2011 government report put a majority of blame on BP, the company created a multi-page website to communicate its own message to the public. BP's *Gulf of Mexico Restoration* website uses these three strategies to try to repair its reputation: a kindhearted verbal strategy of sincere apologies and statistical accounts of financial compensation practices to highlight its corporate social responsibility; an active visual strategy of wildlife cleanup and local business restoration images to illustrate economic and environmental recovery and de-emphasize damage of the crisis; a forward visual and aural strategy of *Commitment to the Gulf* video to focus viewers on its commitment to improving scientific and engineering practices.

BP uses a kindhearted verbal strategy of sincere apologies and statistical accounts of financial compensation practices to highlight its corporate social responsibility. BP apologizes to victims and their families by powerfully stating, "we deeply regret this loss of life and recognize the tremendous loss suffered," (BP, 2013) to appear sympathetic to the public and combat the perceived insensitivity of BP's spokesperson and CEO, Tony Hayward. With statistical accounts of a "\$20 billion trust to satisfy claims" backed by the US government and "a total of \$8.2 billion" being paid by BP to individuals and businesses through claims since May 2010 (BP, 2013), BP shows that it's accepting responsibility for the accident and cooperating with the US government to indemnify those who were affected by the crisis with generous financial compensations. BP

uses this verbal strategy to overcome negative publicity the company received for focusing on blaming sub-contractors, Transocean and Halliburton, instead of concentrating on the victims. In his article "Crisis Management and Communications," Coombs emphasizes the necessity for a company to adopt apology and compensation strategies when victims suffer any serious harm (2007). Throughout the website BP uses only a verbal strategy when discuss the initial oil spill crisis and the past, rather than a visual strategy of images and large headings, to not draw attention to the damage and negative aspects of the crisis, but to subtly make aware that BP accepts responsibility and is sympathetic. Words are more powerful in stimulating deep intellectual interpretation and eliciting emotional response, which is why BP uses a verbal strategy to discuss its commendable leadership in taking responsibility and sympathy for victims. BP's apologetic tone and statistical accounts of financial compensation practices tie into its kindhearted verbal strategy to demonstrate to the public its corporate social responsibility in its crisis response.

BP uses a strategic active visual tactic of wildlife cleanup and local business restoration images to illustrate economic and environmental recovery and de-emphasize damage of the crisis. According to a November 2010 US Fish and Wildlife Services report over 6,100 birds, 600 sea turtles, and 153 dolphins were found dead and visibly oiled in the Gulf following BP's oil spill (Bryant, 2011). BP uses images of workers taking sediment samples for the Environmental Protection Agency to collect data and evaluate the impact of the oil spill on wildlife and the surrounding habitat, to show its dedication to restore natural resources harmed. According to Gaines-Ross in her article "Reputation Warfare," a company defending its reputation must partner with reliable third parties who will echo its message to the public, providing the company credibility (2010). BP also uses images of sea turtle patrols locating nesting turtles on Texas beaches and collecting and protecting turtle eggs. This visual strategically shows how BP is preventing mortality among affected wildlife and reducing additional damage, a proactive

approach that the company chooses to highlight because of its slow and inadequate response to cap the oil flow during the initial crisis. In order to keep good on CEO, Tony Hayward, and President Obama's promise to salvage businesses in the Gulf states impacted by the tragedy, by "making them whole," (Adams & Gabbatt, 2010) BP uses images of busy seafood markets in Florida to illustrate how the company supports one of the regions most vital industries by compensating businesses affected and restoring confidence in customers through new seafood testing procedures. Throughout the website the company uses a visual strategy, rather than a verbal strategy full of empty words, when emphasizing recovery efforts and future outlooks to focus viewers attention on the positives while showing action, illustrating with proof that BP is working to improve. BP chooses a visual strategy to point out its progression because visuals leave longer lasting effects on viewers, allowing the website's readers to walk away with an overall positive image of the company, the goal of BP's reputation repair website. BP's wildlife cleanup and local business restoration images fit into the company's active visual strategy to display the company's economic and environmental repair efforts and de-emphasize damage of the crisis.

BP *Commitment to the Gulf* video employs a forward visual and aural strategy to focus viewers on its commitment to improving scientific and engineering practices. BP uses this video to demonstrate its dedication to incorporating lessons learned from the accident into new procedures and designs of new technology to prevent a crisis like this from happening again. Aurally, BP Operations Manager Fred Lemond, a credible source for describing BP's scientific and engineering practices, states that the company shared what it learned with governments and the industry "so that we can all produce energy more safely" (BP, 2013). These aural promises of positive improvement and visuals of workers handling state of the art engineering technology specifically built by the company to assess the impact of the oil spill on the Gulf illustrate BP's success in improving its practices and engineering capabilities to restore the Gulf. Post crisis

updates on progression of recovery efforts and corrective measures as well as analysis of lessons learned are necessary steps for a corporate crisis of this magnitude (Coombs, 2007). Also in the video BP expresses its commitment to America by asserting that the company “supports 250,000 jobs in communities across America” and that over the last five years BP invested more in America than any other energy company (BP, 2013), while showing visuals of diverse BP employees in states all over America, showing BP is dedicated to all of America and not only the Gulf states that were impacted by the spill. The company describes its dedication to the American community to address President Obama’s concerns with BP’s unethical drilling practices and lack of concern for damage done to American communities (BBC, 2010). Given the severely damaging power of the criticism from the President of the United States, BP uses a combination of visual and aural strategies in its video to form a complete picture of its effective response by drawing on multiple senses through aurally stating how BP is improving with a credible source and showing a motion picture of the evidence rather than a still shot image. Seeing and hearing the same message at the same time in action allows for stronger communication transfer, which is why BP chooses a such an influential mix of visual and aural strategy to focus on the President’s main concern of improving practices for the future. BP’s *Commitment to the Gulf* video confirms the company’s forward visual and aural strategy to focus viewers on its commitment to improving scientific and engineering practices.

BP’s *Gulf of Mexico Restoration* website uses these three strategies to try to repair its reputation: a kindhearted verbal strategy of sincere apologies and statistical accounts of financial compensation practices to highlight its corporate social responsibility; an active visual strategy of wildlife cleanup and local business restoration images to illustrate economic and environmental recovery and de-emphasize damage of the crisis; a forward visual and aural strategy of *Commitment to the Gulf* video to focus viewers on its commitment to improving scientific and

engineering practices. BP uses its visual and aural strategies most effectively on its website because it uses each to focus readers on the positive future outlook of the company, validating the company's commitment to restoring the Gulf and America and dedication to improving practices to produce cleaner and safer energy. With help of BP's crisis response website to repair its reputation, BP recovered from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill crisis by reclaiming its spot as a top multinational energy corporation.

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