Image Restoration Theory: Analysis of Polish Deputy Prime Minister's Tweets in Response to Postponed Polish Presidential Election in 2020

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Abstract - Following Covid-19 pandemic emergence in 2020, the Polish presidential election was about to be either postponed and rescheduled to the latter date or organized remotely via postal voting. At that time, the Deputy Prime Minister of Poland and Minister for State Assets, Jacek Sasin, has famously decided to allocate 70 mln PLN to move forward with organizing the election on the initial date of 10th of May 2020, which in the end, did not take place. The incident was widely covered across the Polish press, social media, and news. Minister Jacek Sasin has become the subject of public outcry, online mockery, critical comments from the opposition politicians, derogatory press coverage; however, he has retained his political functions. The study objective is to analyze the image repair strategies that Minister Sasin has adapted in his tweets, and to assess the effectiveness of these strategies. The study revealed that Minister Sasin had used the following image repair strategies: evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness and, denial. The effectiveness of employed strategies was assessed as unsuccessful. More research is needed towards assessing image repair strategies on the Polish political scene.

Keywords*: Crisis, image repair theory, reputation, Twitter*

I. INTRODUCTION

The first round of voting for the Polish presidential election was planned to be held on the 10th of May 2020. Due to the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic, and an increasing number of Covid-19 cases, as well as enforced rules of social distancing with imposed lockdown, there was a public and political debate as to whether the election should be postponed to a later date. The two presidential candidates included the incumbent president Andrzej Duda, represented by the ruling party Law and Justice, and Mayor of Warsaw Rafal Trzaskowski, with the support of the opposition party Civic Platform. The governing alliance, namely the leading Law and Justice party with the Agreement party, has eventually come to the mutual agreement that the presidential election should be rescheduled to another date. This resulted in postponing the presidential election to a later date of 28 June 2020 (first round) and 12 July 2020 (second round) as ordered by the Marshal of the Sejm (Parliament), Elzbieta Witek, on the 3rd of June 2020. Nonetheless, prior to this

order, the Deputy Prime Minister from the ruling party Law and Justice Jacek Sasin has already allocated 70 mln PLN (the exact amount is stated as PLN 68,896,820) from the Polish national budget to organize the election by postal voting only on the initially planned election date of May 10th, 2020. As presented by some Polish media, the amount of 70 mln PLN was legally bound by few contracts between the Polish government and the printing company as well as with the state-owned Polish Post. As ordered by Minister, 30 mln voting ballot papers have been printed and paid for with the public budget money, even though there was no legal basis for such spending. The news about the 'wasteful' allocation of 70 mln PLN by Minister Jacek Sasin, without complying with any legal election procedures, was widely spread among Polish media. Consequently, his public reputation was damaged, requiring solutions to regain public trust and a positive image.

Image Restoration Theory argues that when one's reputation is threatened or damaged, one will engage in strategies aimed at restoring and repairing it. The effectiveness of these strategies is context and person dependant. Image Restoration Theory has been widely used in the political sphere. The topic of image repair has been mostly applied to studies of interviews, press releases, television, speeches, or media broadcasts (Eriksson & Eriksson, 2012; Hambrick, Frederick & Sanderson, 2013). The theory was not much investigated in the use of social media (Yaqub et al., 2017), for example, Twitter. Nevertheless, while an increasing amount of media coverage and political debates are occurring on social media platforms, the Image Restoration Theory has progressively started to be applied within a variety of social media analyses (Briki, 2009).

As of March 2021, Minister Jacek Sasin is followed by 55 thousand Twitter followers. To compare, Radoslaw Sikorski, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs, and a Member of the European Parliament, and Donald Tusk, a former President of the European Council, as well as a former Prime Minister of Poland, two most popular Polish politicians have around 1 million Twitter followers. Thus, although Sasin's Twitter account is not as popular as few other Polish politicians, some of his tweets have been echoed and recited across media news on multiple occasions, making it a valuable source of information for Polish public opinion.

Objective

The main purpose of this study is to identify and then analyze the most common strategies and their effectiveness used by Polish politician Jacek Sasin on his official Twitter account in response to May 2020 presidential election crisis. It is also the study objective to expand Image Repair Theory into the Polish political sphere. Literature review, two research questions, methods, results, findings, conclusion, and limitations, and future research are included in the paper.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Image Repair Theory

Image Repair (or Restoration) Theory was developed by William Benoit (1995) in order to study organizational response to a crisis. Image is a very important aspect of organizational or individual reputation, impression, and public relations (Benoit, 1997). The image crisis happens within the events, when an organization/person is perceived as responsible for the crisis, and the crisis of the action appears to be negative and offensive. The perception of the given audience about organization responsibility in terms of crisis and offensiveness of crisis is crucial. Thus, it does not matter if an organization or a person was responsible for the crisis in reality. Moreover, organizations invest a great effort to maintain a positive image.

The theory indicates what kind of message will be effective in restoring institutions' image during or after a crisis. Proposed image repair strategies are: denial (decreasing responsibility for the crisis by shifting blame or denying the act has happened); evasion of responsibility (provocation - the reaction to crisis was justified in these conditions or it was a response to another wrongful act; defeasibility - lack of resources or control to react properly, crisis happening due to accident, reaction toward crisis was meant to be effective and there were good intentions); reduce offensiveness (making the crisis appear to be less negative by bolstering- enhancing good reputation of the accused, minimization- reducing the perception of the problem, differentiation- comparing with worse crises or acts, transcendence- putting a crisis in a broader context, for example by arguing that the reaction to crisis brings more benefits than costs, attack accuser - accusing the one who made allegations toward organization, questioning their reputation, and compensation - apologizing and giving compensation to crisis victims); corrective action (promise that the crisis will be handled well, and the problem will be corrected) and mortification (taking responsibility and apologizing).

Image Repair theories were used in many research studies, covering many fields, including political ones. The most notable analysis of image repair, in accordance with the Image Repair Theory, includes the study of President George W. Bush after his approval ratings decreased due to U.S involvement and casualties caused by the Iraq war (Benoit, 2006). Used strategies included: denial, defeasibility, transcendence. Then, the unprecedented speech of Queen Elizabeth was well-researched in terms of used image repair strategies (denial, bolstering, defeasibility, transcendence) after the tragic death of Princess Diana (Benoit & Brinson, 1999). In addition, the former figure skater Olympian, Tonya Harding's interview was explored (used strategies included: bolstering, denial, attacking accuser) after the alleged attack on her rival, Nancy Kerrigan (Benoit & Hanczor, 1994).

The effectiveness of each proposed by Benoit (2006) strategy may depend on many factors such as the context of a crisis or an audience's characteristics. Nevertheless, based on past examples and cases, it has been generally assumed that one of the best ways to prevent politician's reputational damage and protect one's image is to apologize for mistakes (Sheldon & Sallot, 2009), hence use the strategy of mortification (Benoit, 2006).

2020 Polish presidential election

Poland has a multi-party system, with few competing political parties. Commonly, the government is formed by a coalition of two or more parties, as individual parties usually do not obtain sufficient power. Since 2005 (excluding the year 2016), the right-wing and center parties have dominated the Polish political sphere. The two most influential parties are the Law and Justice party, supporting social conservatism and economic, governmental involvement, and Civic Platform (later regarded as part of Civic Coalition together with the Modern party), representing the liberal-conservative approach. (Fundacja Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, 2011; Ewybory.eu). As shown, the usual voters support ranges between 20% till 40% for both of the parties, oftentimes with only slight differences between both parties. For example, only 1% of the difference between voters' support for each party was reported on May 2005, June 2006, September 2007, July 2013, September 2014, and April 2015 (Ewybory. eu). Since 2015, the Law and Justice party has dominated the government with the current result of 33% of voters support over newly created in 2020, Szymon Holownia's Poland 2050 party with 17% of support, and Civic Coalition with 11% of support. As shown, most of Law and Justice party voters come from small towns and villages, while Civic Coalition supporters are more likely to be located in big cities.

The Covid-19 pandemic has added tension to the political situation in the already divided country. According to early polls, the 2020 presidential election results were at the time hard to predict; hence the timing of the election was crucial for the leading ruling party, Law, and Justice. In April 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic was on the rise in the entire country, and the imposed lockdown and social distancing rules limited the usual practice of voting at the pre-arranged polling places. The leading ruling party, Law and Justice, was faced with a challenging decision as to whether organize postal voting or delay the election date at the risk of losing the election.

At the beginning of May, the Agreement party,

which is in a governing coalition with the dominant Law and Justice party, opposed the proposal to organize the presidential election on the original date of 10th of May 2020. Later, National Electoral Commission has also officially stated that it would be impossible to arrange the presidential election on the 10th of May. In addition, few presidential candidates, constitutionalists as well as politicians have expressed their criticisms towards the government over plans to pursue the original election date during the Covid-19 pandemic (Koper & Goclowski, 2020). As argued, the election organized by postal voting only would be unconstitutional as well as violating the confidentiality of voters. This criticism was also shared and expressed by three former presidents and six prime ministers.

Throughout the heightened political debate over the election date, as well as accompanied uncertainty as the 10th of May was approaching, few proposals were suggested by the political parties. The Agreement party opted for extending the president's term by two years, which was not accepted by the opposition parties. The Civic Platform party, which is the major opposition party, argued for moving the election date to May 2021. The Law and Justice party, which is the ruling party, insisted for the presidential election be organized by postal voting only at the initially scheduled date. This would entail appropriate changes in the election rules, as voting by post only is regarded unconstitutional in a Polish legal system. However, modifying election rules less than six months before the scheduled election date was ruled unconstitutional by the Constitutional Tribunal in 2011 (Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 2011).

Prior to attaining mutual agreement between political parties, the leading ruling party, Law, and Justice, has already initiated actions to organize the election on the 10th of May. As argued, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, coming from the Law and Justice party, has given orders to arrange the election on the 10th of May only by postal voting. On the 23rd of April, state-owned Polish Post sent emails to every Polish mayor, requesting to provide private data of 30 mln Polish citizens, including their national identification numbers, birth dates, and addresses. This request was later criticized by the majority of Polish mayors, lawyers, and politicians as unlawfully violating data privacy. Due to widespread public and political backlash in the early May, the two ruling coalition parties Agreement party and the Law and Justice party, have eventually come into agreement to postpone the presidential election. The first round of the presidential election was moved to the 28th of June 2020, with the second round on the 12th of July.

In September 2020, the administrative court in Warsaw had ruled that the Prime Minister's order to organize the election by postal voting on the 10th of May 2020 was in violation of with Constitution and unlawful (TVN24, 2020). Following the ruling, the opposition parties demanded both Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and Deputy Prime Minister Jacek Sasin to resign. At the end of May 2020, the vote of no confidence in Deputy Prime Minister Jacek Sasin was initiated by the opposition politicians; however, rejected by Sejm (Parliament).

Postponing the presidential election due to public health crisis, or any type of other emergency situation in Poland, is an unprecedented event. As stated in Constitutional article no. 228 (Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 1997), the presidential election can be postponed due to an imposed martial law, state of emergency, or state of natural disaster. However, none of these have been declared by the Polish government.

Twitter among Polish politicians

Twitter is a social media platform, which is very popular in the USA, and increasingly in Europe. It is slowly gaining more popularity among Polish politicians. It is the third most popular social media platform in Poland, with the most active users being politicians and journalists, as opposed to celebrities, musicians, or actors (Wyzsza Szkola Psychologii Spolecznej, 2013). Thus, Twitter in Poland has more of a political function, rather than an entertaining one. As of 2018, it has been reported that out of 460 MPs, only 315 had Twitter accounts, including 252 active users. Out of 100 Senators, 44 had a Twitter account, but only 24 of Senators were active users of Twitter (Hill + Knowlton Strategies, 2018). Nevertheless, tweets among Polish politicians appear to represent less official party standpoints, but rather present personal views of politicians. Links are often shared as part of these tweets.

Twitter is a medium, aimed not only at connecting politicians with an audience (Yaqub, Chun, Atluri &Vaidya, 2017) but also at initiating political debates between opponents. Before, there were many studies aimed at analyzing political debates occurring on Twitter through means of content analysis (Briki, 2019), with most applied to U.S. politics, especially presidential campaigns. Concerning the Polish political scene, recent famous, political 'Twitter battles' include President Andrzej Duda denying the circulating information that his wife had refused to shake hands with President Trump, calling it "fake news." Another example includes disagreement between Israel and Poland over the IPN ruling. There has not been much research published about the usage of Twitter among Polish politicians, and this paper might be one of the first ones.

Jacek Sasin's role in the 2020 Polish presidential election

Jacek Sasin has become a widely recognizable person within Polish society due to his involvement in the organization of the 2020 Polish presidential election. He was thought to allocate 70 mln for the presidential election, which did not take place. Consequently, he has encountered widespread public criticism and outcry coming from opposition politicians and media. Almost all the media articles were critical of Sasin's actions. Top opinion-forming media websites such as Onet.pl, RMF FM, TVN24, Rzeczpospolita, Wp.pl, Gazeta Wyborcza (Imm, 2021) presented these news numerous times and on different

occasions. As accounted, within the period from May 2020 up until February 2021, Gazeta Wyborcza has produced around 37 online articles on the mentioned topic (key searching words: "Sasin" and "wybory" meaning "the election" in Polish language, Gazeta Wyborcza, 2020). Onet.pl has published around 38 online articles (Onet.pl, 2020), RMF FM around 3 articles and 3 auditions (RMF FM, 2020), TVN24 around 17 articles (TVN24, 2020), Rzeczpospolita around 20 articles (Rzeczpospolita, 2020), while Wp.pl, around 52 articles (Wp.pl, 2020) .

It can be concluded that Jacek Sasin has become a well-recognized figure within Polish politics and society, not only due to his held high political position but also due to his actions related to the arrangement of May the 2020 presidential election. His portrayed online image can be described as negative or satirical, with numerous satire pictures as well as hashtags created on social media. The term 'sasin' has been satirically popularized as a form of a currency or a unit of a measure online. For example, InPost, one of the biggest private postal delivery companies, has promoted one of its services of "Instant deliveries" by pricing is at 0,0000001285714 sasins, which presumably equaled 9,99 PLN (Winogrodzki, 2020).

In this vein, Jacek Sasin's image presented by the media has deteriorated. As shown, the online poll asking respondents as to whether Jacek Sasin shall be dismissed from his current political functions as a result of his wrongdoings in attempting to organize the May 2020 presidential election was conducted (Bartkiewicz, 2020). The poll collected responses from a representative for Polish society sample of 800 respondents, over 18 years old, and was undertaken on the 3th and 4th of June 2020. The poll revealed that 55.7% of respondents have answered "Yes" to the proposal of dismissing Sasin, 20.7% of respondents have answered "No," while "I do not know" answer was selected by 23.6% of respondents (Bartkiewicz, 2020). Such opinion of the public represents a sufficient crisis in trust and reputation, requiring adaptation of image repair strategies (Benoit, 1997).

Sasin was interviewed on many occasions, and multiple articles in Polish media were written about him and his actions in relation to the presidential election. Many journalists have used Sasin's words and statements during interviews, calls, or government conferences as news headlines. While different media may cover the same statement differently, Twitter serves as a direct and accessible source of information about political statements, opinions, declarations, or promises, with no mediation of media or other commentators (Briki, 2019). Twitter also allows politicians for direct and immediate access to the public. This is particularly important in the events characterized by increased public attention and rapid developments, such as the decision to postpone the presidential election in May 2020, where shaping public opinion is crucial to prevent a reputational crisis.

Sasin's tweets contain mostly political content. This is shown in his responses to opposition politicians' tweets, the re-tweeting post of his colleagues from the Law and Justice party, promoting his own political agenda and actions, but also commenting on national, religious, cultural, and sports events. When it comes to the crisis related to his assumed payment of 70 mln PLN for organizing the 2020 May presidential election, Jacek Sasin has neither confirmed nor denied alleged accusations in his tweets. In one of his tweets, he has admitted that 'the democracy costs' hence indirectly confirming the allegations against him.

Despite Sasin's relatively low number of Twitter followers – 55.9 thousand – his account remains fairly active with new posts, including re-tweets. His tweets are published on average every 1-7 days. He joined Twitter in October 2017, and as of the 6th of April, has published overall 7305 tweets. Assuming he is a fairly frequent Twitter user, the average number of posts per day equals 0.35, thus one post per 3 days. Nonetheless, holding one of the top political positions in the country, while facing exceptionally high public criticism due to his actions constitutes a need for Image Repair Theory application and further analysis.

Crisis Timeline

While the crisis has happened during a relatively short period of time (April/May), the news coverage went far beyond this period. The research analysis did not cover the time period after November 2020; nevertheless, the crisis can be assessed as currently ongoing, due to continuous media coverage of the issue. It is still unknown what has happened with 70 mln PLN. The below list presents a thorough overview of the crisis and related events, relevant to Sasin's usage of image repair strategies.

Pre-crisis phase
6.04 - The ruling party Law and Justice passes legislation in Sejm to organize presidential election only by postal voting.

Crisis-phase
16.04 - Marshal of the Sejm (Parliament), Elzbieta Witek announces that the presidential election on. The 10th of May 2020 will go ahead.
16.04 - Prime Minister's Office orders postal workers (Polish Post Office) to "execute actions in the area of counteracting COVID-19, consisting in undertaking and carrying out necessary actions aiming at preparing and conducting the election of the President of the Republic of Poland by correspondence". PWPW (the Polish Security Printing Works) receives a similar letter - counteracting COVID-19, it is to print ballots, instructions for voters, and declarations that they will vote secretly and in person. Jacek Sasin, as Minister for State Assets, oversees Polish Post, while Mariusz Kaminski, Minister of the Interior and Administration, oversees PWPW. They are to sign contracts with the companies and to find

funding in the budget.

23.04 - Politicians from the opposition voice critics that election by postal voting only might be not democratic and logistically impossible.

23.04 - Ballot papers begin to be printed in some cities.

24.04 - Opposition party leaders submit a letter to the prosecutor's office. It regards the possibility of committing a crime by Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and Deputy Prime Minister Jacek Sasin in the organization of the correspondence election, namely illegal preparation of the presidential election despite the fact that the law permitting their organization had not been passed.

28.04 - "Providing the Polish Post with personal data of voters is a legal obligation of local governments," - writes the provincial governor Konstanty Radziwill (Law and Justice party) to the Mazovian mayors and village heads.

29.04 - Polish Post rejects individual citizen's requests to delete their personal data.

30.04 - As stated by the Polish government, Jacek Sasin is not responsible for printing voting ballot papers or preparing mail-in ballot packages. He also did not hire any private companies to prepare them. It is the Polish Post that is carrying out activities for the preparation of the postal election, based on the decision of Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki on April 16.

30.04 - There is a leakage of ballots papers as shown by one of the presidential candidates, Stanisław Zoltek.

4.05 - Deputy Law and Justice Minister Waldemar Buda has admitted in an interview that the May 10 election is at risk.

4.05 - The government is being accused again of ordering the printing of the ballots. The government blames PKW (National Electoral Commission) for this.

5.05 - Senate rejects the bill on postal voting in the presidential election. The bill goes back to the Sejm.

6.05 - 8.05 - Sejm rejects Senate veto. President Andrzej Duda signs the legislation for the new law on universal postal voting during the election.

8.05 - 9.05 - There is a political agreement between Jarosław Kaczynski and Jarosław Gowin, two leaders of two ruling parties, to postpone the election.

8.05 - The Polish Post defends itself - it did not start the distribution of election packages and did not order the printing of the ballot papers.

12.05 - The new election law is passed. It replaces the law on voting by mail only, which was signed by President Andrzej Duda on May 8.

15.05 - Press covers news and suspicions that printing of the ballots was ordered without any legal procedure and cost 15 mln from the national budget. There begins a search for the responsible person.

26.05 - In an interview with one of the main Polish newspapers, "Wyborcza," the vice president of the Polish Post says that about 30 million packages have been in the Postal warehouses since yesterday.

27.05 - As the TVN24 portal revealed, at least 70 million PLN went to the envelope election directed by Jacek Sasin, which did not take place. The Polish Post has already paid 26 million PLN to the companies which were commissioned to prepare the election packages.

27.05 - Opposition politicians notify the prosecutor's office about presidential election spending. The ballot printing order was issued before the legal procedures for doing so were passed.

28.05 - There is a vote of no confidence in Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for State Assets Jacek Sasin, initiated by the opposition politicians. The Parliament, by a vote of the Law and Justice party, rejected a vote of no confidence in Jacek Sasin.

18.06 - Jacek Sasin claims that the responsibility for printing voting ballot papers is on PKW (National Electoral Commission). He says that he suggested to PKW to use already printed ballots, but PKW made a different decision.

19.06 - The 30 million packages (worth 70 million PLN) prepared for the May 10 election will go to waste. Disposing packages will incur further costs. This will be investigated by the NIK (Supreme Audit Office) and opposition politicians.

22.06 - Supposedly, Law and Justice ruling party orders ballot packages to be stored in an unknown to public opinion Polish Post warehouse and to secretly destroy the ballots.

22.06 - Opposition politicians notify the prosecutor's office. They want the prosecutor's office to secure the ballot packages as evidence in the investigation of a criminal nature.

25.06 - There are no contracts found between the government officials and contractor companies, concerning organizing the 10th of May presidential election, even though the orders from the government were made.

26.06 - The Polish Post complains about the disturbing visits from opposition politicians and depreciating postal workers. They have visited six times between May and June, demanding to see the documents related to the governmental orders of printing ballots. They have also tried to enter the warehouse, where the voting ballots may be stored, but were not allowed in.

25.07 - Opposition politicians steal one of the ballot packages from the Polish Post warehouse. Polish Post informs that the police and internal units are currently investigating the incident.

4.08 - Opposition politicians voice concerns about destroying package ballots by Polish Post.

1.09 - Polish Post has sent a request for reimbursement (70 mln) to the National Electoral Commission.

Invoices are to be sent later.

10.09 - The Regional Prosecutor's Office in Warsaw, where opposition politicians notified about a possible crime committed by Deputy Prime Minister Jacek Sasin and Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, has not secured the ballot packages.

15.09 - After a complaint by Ombudsman Adam Bodnar, the administrative court in Warsaw handed down a verdict for Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki on the "envelope election." It emphasized that the prime minister violated the constitution twice. The planned correspondence voting did not meet the secrecy requirement, he acted without legal basis when issuing decisions to start preparations for the elections, and only the State Election Commission and the National Electoral Commission can organize the election.

15.09 - Deputy Minister of Interior and Administration Maciej Wasik, with whom the Ombudsman's Office corresponded, maintains that the entire election project was taken over by the Polish Post. Polish Post denies.

15.09 - The printed ballots could not be used in the voting on June 28, when the normal election was held, because the Civic Coalition changed the candidate for the office of the President: Malgorzata Kidawa-Blonska was replaced by Rafal Trzaskowski.

15.09 - Amendment to the Law on Prevention of COVID-19 from July states that if an official breaks the law, but acts with the intention of fighting an epidemic, they are not subject to punishment. The rule can apply to situations that happened before the amendment came into force.

2.10 - There are no documents signed by the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of State Assets Jacek Sasin, and head of the Ministry of Interior and Administration Mariusz Kaminski on the general correspondence election.

28.09 - The prosecutor's office refused to open an investigation into the actions of Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and Minister Jacek Sasin because it would be the detriment of public interest.

7.10 - Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki appointed the Interior Ministry's Mariusz Kaminski to sign a contract with PWPW (Polish Security Printing Works) for printing ballots. The distribution and collection of the packages were to be handled by the Polish Post supervised by Jacek Sasin's State Assets ministry. Kaminski, who heads the ministry, was supposed to find the money in the ministry's budget and pay for the service. But he didn't.

7.10 - The Polish Post itself ordered the printing of the election packages to the Polish Security Printing Works - claims the deputy head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration Maciej Wasik.

The Polish Post denies that it has ordered the Polish Security Printing Works to print the ballots.

9.10 - Polish Post sends invoices and is to be repaid for printing ballots by the National Electoral Commission, which was by Prime Minister decision left out from organizing the postal election.

16.11 - The prime minister wants the cassation of the administrative court verdict. He claims that he did not organize the postal election in the form of a general election for all.

15.01 - The Public Prosecutor's Office refused to initiate an investigation into the destruction of election packages printed for the postal voting. Instead, an investigation into the "theft" of the packets by a journalist from Wyborcza is underway.

Research Questions

The national budget spending of 70 mln PLN for organizing failed 2020 May presidential election, and printing ballot papers that were never used, manifest a sufficient crisis for reputation damage of those who were responsible for this decision. The image repair strategies used by Deputy Prime Minister Jacek Sasin, who was considered the main decision-making person, might have influenced his approval (trust) ratings throughout the crisis. To explore image repair strategies used by Jacek Sasin and their effectiveness, the following research questions were proposed:

RQ1: Which image repair strategies did Sasin employ in his Twitter posts to respond to widespread criticism over his actions of allocating 70 mln PLN public budget money for organizing the May 2020 presidential election, which never took place?

RQ2: Were the employed by Sasin image repair strategies effective in improving his image, as assessed by his approval/trust ratings?

III. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative content analysis was used on all Twitter posts created by the official public Twitter account of the Deputy Prime Minister Jacek Sasin relating to the organization of the May 2020 presidential election. Deputy Prime Minister Jacek Sasin has been using Twitter frequently to connect with his audience, tweeting on average once per few days. Although governmental conferences, press releases as well as interviews conducted with Jacek Sasin serve as a. valuable source for analysis of image repair strategies, Twitter is a more personal tool, enabling politicians to connect with the public directly. Accordingly, the rhetoric and intentions behind Deputy Prime Minister's actions in relation May 2020 presidential election could be more visible than in the case of other media analysis.

Research Design

Content analysis is a systematic, scientific method, aimed at exploring and analyzing textual data (Mayring, 2000). It is a widely practiced and accepted method of conducting research (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Qualitative content analysis (QCA) aims at interpreting data (including both the content and the context of the data) through systematically categorizing or coding it (Assarroudi et al., 2018). Applied categories to interpret the data can be decided before the analysis or throughout it, depending on whether a content analysis is thought to be inductive or deductive (Mayring, 2000). Thus, categories can be derived from the data itself or a separate theory but shall be related to the research questions and theoretical background of the research as well as can be further revised depending on the data. The outcome of the qualitative content analysis is to identify and discover categories, themes, and trends within the textual data based on the chosen coding system (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009; Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). In this paper, the deductive (directed) category application was used. It is a way usually applied in order to expand already existing theoretical framework or theory (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). In this regard, exploring Jacek Sasin's employed image repair strategies may lead to discovering new effective strategies with relevance to Benoit's typology. This analysis included both latent and manifest levels of QCA; namely, both words and their underlying meanings were taken into consideration.

Coding Framework

In order to explore which image repair strategies were used by the Deputy Prime Minister Benoit' (1995, 1997), the theory was applied. Table 1 presents the image repair strategies derived from Benoit's typology.

I. TABLE

BENOIT'S IMAGE REPAIR TYPOLOGY STRATEGIES

Strategy	Description	Example
Evasion of Responsibility		
Provocation	Responding to a different act	I lied to you because you were rude to me
Defeasibility	Lack of control/information	I lied to you because I didn't know you want to hear the truth
Accident	The act was an accident	I lied to you because I thought it was the truth
Good intentions	Good intentions behind the act	I lied to you to protect you

Reducing Offensiveness		
Bolstering	Enhance good qualities of accused	I have never lied to you before
Minimization	The act is not severe	It was a small, white lie
Differentiation	The act is comparably not that harmful	I did not lie to you; I avoided some truth
Transcendence	There are more important things	I lied to you to because I wanted to organize a birthday surprise
Attacking the accuser	Decrease credibility of an accuser	You lied to me on many more occasions
Compensation	Reimbursing victims	I will help you clean the house
Corrective Action	Seeking a solution to solve the caused problem	I will tell you all the truth now, what do you want to know?
Mortification	Confess and apologize	I am sorry I have lied to you

Adapted from Benoit (1997, 2015)

Apart from the above-described strategies, the "silence" or "no comment" strategy has been included in some frameworks (Benoit, 1995; Len-Rios & Benoit, 2004). Stonewalling, which is providing irrelevant information or not answering the accusation directly, hence withholding an appropriate answer (Smithson and Venette, 2013), could also be considered as another image repair strategy beyond Benoit's typology. For those tweets which did not fall into any of Benoit's typical categories, a separate analysis was performed on whether these could be regarded as "stonewalling" strategies. With reference to the "silence" category, it was challenging to assess whether long breaks in tweeting or tweets referring to other topics than the 2020 May presidential election could be evaluated as depicting the "silence" strategy. Therefore, the "silence" or "no comment" image repair strategy was excluded from this analysis.

In order to investigate the effectiveness of image repair strategies adapted by Jacek Sasin in his tweets, the monthly approval ratings (polls assessing respondents' "trust" towards certain politicians) were analyzed and matched with the time of each used strategy. Polls were conducted by CBOS - Centre for Public Opinion Research- a credible opinion polling institute in Poland (Fundacja Centrum Badania Opinii Spolecznej, 2020).

Sampling

The timeframe for collecting tweets was from the 15th of April 2020 up until the 15th of November 2020, covering the crisis timeline. The overall number of tweeted

posts on the official account of Deputy Prime Minister Jacek Sasin equals 428 in this time period, including 235 of his own tweets and 193 retweets. 16 tweets were used for the analysis. Retweets were excluded from the analysis, as they did not represent Sasin's statements.

Procedure

The first stage of analysis included reading and re-reading all the tweets to understand which tweets may be relevant for the analysis. Tweets dates were also compared with the crisis timeline events to see relations. From the 15th of April 2020 up until the 15th of November 2020, Jacek Sasin has posted 235 of his own tweets in total, excluding his re-tweets. Using keywords related to the crisis; the Polish words of "election" ("wybory"), "presidential election" ("wybory prezydenckie"), "Post office" ("poczta Polska"), "resignation" ("dymisja"), "the vote of no confidence" ("wotum nieufności") 14 were retrieved. Furthermore, the analysis of tweets' meanings was also performed, to retrieve tweets that did not contain keywords, yet was related to the topic. In this manner, 2 more tweets were found relevant. Therefore, the analysis sample contained 16 tweets, and tweets were numbered from 1 to 16 and later translated from Polish to English. Importantly, some tweets, despite consisting of the keywords, were excluded from the analysis, because they were related to comments about the presidential election later organized in June and July, rather than the one which did not take in May.

In order to answer the second research question, trust ratings for Deputy Prime Minister Jacek Sasin were analyzed before the onset of the crisis (15th of April) and throughout the crisis (15th of April – 15th of November). The trust ratings were retrieved from CBS (Centre for Public Opinion Research) website (Fundacja Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, 2020). The CBOS institute performs monthly ratings evaluating public opinion trust towards particular politicians. Therefore, the trust ratings for early March, late May/June, early July, end of August, late September/October, early November, and early December were retrieved and analyzed. Analysis of those six trust ratings allowed to view the effectiveness of each used by Sasin image repair strategies. It's important to note, however, that those ratings could also depend on other political events in which Jacek Sasin was involved.

IV. RESULTS

Research Question 1

By coding the sample with Benoit's image repair typology, few main strategies appeared. These were respectively: reducing offensiveness (attacking the accuser, bolstering, differentiation, defeasibility, and transcendence), denial (shifting the blame), and evasion of responsibility (good intentions). Overall, there were 24 examples of used image repair strategies among 16 tweets. Some tweets consisted of few strategies used at the same time. The most used one was reducing offensiveness with 16 instances out of overall 24, denial with 4 instances out of 24, and evasion of responsibility with 4 instances out of 24. Within the category of reducing offensiveness Benoit's typology, the predominantly used strategy was attacking the accuser (10 cases), then bolstering (4 cases), differentiation (1 case), and transcendence (1 case). Within the denial category, the most used strategy was shifting the blame (4 cases). Within the evasion of responsibility category, the used strategies were good intentions, which appeared in 3 instances, and defeasibility used once. Attacking the accuser strategy was employed in Sasin's tweets, usually as a response to negative press coverage, or accusations from opposition politicians. Attacking the accuser entails the intention to decrease the credibility of an accuser. In the 10 tweets, Sasin has used this strategy (Tweet no 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13). Bolstering was used by Sasin in 4 Tweets (Tweet no 4, 8, 9, 14). Bolstering image repair strategy serves to put oneself in a good light by, for example, highlighting previous or current achievements. Transcendence strategy appeared in 1 tweet (Tweet no 1) and differentiation strategy also in one tweet (Tweet no 15). Transcendence is an image repair strategy aiming to redirect attention from the wrongful act towards other more important issues. Differentiation is a strategy employed by Sasin in his tweets when he distinguishes his act from other wrongful acts committed by other people. Shifting the blame has been employed on 4 occasions (Tweet no 5, 7, 10, 11). Good intentions strategy appeared in 3 of Sasin's tweets (Tweet no 1, 10, 15). Usage of good intentions strategy is aimed at viewing the act as coming from good and noble intentions. There was also one tweet (Tweet no 15), where defeasibility was used. Defeasibility is the strategy when the accused declares some sort of lack of control or information regarding the act. Two tweets were considered as without any of Benoit's typology strategy. Nonetheless, it was interpreted that the avoidance of directly addressing accusations in those 2 tweets, could be interpreted as stonewalling (Tweet no 3 and Tweet no 16).

The analyzed tweets are presented below:

(…)To Konstytucja jasno określa terminarz wyborów prezydenckich i żaden były polityk z zagranicy nie powinien nawoływać do ich bojkotu. Panie @donaldtusk proszę wreszcie zamilknąć i przestać szkodzić Polsce. (Tweet no 1)

> Translated as: (…)It is the Constitution that clearly defines the timing of the presidential election, and no former politician residing abroad should call for a boycott. Mr. @donaldtusk, please finally be silent and stop harming Poland.

Fejkowe media znów w natarciu. Wczoraj wieszczono dymisję Prezydenta @AndrzejDuda, a dziś @rzeczpospolita dymisjonuje mnie. Ciekawe kto jutro? #FakeNews (Tweet no 2)

Translated as: The fake media is on the offense again. Yesterday the resignation of President @AndrzejDuda, and today @rzeczpospolita was dismissing me. I wonder who will be tomorrow? #FakeNews (Tweet no 2)

#pierwszytygrys.ie @KosiniakKamysz stawianie mnie wśród 80 tys. pracowników @PocztaPolska którzy nieprzerwanie pracują dla Polaków, to zaszczyt i duma! #debataprezydencka (Tweet no 3)

Translated as: #firsttiger.i.e., @KosiniakKamysz Putting me among the 80,000 @PocztaPolska employees who continuously work for Poles is an honor and pride! #presidentialdebate (Tweet no 3)

Zjednoczona Prawica udowodniła, że potrafi osiągnąć porozumienie w sprawach najważniejszych dla Polski. Bez względu na skalę ataków opozycji. Pracujemy dalej! #WyboryPrezydenckie (Tweet no 4)

Translated as: The United Right has proved that it is able to reach an agreement on the issues that are most important for Poland. Regardless of the scale of the opposition's attacks. We will keep working! #PresidentialElection (Tweet no 4)

Zarzuty wobec mnie i rządu @pisorgpl prezentowane przez pana Budkę w sprawie wyborów prezydenckich są całkowicie niezgodne ze stanem rzeczywistym. A jeszcze parę dni temu sami chcieli przełożyć wybory... #wybory2020 (Tweet no 5)

Translated as: The allegations against the @pisorgpl government presented by Mr. Budka regarding the presidential election and me are completely inconsistent with the reality. And just a few days ago, they themselves wanted to postpone the election.... #elections2020 (Tweet no 5)

Pan @SlawomirNitras utracił kontakt z otaczającą rzeczywistością. Już wczoraj komisja sejmowa zaopiniowała ten absurdalny wniosek negatywnie. Jasno wykazałem bardzo niski poziom argumentacji opozycji… (Tweet no 6)

Translated as: Mr @SlawomirNitras has lost touch with the surrounding reality. Yesterday the parliamentary committee already gave a negative opinion on this absurd proposal. I clearly demonstrated a very low level of the opposition's argumentation…(Tweet no 6)

Opozycja drwi z konstytucyjnego porządku prawnego. Wybory prezydenckie zostały zablokowane przez Senat oraz cz. władz samorządowych. Cała operacja służyła jedynie wymianie @M_K_Blonska na @trzaskowski_@Platforma_org stawia interes partyjny ponad narodowym! (Tweet no 7)

Translated as: The opposition mocks the constitutional legal order. The presidential election was blocked by the Senate and municipalities. The whole operation only served to exchange @M_K_Blonska for @trzaskowski_@Platform_org putting party interest above the national one! (Tweet no 7)

Bardzo dziękuję Koleżankom i Kolegom z Klubu Poselskiego @pisorgpl, którzy głosowali za odrzuceniem tego absurdalnego wniosku totalnej opozycji. Jedność #ZjednoczonaPrawica to realna siła, która buduje naszą Ojczyznę! Ciężka praca dla Polski broni się sama! (Tweet no 8)

Translated as: Many thanks to my colleagues from the MP Club @pisorgpl who voted against this absurd motion by the total opposition. Unity #UnitedRight is a real force that builds our Homeland! Working hard for Poland defends itself! (Tweet no 8)

Sejm RP odrzucił wniosek o wotum nieufności wobec mnie, który został złożony przez @Platforma_org. Wartość merytoryczna wniosku, była dramatycznie niska. Jestem jednak wdzięczny opozycji za to, że miałem szansę zaprezentować działania moje i @MAPGOVPL: (Tweet no 9)

Translated as: The Parliament of the Republic of Poland has rejected a motion of no confidence in me that was submitted by @Platform_org. The merits of the motion were dramatically low. However, I am grateful to the opposition for the opportunity to present my and @MAPGOVPL's actions: (Tweet no 9)

Opozycja robi sobie żarty z logiki. Obstrukcja Senatu nie dopuściła do wyborów majowych. Jedynego bezpiecznego scenariusza na tamten czas. Dlatego teraz to przedmiot pracy komisji. Chodziło nam o zdrowie i życie. Wam, PO, o polityczny interes. (Tweet no 10)

Translated as: The opposition mocks the logic. Obstruction of the Senate prevented the May election. The only safe scenario at the time. That's why it's now committee work. We were concerned with health and life. You, the Civic Platform, were about political interest. (Tweet no 10)

Bezmiar hipokryzji opozycji: najpierw blokują wybory

majowe w Senacie. Potem mówią o zmarnowanych środkach. Następnie chcą ponownego przeprowadzenia wyborów bo ich kandydat @trzaskowski przegrał. Oczywiście teraz koszt nie gra roli. Ile można płacić za cwaniactwo POlityczne? (Tweet no 11)

Translated as: The immensity of the opposition's hypocrisy: first, they block the May election in the Senate. Then they talk about wasted resources. Then they want a re-run of the election because their candidate @trzaskowski lost. Of course, now cost doesn't play a role. How much can you pay for POlity's cunning? (Tweet no 11)

Sam Pan się ze słowami nie liczy, a szkoda. Takie rzeczy może pisać tylko ktoś z gigantycznym EGO w rozmiarach balonu braci Montgolfier, albo kompletnie oderwany od rzeczywistości komentator, który uważa że ma monopol na prawdę. (Tweet no 12)

Translated as: You yourself do take the words seriously, which is a pity. Such things can only be written by someone with a giant EGO the size of the Montgolfier brothers' balloon, or a commentator completely detached from the reality, who thinks he has a monopoly on truth. (Tweet no 12)

Po dziennikarzach Gazety Wyborczej można spodziewać się wiele, ale wejście w rolę rabusia? Jak można upaść tak nisko by wynieść cudze mienie. A wszystko po to by wesprzeć swoje polityczne teorie. GW sięga dna! (Tweet no 13)

Translated as: One can expect a lot from the journalists of Gazeta Wyborcza, but entering the role of a robber? How can one fall so low as to steal someone else's property? And all this to support their political theories. GW has reached the bottom! (Tweet no 13)

Praca w Rządzie to nie jest rywalizacja w rankingach popularności. To podejmowanie niepopularnych decyzji w często bardzo trudnych sprawach. (…) Przeciwników nie ma ten, kto nic nie robi (Tweet no 14)

Translated as: Working in Government is not about competing in popularity ratings. It is about making unpopular decisions on often very difficult issues. (…) He who does nothing has no opponents (Tweet no 14)

Były podstawy prawne do przygotowań do wyborów korespondencyjnych 10 maja. Konstytucja dokładnie wskazywała na termin wyborów. Demokracja kosztuje. Porozmawiajmy o tym, ile kosztuje awaria Czajki w Warszawie @trzaskowski_ i ile trzeba na to wydać. (Tweet no 15)

Translated as: There was a legal basis for preparing for the postal voting only election on May 10. The date of the election was indicated in the Constitution. Democracy costs money. Let's talk about how much the Czajka crash in Warsaw costs @trzaskowski_ and how much should be spent on it. (Tweet no 15)

Gratuluję autorowi poczucia humoru! Mnie osobiście rozbawił (Tweet no 16)

Translated as: Congratulations to the author for his sense of humor! He made me laugh (Tweet no 16)

II. TABLE
THE APPROXIMATE TIMELINE OF EACH TWEET

Date of posting	Tweet no
End of April/ beginning of May	1-10
End of July	11, 12, 13
Mid-August	14
End of September	15
Beginning of November	16

Research Question 2

The second research question was addressed by looking at the six points in time for trust ratings for Jacek Sasin.

III. TABLE
TRUST RATINGS FOR JACEK SASIN

Date	Ratings of Trust	Ratings of Neutrality	Ratings of Distrust	Other (refuse to answer, no opinion)
5-15 March	29%	17%	24%	30%
22 May- 4 June	27%	13%	35%	25%
30 June – 9 July	26%	11%	34%	29%
18-27 August	26%	15%	32%	27%
28 Sept- 8 Oct	25%	12%	37%	26%
5-15 November	19%	15%	46%	20%

As presented, there is a huge difference between rankings before the crisis and during the crisis. Ratings of trust for Jacek Sasin remained relatively stable; however, ratings for declared distrust were gradually increasing, reaching almost 50% at the beginning of November.

V. FINDINGS

Deputy Prime Minister Jacek Sasin has addressed the crisis of 'wasteful' allocation of 70 mln PLN in 16 of his tweets from 15th March up until 15th November. He has used image repair strategies on 24 occasions, mainly by reducing the offensiveness of his act, indirectly denying that it happened, or by evading responsibility. His most frequently used strategy was to attack the accuser, usually by directly responding to them and tagging in his tweets. His attacks were mostly about opponents' lack of logic, hypocrisy, dishonesty, disregard for legal order, and lack of consideration for the national interest, and caring only about political interest. He has also attacked the media calling them "fake news" and 'thieves.'

Another strategy that he used was bolstering. He has praised himself and his colleagues from the ruling party for hard work, taking care of citizens' health and wellbeing, patriotism, taking care of national interests, and complying with Constitution. He also depicted himself as someone who may make the unpopular and difficult decisions for the greater good. He has also underlined the unity of the ruling government parties. While he did not directly deny his public budget spending, he has shifted the blame for this for Senate and municipalities as well as opposition politicians who were to block May presidential election. In other words, the act of spending 70mln PLN was not wrong but blocking May presidential election was. Sasin has highlighted that he wanted to organize the May presidential election by postal voting only, hence spent the needed amount of money, in order to protect citizens from the virus. This strategy is called the good intention strategy. In addition, as argued by him, there was a need to organize the presidential election in May, because this is what was written in the Constitution. This strategy can be interpreted as defeasibility; Sasin did not have any other choice than to organize the election in May. Jacek Sasin has also remarked in his tweets that spending 70mln PLN can be no worse than spending money to repair the breakdown of the sewage treatment plant in Warsaw, which he blamed opposition politicians for. This was a differentiation tactic. Finally, he employed transcendence, arguing that complying with national constitutional law is more important than spending 70mln PLN. His stonewalling techniques were mostly about mocking and laughing at opposition politicians. Interestingly, while Sasin has not directly denied spending 70mln PLN in his tweets, but rather justified this action due to the Constitutional order of fixed date presidential election, throughout the crisis timeline, many of his colleagues from the ruling party has blamed Polish Post and National Electoral Commission for deciding to print voting ballots. Hence, while Sasin could still allocate the money for printing, the orders to do so did not come from him.

Analyzing when each strategy was employed, especially those strategies which were used more than one time, at first, Sasin relied primarily on accusing the accuser strategy. Then, bolstering and shifting the blame strategies were more frequently used, and later good intentions approach was employed. This is particularly interesting, as Jacek Sasin might have shifted to different, less offensive strategies when discovering that accusing the attacker does not improve his image. Nonetheless, in Tweet no 14, he has stated that he does not care about his trust ratings but rather is dedicated to making the right decisions for the country.

As argued by Benoit (1997), corrective action may be the most successful strategies to repair the image. Jacek Sasin has not used this strategy. As presented in the trust ratings, his trust remained more or less stable before and throughout the crisis (on average, 25%). Only between October and November, he has lost 6% of trust from public opinion. On the other hand, his distrust ratings have increased significantly, from 24% to 35% from early March to the end of May. Then the distrust ratings remained relatively stable, to jump again on two occasions – end of September and at the beginning of November. The changes in distrust from March till May might have been caused directly by the events related to postponing the May election. Up until the very last moment, citizens in Poland did not know whether the election will be organized in May or postponed. This could trigger public confusion, potentiated by latter anger in late May, caused by the news about Sasin's wasteful allocation of 70mln PLN from the national budget. At the end of September, Sasin has tweeted the memorable phrase, which was later spread across news and media. He stated that "Democracy costs." Knowing that the election which did not take place has cost 70mln PLN or more, and that is the cost which shall be expected from the democratic system, could trigger public outrage and distrust. Early November, Sasin has used only one image repair strategy – stonewalling. It could be argued then, that if there were not any external events happening which could deteriorate his reputation, stonewalling was not a successful strategy to repair his image.

VI. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There are few important limitations to be considered in this study. First of all, analyzing only the Twitter account, without much consideration for other media may be too simplistic for image repair theory during a crisis. It could be worthwhile to extend the study with a wider analysis of newspapers, press releases, other social media to gain a better understanding of how a person of interest intended to repair one's image. Also, Twitter accounts maybe not as followed and public opinion forming as other media. Moreover, image repair strategies shall be put into a wider context of a political sphere. Other political events may have affected trust ratings for Deputy Prime Minister Jacek Sasin, particularly given his high political position in the country, and these were beyond the scope of this paper. Also, most of Sasin's tweets were directed not towards the crisis in general, but rather towards particular instances of accusations or specific news articles written about him at the time. This also limits the interpretation of effectiveness for each used

strategy, as there is not only one existing crisis but rather comments and responses to this crisis, creating smaller sub-crises.

Future research could be directed to examine Benoit's image repair typology in different social settings and media (e.g., on Facebook). It would also be interesting to conduct empirical research relating to Image Repair Theory, to measure the efficacy of each image repair strategy in a more controlled setting. Considering the Polish political scene, more research studies shall incorporate the Image Repair Theory, particularly because of the ongoing conflict/crisis between the ruling party and the opposition parties, hence having appropriate context for the application of the theory.

VII. CONCLUSION

Sasin's used image repair strategies mostly involved evasion of responsibility, then reducing offensiveness and a bit of denial. There was no corrective action or mortification strategies applied. While it makes sense that Deputy Prime Minister Jacek Sasin would intent to defend his image by evading responsibility, since concrete accusations for his actions were made by politicians, celebrities, and famous people, this strategy was ineffective in terms of his trust ratings. Public opinion polls have revealed decreases in trust for Jacek Sasin from March till May, and then from October till November. Although he used a variety of different strategies adapting them to the current events, they all appeared ineffective in repairing his image. This research is aimed to extend the Image Repair Strategy (Benoit, 1995) to the political sphere in Poland, and to the analysis of Twitter in general.

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