**Sweden’s use of the image repair theory during its refugee crisis**

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**Abstract**Sweden, a historically welcoming country to asylum seekers, faced a crisis beginning in 2015 when over 160,000 people sought asylum within the country. The massive influx of refugees, negative international press, and concerns of the Swedish publics prompted Sweden to pass immigration restrictions. Sweden needed to maintain its image as a humanitarian and social welfare leader in the face of this crisis. To do this, Sweden used strategies from the Image Repair Theory in its official communications. These include press releases, speeches and multiple websites developed to inform publics about the migration situation. To understand the situation fully, a brief history of immigration in Sweden is presented, followed by an explanation of the strategies of the Image Repair Theory, an analysis of international and intranational news coverage and finally comparing all these factors to the language used in Sweden’s official responses.

**Background**

*Sweden and Refugees*

The influx of asylum seekers in Sweden started in the 1980s, when migrants were escaping hostile dictatorships such as Augusto Pinochet’s rule of Chile and bloody wars such as the Iraq-Iran war. This began with Sweden’s definition of a refugee, which it classified as anyone with “well-founded reasons to fear persecution due to race, nationality, religious or political beliefs, gender, sexual orientation, or affiliation to a particular social group,” with this persecution coming either directly from the home country’s authorities, or their failure to address the persecution (Asylum regulations).

Much of what could be seen in Sweden’s modern refugee crisis held many similarities with the refugee crisis of the 1990s. During the decade, over 100,000 Bosnians and Albanians were granted asylum in Sweden due to ethnic cleansing wars in the former Yugoslavia. It is important to note that although Sweden maintained its reputation as a welcoming country to immigrants to the rest of the world, many of the concerns the Swedish public are expressing today were also presented back then.

Despite concerns from native Swedes about integration, unemployment and safety, the 100,000 Bosnians embraced the culture and became an integral part of the Swedish social system. (Sweden and migration)

*The Image Repair Theory*

The image repair theory is based on the assumptions that communication is goal-driven, and a positive reputation is one of the primary goals of communication (Benoit, 2015).

There are five strategies outlined by the theory of image repair, three of which are further broken down into tactics. Each of these parts of image repair will be briefly discussed in the following sections.

*Denial*

The strategy of denial usually is executed one of three ways, or chronologically as each step is deemed untrue by the public. The steps the accused can take are: deny that any wrongful action occurred, denial of any involvement, and denial that the act was harmful. The accused can also shift blame from themselves to another party. The logic behind this tactic is that if another organization actually committed the act, the accused should not be held responsible.

*Evasion of Responsibility*

There are four common tactics for evading responsibility: Provocation, Defeasibility, Accidental and Good Intentions. Provocation constitutes the claim that an organization was only reacting to the actions of others. Defeasibility argues that the conflict or situation was unavoidable. A situation can simply be deemed accidental. Finally, an organization can communicate the message that it had good intentions, but the situation did not go as planned.

*Reduce Offensiveness*

Similarly, the strategy of reducing offensiveness can be divided into six tactics: Bolstering, Minimization, Differentiation, Transcendence, Attack Accuser and Compensation. An organization faced with a negative situation can bolster its image by including positive aspects of the organization in its messaging, counteracting the perception brought about by the negative situation. Minimization argues that the situation is not as bad as it seems. Differentiation compares the organization’s actions with actions of others that would be considered worse, making the organization’s actions less offensive. Transcendence frames an action in a more positive light. The situation becomes perceived as necessary due to this framing. The accused can attack the reputation of the accuser. Finally, the organization can offer compensation to those affected by their actions in an attempt to rectify any wrongdoing.

*Corrective Action*

Taking corrective action is making a promise to publics to return things to the way they were before the negative situation or crisis. This can include presenting initiatives that will make sure there are no reoccurrences of the problem, or removing those who are responsible from within the organization.

*Mortification*

Mortification includes admitting fault, expressing remorse, apologizing and asking publics for forgiveness. Oftentimes the effectiveness of mortification relies on the public perception of the sincerity of the apology.

*Sweden Refugee Crisis – 2014-2016*

Following the spike of Bosnian asylum seekers in the 1990’s, Sweden’s immigration numbers stayed relatively stable until 2014, when refugees from active warzones, primarily Syria, were welcomed into Sweden. Fredrik Bengtsson, head of the press unit at the Swedish Migration Agency reported, “The year 2014 was the second highest level on record for asylum seeking applications; second only to 1992 when more than 84,000 people, many of them fleeing the former Yugoslavia, requested asylum in Sweden” (Sweden and migration). Nearly all of the 70,000 immigrants from Syria were granted permanent residence permits in Sweden in 2014.

In 2015, about 160,000 people sought asylum in Sweden, twice as many as in 2014, and the largest influx of asylum seekers in Swedish history. Once again, the majority of asylum seekers were fleeing Syrian Civil War, and to date Sweden has welcomed more refugees than any other European country in relation to its population (Sweden and migration). It became obvious that the Swedish migration system that was in place before the crisis was not intended to deal with the significant number of people crossing into the country. At this time, Sweden was also facing intranational problems- a lack of housing making it difficult for Swedish citizens to find homes in certain parts of the country, and unemployment rates which had risen to 7%. These internal crises only magnified the issues that the refugee crisis provided Sweden. Due to lack of accommodation, some asylum seekers were housed in tents until living arrangements were made for them.

*Legal and political background*

The Riksdag is the Swedish Parliament. The Riksdag has 349 members who are elected every four years. The Swedes refer to the Prime Minister and the 22 ministers as “The Government.” Eight political parties are represented in the Riksdag during the 2014-2018 electoral period. The three major parties in Sweden are the Social Democratic Party, the Moderate Party and the Sweden Democrats. The Social Democratic Party is the oldest and largest political party in Sweden. The Sweden Democrats are a political party that has risen in the wake of the refugee crisis. The Sweden Democrats hold nationalistic beliefs, and are opposed to immigration. Historically, the Sweden Democrats was started by Nazi sympathizers, but modern leadership has denounced these beliefs and has cut ties with anyone who voices those beliefs. However, the party still struggles with the negative perception from their peers, the media and parts of the Swedish public. (Riksdagsförvaltningen)

In Sweden, the Migration Agency is the authority that considers applications from people who want to become permanent residents of Sweden, visit the country, seek protection from persecution or become Swedish citizens. In the reception of refugees, the Migration Agency provides housing and money for food to asylum-seekers, while they wait for a decision in their asylum case. When a refugee is granted a residence permit in Sweden, we give compensation from the state to the municipalities and county councils. If the application of an asylum-seeker is rejected, the Migration Agency is actively involved in the process of having this person leave Sweden. (About the Swedish Migration Agency)

The Schengen agreement is the open border policy between European Union countries. It allows for travel across EU internal borders without extensive ID checks. The Dublin Regulation states that a refugee who comes to Europe must apply for asylum in the first safe country she/he arrives in. (Asylum regulations)

**Research**

To develop insight into the perception of the Swedish refugee crisis and the Swedish government’s response, content from international news outlets, popular Swedish daily newspapers and press releases and other resources produced by the Swedish government were analyzed. Government response was then compared to strategies and tactics of the Image Repair Theory.

*International News Media*

Coverage of the Swedish refugee crisis from European and American news sources were found to hold a negative tone overall. Headlines and content depict Sweden as overextending itself, and crumbling from the inside as a result of dealing with the influx of asylum seekers. “The Death of the Most Generous Nation on Earth – Little Sweden has taken in far more refugees per capita than any country in Europe. But in doing so, it’s tearing itself apart.” (Traub, 2016). Others were negative responses to Sweden’s policy changes in light of the crisis. “Sweden criticised over plans to expel asylum seekers” (Strickland, 2016). International stories with interviews of Swedish citizens seemed strangely one sided. "’I feel betrayed by my country’: The Swedes who think their Scandinavian utopia is being ruined by refugees” (Cheng, 2016). Most news sources reported an increase in negative views of refugees by the Swedish public. “As Sweden Absorbs Refugees, Some Warn The Welcome Won't Last” (Beardsley, 2016). The Spectator, a British weekly, ran a guest story by Tove Lifvendahl, the political editor-in-chief of Svenska Dagbladet entitled “How Sweden became an example of how not to handle immigration” (Lifvendahl, 2016).

*Swedish News Media*

While Swedish newspapers still contained negative sentiments about the refugee crisis, the overall impression was much more pro-immigration from the intranational publications. Headlines in this section that have been translated into English will be marked with a “\*” in the attribution. Many articles indicated a “Continued strong commitment to refugees” (\*, Mårtensson, 2015). While many would agree that increased restrictions on immigration was necessary, some groups still opposed them. “Petition against the new asylum obstacles - Refugee and human rights organizations strongly criticizes the ID controls on travel from Denmark to Sweden, introduced last night. The measure may be shut out certain groups from seeking asylum in Sweden.” (\*, Göteborgs-Posten, 2016). In addition to the general Swedish public voicing support for refugees, newspapers also reported the country’s celebrities showing support. “Celebrities supporting refugees with poem - Several celebrities, including Cate Blanchett, showing their support for refugees forced to leave their homes by a video read a poem. UNHCR is behind the campaign #WithRefugees.” (\*, Göteborgs-Posten, 2016). Guest writers also argue that the refugee crisis should be framed in a more positive way, highlighting the benefits of immigrants to Swedish culture and economy. “The refugees own network is an untapped resource.” (\*, Suter, Hyndman, 2015). These as well as multiple stories on various rallies supporting refugees and humanitarian aid initiatives by organizations and communities paint a much different picture of the mood in Sweden than reading only international news media would make one assume.

*Sweden’s Response*

As a result of the influx in numbers of refugees in 2015, Sweden made changes to their migration policies. These changes were communicated to the public through press releases, found online at *government.se/press/*, and two government websites: *sweden.se/migration/* and *migrationsverket.se/*. The following press releases are presented in chronological order.

*Sept. 23, 2015: Stefan Löfven takes part in EU summit on refugee crisis*In its first press release dealing with the refugee crisis, Sweden focuses on the role it plays in the EU as a whole. “The EU must do more to help resolve the ongoing conflicts and to help people on the ground.” This serves to minimize the role Sweden has in controlling the crisis. The press release also shifts blame for the crisis from Sweden to the EU as a whole, stating “One issue to be particularly addressed is how the EU and its Member States can contribute more to UN humanitarian operations in Syria and neighbouring areas.” This is in line with later statements that Sweden would not have had trouble dealing with an influx of refugees if other EU countries had done their part and taken in more asylum seekers (2016, March 3).
*Nov. 2, 2015: Press invitation: Ethical recruitment of migrant workers*The theme of corrective action begins to appear in just the second press release. Sweden voices support for a new initiative, the “International Recruitment Integrity System (IRIS) – aimed at helping companies to sustainable and ethical recruitment policies for migrant workers.” Sweden also uses the bolstering tactic, citing its “agenda to counteract exploitation of foreign workers” as a reason for supporting the initiative.
*Nov. 12, 2015: Internal border controls in Sweden*The messaging makes use of transcendence, framing these changes as necessary. “Sweden receives an exceptionally large share of the refugees coming to Europe. Internal border controls gives the police better possibilities to uphold law and order in a situation were 2000 persons a day seeks asylum, says Anders Ygeman minister of Home Affairs.” Sweden continues to bolster its image as a welcoming country to immigrants, stating “More refugees are now trying to reach Sweden than ever before. This migration brings opportunities for Sweden…”
*Nov. 19, 2015: Prolonged internal border controls in Sweden*Seven days into the 10 day internal border control, transcendence was once again used to justify prolonging the restrictions. “[I]t is necessary to prolong the period for internal border controls since the present situation continues to pose acute challenges to vital functions in society.” Once again the statement “More refugees are now trying to reach Sweden than ever before” is found in the press release, however, no image bolstering was found in this release.
*Nov. 24, 2015: Press invitation: Briefing on the migration situation*The briefing begins with reinforcing Sweden’s stance on migration, “Sweden has the worst refugee crisis since World War II has taken greater responsibility than any other country in the Western world. We are a small country that makes a huge effort and the Swedish people showing great solidarity at a difficult time. We cherish the international asylum law.”(\*, regeringen.se/). The Swedish government also shifts blame away from Sweden. “The refugee situation needs to be handled jointly within the European Union. The Government will therefore continue to press for a system in which all countries, without compromising on the individual asylum procedures, take joint responsibility for receiving refugees.” (\*)
*Dec. 4, 2015: Sweden and Afghanistan begin negotiations on readmission agreement*Subtle shifting of blame is seen here, as the language indicates a need to fix problems in Afghanistan in order to help the immigration situation in Sweden. “In close dialogue with Afghanistan, Sweden will also continue to try to improve the social and economic conditions in the country through development cooperation. This will allow us to create conditions so that people do not feel compelled to flee.” (\*). This also can be seen as defeasibility, given that Sweden has little control on the situation in Afghanistan, the influx of asylum seekers, in this case especially unaccompanied minors is not something that Sweden could have done much to avoid. Image bolstering was strongly used in the closing paragraphs, stressing the extensiveness of Sweden’s cooperation with and contributions to Afghanistan and NATO missions. “Mr Ghani [Ashraf Ghani, president of Afghanistan] expressed appreciation for the extensive and long-standing Swedish contributions.”

*Feb. 15, 2016: Proposal to temporarily restrict the possibility of being granted a residence permit in Sweden*The proposal exemplifies the overarching themes of provocation, defeasibility, good intentions, bolstering, minimization and corrective action. Though the changes to Sweden’s migration policies are significant, they are communicated in a way that minimizes the impact of these changes. To preserve the image that Sweden has of a welcoming state for asylum seekers, provisions and exceptions are found throughout the messaging. It is important to notice while other “temporary” restrictions to this point have been effective for a matter of days, the temporary restrictions communicated in this press release will be in effect for three years.
*March 3, 2016: Government decides to prolong internal border controls again*Sweden continues to shift blame for its internal border controls to the EU as a whole. “Europe has not managed to maintain its external borders. Until we see a joint European solution, Sweden will be forced to use short-term national measures … says Minister for Home Affairs Anders Ygeman.”
*March 11, 2016: Government proposes amendments to asylum seekers’ right to assistance*Continued use of provocation and defeasibility being used to justify Sweden’s actions relating to asylum seekers. The Swedish government communicates the necessity of the new restrictions by describing them as “a result of several serious conflicts around the world.”
*April 7, 2016: Government decides to prolong internal border controls again*With no mention of the blame shifting from the previous release of the same title, this release focuses on using transcendence by reminding the public of the alternatives to increased restrictions. “Our authorities make the same assessment as previously regarding how order and security could be affected if we abolish the controls, says Anders Ygeman Minister for Home Affairs.”
*April 8, 2016: Proposal to temporarily restrict the possibility of being granted a residence permit in Sweden*Corrective action is used by explaining the changes made to the proposal. “It is important that these temporary amendments do not lead to practical problems in relation to other public services and systems.” Sweden continues to bolster their reputation by outlining the other migration agreements that they still hold themselves accountable to. “A relative may be granted a residence permit if denying a residence permit would contravene a Swedish commitment under a convention.”
*May 4, 2016: Government decides to prolong internal border controls again*Unlike earlier press releases of the same title, none of the tactics of the Image Repair Theory were used in this press release.
*June 2, 2016: Three assignments to the Swedish Migration Agency on ‘return’*Transcendence is used to justify the need for asylum seekers who have had their applications and appeals denied to return to their home countries. “For the asylum and reception system to work, people who have received such an order must return. This is a prerequisite for a legally secure and credible asylum process. Through this, more accommodation for other asylum seekers will be freed up and costs in the area of migration will be reduced.” Following the theme of previous releases, transcendence is used to illustrate the necessity of these corrective actions. The message is also accompanied by bolstering with the mention of helping other asylum seekers through this process.
*June 3, 2016: Border controls prolonged until November*A validation of the shifting of blame for the crisis to the EU is seen here. “The European Union has confirmed Sweden's view, and our need for border controls.” Sweden’s messaging continues to enforce this concept throughout the release, claiming “’How the EU's external borders are handled, and the actions of our neighbouring countries and other EU countries have a major impact on Sweden's overall assessment of future border controls,’ says Minister for Home Affairs Anders Ygeman.” In a reminder that Sweden has always had good intentions when it comes to migrants, it states that “Sweden's objective is to have effective external EU borders and a return to free movement in the Schengen area.”
*June, 3 2016: Stefan Löfven to host refugee summit with President Obama*Co-hosting the Leaders’ Summit on the Global Refugee Crisis bolsters the image of Sweden as a country that should be looked up to in regards to refugee policy and the highlights the work they are doing at home. Prime Minister Löfven states that it was clear the US wanted Sweden to co-host the Summit. The Prime Minister uses this good press opportunity to continue to shift the blame of Sweden’s crisis away from the country saying, "I am pleased to have strong allies in the struggle to ensure that more countries contribute to helping the 60 million people who have been forced to flee; it cannot be the responsibility of only a few countries to offer protection and help."
*July 1, 2016: Speech by Alice Bah Kuhnke at the Nordic Lutheran Bishops Summit*While speaking about the Church of Sweden, the Swedish Minister of Culture and Democracy also bolstered the image of the country as a whole. “I have talked of this many times, but it still moves me and fills me with great pride to think of the way the civil society organisations in Sweden gathered forces and stepped in, quickly and with impressive strength. Thousands of people from all parts of Swedish society volunteered and were mobilised, both by long time established organisations and by new initiatives responding to the situation.” Near the end of her speech, Kuhnke also bolsters Sweden’s commitment to Swedish culture, a main concern of the publics presented in the news media. “The Swedish government is doing all that we can for a Sweden that keeps together.”
*Aug. 31, 2016: New aid initiative focusing on displaced children*In this press release, a form of differentiation/minimization is used. When the number of people in the world who are in need of humanitarian assistance (130 million) are compared to the number of people who seek asylum in Sweden, the situation takes on a different, more global context. Bolstering is also executed well in this release. “’The world needs countries that demonstrate leadership in acute humanitarian situations. I am proud that Sweden is now shifting up another gear to help children fleeing from war, conflict and disasters,’ says Minister for International Development Cooperation and Climate Isabella Lövin.”
*Oct. 3, 2016: Measures for more efficient returns*Bolstering by presenting the idea of an efficient migration effort continues. “We must be able to maintain a long-term, sustainable and humane migration policy that safeguards the right of asylum.”
*Nov. 11, 2016: Government decides to prolong internal border controls again*Once again the press release contains no language that coincides with any tactics from the Image Repair Theory.
*Nov. 21, 2016: Gustav Fridolin to address and attend Education International Migration Conference in Stockholm*The Education International Conference, which addressed schooling for newly arrived refugees, took place in Sweden. Bolstering is used when explaining why the conference was chosen to be in Sweden. “The conference is being held in Stockholm since the federation considers Sweden to be a world leader when it comes to newly arrived pupils.”

*Migrationsverket.se*Migrationsverket.se is the official website of the Swedish Migration Agency. It serves as an informational hub for facts, statistics, laws, regulations and news regarding migration in Sweden. Much of the messaging presented on the Migration Agency website corresponds with official government press releases, providing a consistent message of bolstering and transcendence. Differences between messaging found in the press releases and the Migration Agency website include a bolstering of the democratic process that shapes migration laws and regulations, Sweden’s broad definitions of refugees and qualifying for asylum and specific profiles of refugees that have integrated themselves into Swedish society.
The Migration Agency makes a point to stress that the decisions they make regarding migration come from the Swedish people. “We are thus commissioned by the Swedish people, through the politicians who make decisions on migration policy. The Agency is to apply the regulations that the citizens, through their elected representatives, have decided should apply when it comes to migration.” This could be a form of shifting blame, by switching responsibility for the Migration Agency’s action to elected officials and by extension Swedish voters.
Sweden has a reputation of being one of the most accommodating countries in the world to migrants. This is because of the extensive welfare system that is in place. For refugees, “the Migration Agency provides housing and money for food to asylum-seekers.” Sweden also has a broad definition of a refugee, allowing more people in more situations to apply for asylum in the country. “In accordance with the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Swedish legislation and EU regulations, a person is considered a refugee when they have well-founded reasons to fear persecution due to race nationality religious or political beliefs gender sexual orientation, or affiliation to a particular social group.”
An entire section of the website (/people-we-meet) is dedicated to profiles of various Swedish migrants and their stories. This bolstering of migrants and their contributions to Sweden reinforces the Swedish government’s stance that refugees positively contribute to Swedish culture and economy. Each profile is accompanied by facts and statistics about the migrant’s situation. Strong bolstering throughout this section of the site begins with the desirability of living in Sweden. “They have come here for various reasons and their life stories differ, but they share the will and desire to come to Sweden.” (People we meet). Each individual profile bolsters a different aspect of what Swedish citizens value. While the refugee crisis in Sweden is a prominent issue, reminders of the hardships refugees face is a good tactic to keep support for refugees in the country. “When I think about everything that my family and I have experienced, all the problems in Sweden are so small.” (Zanyar found a future in Sweden). This is further enforced by communicating gratefulness to Sweden and its communities. “We would like to live and work in Sweden as we are happy here. We feel that people here are honest and helpful” (Marium chose to study here). It is also important to bolster the advantages of accepting migrants, including refugees, into Swedish society. “Many of those who come to Sweden have brought with them a great deal of professional skills” (Language: the way into society). The Swedish people are proud of their social welfare system and the benefits it provides for all who live in Sweden. “The social security system and the opportunity for a family life in Sweden was also a strong contributing factor to my choice of Sweden.” (Language: the way into society). To bolster the image of refugees and Sweden policy, it is important not to present them as one-dimensional. Each refugee has goals, and communicating these goals will help Swedish publics understand and connect more with refugees. “The fact that I am able to go to school, learn languages and study sciences – for me this is a reality made possible, and it's thanks to Swedish people.” (A lifelong refuge). Illustrating that people from other countries perceive Sweden a certain way can help to bolster that perception within the country. “Via media, friends and the internet, I gained an impression of Sweden as a country with laws, rights and good people.” (Living on equal terms). The Migration Agency website follows the trend of frequent bolstering of Sweden, its policies and refugees through the communication of facts, statistics and profiles.

*sweden.se/migration/*A section of the official website of Sweden was made to tell “the story of how migration has helped shape Sweden.” The site is not only about the modern refugee crisis, however. It gives a history of Swedish immigration from 1850 to the present day. While more obvious forms of image bolstering are found throughout, the subtle bolstering of Sweden’s migration efforts throughout the country’s history reinforces the government’s modern stance on migration, without appearing as a direct type of message. While the site takes on a more factual tone, there are still instances where tactics from the Image Repair Theory are used. While the site bolsters Sweden’s response to the refugee crisis, saying, “A DN/Ipsos survey from March 2015 shows that six out of ten Swedes feel that immigration is mainly beneficial for Sweden,” it also highlights the need for corrective action regarding some policies. “At the same time, six out of ten Swedes feel that integration works badly. The main crux of the debate remains how best to integrate migrants from different countries into the Swedish workforce and society, how to provide them with opportunities and ensure they have equal rights.” Maintaining an informational tone and presenting both sides of the migration argument give the site additional authenticity, allowing for believable image repair messaging. “These debates highlight just how complicated and conflicting the issues surrounding diversity are – from studies praising Sweden’s integration policies to articles showing just how far Sweden still has to go in terms of integration.” The majority of overt bolstering can be found in the profiles of Swedes at the end of each time period. Much like the Migration Agency website, Sweden’s official website profiles refugees that came to Sweden for various reasons during the different time periods. Within these feature articles, many bolstering messages can be found. “It is a privilege to be a resident of Sweden where people are respected regardless of religion, belief, colour, appearance and nationality” (Mouhanad Sharabati, modern refugee). Throughout there are positive comments from the refugees about Sweden’s reputation. “She believes Sweden sets a good example of accepting refugees, which in turn leads to a large influx of foreigners in search of a higher quality of life, something Sweden is widely known for.” (Linda Samir Mutawi, love refugee). Often Sweden’s reputation is cited as a reason for choosing to migrate to the country, as refugees recognize “the country’s virtue as a humanitarian solace for immigrants and asylum seekers looking for a better and more stable life.” (Silvio Durán Michea, long-term resident). The many success stories of refugees integrating into Swedish culture also communicate the potential for modern refugees. The refugees all tell stories of once they escaped the pressures of living through war or dictatorships, they could focus on opportunities not otherwise available to them. Kamran Assadzadeh described how “he studied to become a nurse, an opportunity he says he never could have had if he had remained in Iran.” (Kamran Assadzadeh, long-term resident).
Also included in the profile sections are video features and interviews that further illustrate how refugees integrate and contribute to Swedish society, and how Swedish citizens relate to refugees.

**Discussion**

Throughout the Swedish Government’s messaging on the refugee crisis, there are common themes of bolstering, transcendence, defeasibility, shifting blame and corrective action. Sweden used four of the five strategies of the Image Repair Theory to communicate with their publics in response to this crisis.
Since Sweden’s refugee crisis is ongoing at the time of this analysis, it is impossible to fully evaluate the effectiveness of the communication in maintaining Sweden’s image. This case analysis provides the grounds to make the prediction that the consistent messaging and use of Image Repair tactics will prove to be successful in maintaining Sweden’s reputation as a welcoming country for refugees, and one of the foremost nations for immigration policies and social welfare systems. As with all things, there is room for Sweden to improve its image repair messaging; considering the international audience and taking advantage of the power of social media channels are suggested.
The absence of the strategy of mortification can be argued as both effective and ineffective. Shifting blame and communicating defeasibility implies that there is nothing Sweden has done that necessitates an apology. However, the need for corrective action, and the impact of the refugee crisis on the Swedish public presented an opportunity for the Swedish government to apologize to its people, and the refugees that new policies would affect. Overall, refraining from using the mortification tactic was effective in solidifying the Swedish government’s stance on the migration crisis. Apologizing for the refugee crisis and how the government responded to it would be detrimental to Sweden’s reputation as a humanitarian world leader. Sweden also took steps to shift the blame from itself to the European Union as a whole and their lack of cooperation in dealing with the influx of refugees. Due to lack of control in the many situations that prompt asylum seekers to migrate to Sweden, it doesn’t make a great amount of sense to apologize for a situation they didn’t have any control over, hence the use of defeasibility messaging over mortification.

The bolstering done throughout Sweden’s communications plays well with the sense of pride that Swedes feel about their country, along with its culture of acceptance and progressiveness. The concerns of the public that the news media presented were countered by bolstering from the government. A main concern was the integration of refugees into Swedish culture and society. The extensive use of refugee profiles were used to combat the concerns of refugees integrating into Swedish society. Though the profiles were of people from different situations and backgrounds, an overarching love and appreciation for Sweden was evident throughout. Giving refugees a name, face and story, in other words – making them real, allowed Swedes who held misconceptions about refugees a chance to connect with them, and in turn be more apt to accept them.

Sweden could have improved its image repair efforts by better utilizing social media to communicate its messages. A search of Sweden’s official Twitter profile yielded only six results since 2015 containing any of the following words: migrant, migration, crisis, refugee, asylum, immigrant or immigration. Two of these tweets were clarification on concerns raised by other twitter users, and the remaining four contained links to the *sweden.se/migration* website. Social media gives the opportunity for two-way symmetric messages, and the potential to reach a far greater audience than the publics in Sweden. While the Swedish public is the primary stakeholder addressed by the government, a broader perspective in messaging could have reduced the amount of negative international media coverage of the crisis.

As the refugee crisis in Sweden subsides, due to increased regulations and corrective action and the resolving of conflicts in areas refugees are fleeing, Sweden will continue to communicate messages in line with their strong values and reputation on humanitarian aid and social welfare systems.

*Limitations*

Many of the limitations of this case analysis stem from the difficulties of an outsider studying other cultures and systems. As an American, living in America, it is difficult to fully understand the refugee crisis from the perspective of the Swedish government and publics. Relying on secondary research, news media and press releases, limits the scope at which the situation can be fully understood. The language barrier also limited this study. Though many resources could be found in English, those which could not had to be translated, oftentimes leading to versions of documents that could be difficult to understand. The schedule in which this analysis was done also limited the depth of the research. The vast amount of communications and news coverage of the crisis from 2014-2016 call for more analysis of the response from specific government officials, agencies, publics and news media.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Sweden’s widely regarded as one of the most welcoming countries to asylum seekers. How do you think this reputation effected the international perception of the Swedish refugee crisis? Would public reaction be different if the bar for migration standards was not set so high in Sweden?
2. Mortification is a common strategy in traditional image repair. Do you agree or disagree with Sweden’s decision not to implement mortification in their messaging?
3. In modern communication strategies, the power of social media should not be ignored. How should Sweden have used social media to combat negative international media coverage and perception? What other challenges could Sweden have overcome with an efficient use of social media?

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\*Note: Search included migrant OR migration OR crisis OR refugee OR asylum OR immigrant OR immigration