

THE CONVERGENCE OF SITUATIONAL CRISIS COMMUNICATION THEORY AND
SOCIAL MEDIA: EMPIRICALLY TESTING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SPORTS FAN-
ENACTED CRISIS COMMUNICATION

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the effects of fan-enacted crisis communication in response to a variety of crises facing a sports organization. Using Timothy Coombs' (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), this study seeks to determine how an ever-growing online environment has changed the role of an organization's stakeholders by giving them more power to comment during times of crisis. Employing a 3 (crisis response strategy, [attack the accuser; ingratiation; apology]) X 2 (crisis type, [environmental/individual crises; organizational mismanagement]) X 3 (fan association, [identified, rival, neutral]) factorial design, the process of fan-enacted crisis communication during an ongoing sports-related crisis is examined. Several dependent variables were included in the study to measure participants' attitude and behavioral intentions toward the organization such as organizational reputation, crisis responsibility, positive word-of-mouth, and potential fan-enacted crisis communication behavior.

This study revealed many interesting findings regarding online crisis communication. For instance, results showed that the type of crisis strategy did not impact any of the four dependent variables. Individual crises resulted in a statistically significant lower organizational reputation score than a crisis in the organizational mismanagement cluster. Participants also attributed a larger amount of crisis responsibility to organizations that were faced with an organizational crisis. However, the type of crisis did not impact positive word-of-mouth or potential fan-enacted crisis communication behavior.

The fan association variable also led to interesting results. This study showed that the organizational reputation scores of an organization would suffer most among its fans, whereas those who were rivals of or neutral towards the organization would not be as affected. Fan association did not impact the level of crisis responsibility attributed to an organization. Lastly, a participant's willingness to engage in either positive word-of-mouth or potential fan-enacted crisis communication behaviors was in accordance to his/her fan association. Therefore, participants were most likely to engage in these behaviors on behalf of their preferred team and least likely to engage in these practices on behalf of their rival team.

By testing this developing form of crisis communication, this study explores how traditional crisis communication models have evolved as a result of social media, while revealing insights about the cognitive tendencies of the modern sports fan. The theoretical and practical implications of this experiment are discussed in the final chapter.

DEDICATION

In memory of Ann and Charles Klinner and Marshall Allen and Thelma Bell. I hope that God gives you all a window from heaven to see what your legacy of love, determination, and giving has inspired.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

| | |
|----------|---|
| <i>a</i> | Cronbach's index of internal consistency |
| BIRG | Basking in Reflected Glory |
| CORF | Cutting off Reflected Failure |
| EFA | Exploratory Factor Analysis |
| <i>F</i> | Computed value of ANOVA |
| IRB | Institutional Review Board |
| IRT | Image Repair Theory |
| <i>M</i> | Mean: the sum of a set of measurements divided by the number of measurements |
| <i>n</i> | Number |
| NBA | National Basketball Association |
| NCAA | National Collegiate Athletic Association |
| NFL | National Football League |
| NHL | National Hockey League |
| <i>p</i> | Probability associated with the occurrence under the null hypothesis of a value |
| PED | Performance-enhancing Drugs |
| PGA | Professional Golf Association |
| PWOM | Positive Word-of-Mouth |
| <i>r</i> | Pearson's <i>r</i> correlation |
| SCCT | Situational Crisis Communication Theory |

| | |
|----------|--------------------------------------|
| SD | Standard Deviation |
| SSIS | Sport Spectator Identification Scale |
| <i>t</i> | Computed value of <i>t</i> test |

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CHAPTER 1 — INTRODUCTION

In order to better understand sports scandals, empirical examination is needed to further explore how attitudes and behavioral intentions of sports organization stakeholders are impacted. Therefore, this study examined how fan association (fan, neutral, rival), crisis type (individual, organizational), and crisis strategy (attack the accuser, ingratiation, apology) impacted several different measures of attitudes and behavioral intentions toward an organization (organizational reputation, crisis responsibility, positive word-of-mouth, potential fan-enacted crisis communication behavior). Overall, this dissertation explored the effects of online fan-enacted communication. Crisis scholars need to determine how communication activity in an online world impacts stakeholders' attitudes and behavioral intentions toward an organization in crisis. The emergence of social media has altered the role of stakeholders, and it is time for crisis scholars to determine the role these active stakeholders now play during crisis response. This chapter examines the importance of university image/reputation in collegiate athletics and the rise of new media in sports and reputation management. This chapter also explains the purpose, significance, and overview of the dissertation.

Importance of University Image/Reputation in Collegiate Athletics

As with any organization, crises loom as a dangerous threat to short-term image and long-term prestige. In sports, scandals occur both on and off the field of play, placing organizational reputation at risk (Coombs, 2012). Nearly 100 years ago, the famous Chicago Black Sox scandal captured news headlines, as gamblers reportedly paid several players to lose

games intentionally. This scandal showcased how a seemingly sports-specific scandal can bleed over onto the front page of newspapers. It is clear that these types of scandals are not a new phenomenon; yet, they appear to be occurring at an even higher rate in recent years. In fact, sports journalists labeled the year spanning from 2011 to 2012 as the “year of scandal” due to the large number of high-profile incidents (Snyder, 2012, p. 1). During that timeframe, the University of Miami faced egregious NCAA allegations including impermissible benefits, a sex abuse scandal decimated Penn State University’s reputation, another sex abuse scandal loomed over Syracuse University, and player lockouts halted the National Basketball Association and the National Football League regular seasons, (Huffington Post Sports, 2012).

The “Year of Scandal” may have been equaled in subsequent years: authorities arrested New England Patriots tight end Aaron Hernandez for first-degree murder, the NCAA investigated Oklahoma State University for using athletic hostesses to provide sexual favors to football recruits, the NCAA banned Ohio State University from postseason play for players receiving illegal extra benefits, and sports officials accused both Lance Armstrong and Alex Rodriguez (and many, many more) of steroid use. While major sports scandals capture the headlines of mainstream news, the detrimental actions of individual players also threaten sports organizations resulting from issues with drugs, alcohol, and violent acts (Snyder, 2012).

As the number of scandals seemed to increase and the manner in which they were examined began to evolve, the business side of sport also grew. Plunkett Research reports that the American sports industry is worth \$470 Billion (Plunkett Research, 2013). While most people associate large sums of money with professional sports, the NCAA alone reports \$871.6 million in revenue, outpacing some professional sports such as NASCAR (Plunkett Research, 2013). In fact, *USA Today* (2013) reported that thirteen university athletic departments amassed

revenue surpassing \$100 million. Given the intertwined role of academics and athletics, this type of money moves universities from being more than just heralded halls of education, making them as major financial players in the sporting world.

As collegiate sports revenues increased, so did the media attention devoted strictly to college sports. In the last 10 years, the number of college football and basketball games shown on ESPN channels increased from 491 to 1,320 (Pappano, 2012). In January 2011, the University of Texas signed a \$300 million deal with ESPN to establish a television network dedicated solely to their university sports, known as The Longhorn Network (Haurwitz & Maher, 2011). Several conferences have also signed deals to create networks devoted to their collegiate sports programs, including the Pac-12 Network, the Big 10 Network, and the SEC Network. These lucrative television contracts are worth billions of dollars.

Collegiate athletics provide much more than money for the athletic department. Recent years have shown that athletic success can bring additional attention and prominence to the school. For instance, after winning the 2010 BCS National Championship, Auburn University stated that they saw a “dramatic increase” in the number of applications that the university received, a phenomenon often referred to as the “Flutie effect” (Al.com, 2011; Sperber, 1990). The “Flutie effect” was named after Boston College saw a 30% increase in applications after former Boston College Quarterback Doug Flutie threw a hail Mary pass to defeat the University of Miami in the 1980s. Sternberg (2013) notes that there are several other positive benefits associated with collegiate athletics such as inspiring spirit and enthusiasm for all connected with the institution, creating memories that color one’s collegiate experience, encouraging alumni loyalty and involvement, and establishing and promoting the university’s brand image. Such beliefs seem to affirm the maxim of a “rising tide lifting all boats.”

With the financial rewards of collegiate sports continuing to grow, the risk posed by a crisis also increases. Coombs (2011) notes that a crisis completely disrupts an organization and can result in many negative consequences, including damage to the organization's reputation. Brazeal (2008) notes that a reputation in sport is particularly important as one's "market value" often hinges on it. Coombs (2011) warns that increased media coverage and the growing connectivity of stakeholders increases an organization's risk of facing a crisis. Thus, as the number of news outlets dedicated to collegiate athletics increases, the number of "newsworthy" crises can be expected to increase as well. In fact, Sternberg (2013) warns that, "athletics violations and scandals tarnish college and university reputations in a way—and to a level—that few other kinds of malfeasance can reach" (p. 4). Given the large amount of money acquired from athletic revenue, sports-related crises potentially pose threats that universities quite literally cannot afford.

Sports crises possess the ability to wreck a university's bottom line through fines, legal fees, loss of sponsorships, and other financial issues. For instance, following a sex abuse scandal at Penn State University, the NCAA levied a \$60 million fine to be paid over the course of five years (McCarthy, 2013). The university also spent \$5.4 million on communications consulting and legal fees, lost over \$1 million in sponsorship money, and saw the money collected from licensed merchandise fall 20% (McCarthy, 2013). The prevalence of sports crises even caused a group of sports marketers to demand that the image of collegiate athletics be bolstered, as the presence of a crisis could place their brand at risk if they sponsor within collegiate athletics (Thomaselli, 2003). This meeting added another important party to be considered in collegiate athletics: corporate sponsors. Recent forecasts show that sports sponsorship spending is expected to increase by 6% this year, bringing the total to \$13.79 billion being spent by

advertisers (Schultz, 2013). More specific to collegiate sports, it is estimated the title sponsorship for the upcoming collegiate football championship playoff system will garner approximately \$35 million, representing the “highest rights fees ever paid for a collegiate sports property” (Schultz, 2013, p. 1).

When a crisis strikes an athlete or sports organization, sponsorship revenue is often lost (Wilson, Stavros, & Westberg, 2010). For instance, Lance Armstrong lost major sponsorship deals with companies such as Nike, Anheuser-Bush, and Trek bicycles after the United States Anti-Doping Agency reported details of Armstrong’s illegal drug use during his Tour de France success (*NBC News*, 2012). Following the revelation of professional golfer Tiger Woods’ numerous extramarital affairs, companies such as AT&T, Accenture Plc, and TAG Heuer severed their sponsorship deals with Woods, resulting in a loss of millions of dollars (Buteau, 2011). Thus, crises often result in financial loss whether the offending action occurs on or off the field of play.

Crises also harm universities in ways beyond financial losses by eliminating many of the benefits that collegiate athletes create. While some praise collegiate athletics for promoting a university’s brand (Sternberg, 2013), a sports crisis can cast negative light on the entire university. Crises can also harm the attendance at athletic events (McCarthy, 2013). While a crisis can certainly harm a university brand, it can also cause fan bases to rally in support of their team. Despite the financial penalties Penn State faced, the school accumulated \$208 million in donations, its second-highest amount ever, while the Penn State Alumni Association membership grew by 2.4% (McCarthy, 2013). These statistics show that even in the midst of one of the most egregious scandals in NCAA history, sports fans stayed loyal to their preferred team.

Sports organizations boast a uniquely connected group of stakeholders: their fans. Scholarship shows that a person's sports fandom is tied to their own sense of self-esteem, meaning that when their team performs well they feel good about themselves (Raney, 2006). Conversely, when their team struggles, so does a fan's self-esteem. This unique connection often is referred to as "team identification." Wann (2006) describes fan identification as "the extent to which a fan feels a psychological connection to a team and the team's performances are viewed as self-relevant" (p. 332). Therefore, when a sports fan's team faces a crisis, that fan will attempt to help their team salvage its reputation to avoid cognitive dissonance between their strong ties to the institution and the new information presented. For instance, Penn State fans attempted to salvage Penn State's reputation and aid the victims of the scandal by raising millions of dollars for RAINN, the nation's largest organization dedicated to the prevention of sexual violence (Brown, Brown, & Billings, 2013).

Though crisis scholarship recognizes that sports fans are willing to help during times of crisis (Sanderson, 2010; Brown & Billings, 2013; Brown, Brown, & Billings, 2014), no study has examined how these methods impact stakeholders' attitudes and behavioral intentions toward an organization. Yet, with the drastic, negative consequences that can result from crises in collegiate athletics, crisis managers need to explore every avenue that allows for proper reputation and crisis management. Therefore, crisis scholarship must explore how communication technology has allowed fans to become more active and outspoken.

The Rise of New Media in Sports and Reputation Management

In many ways, sports drive the "trending topics" online. According to Parr (2011), more than 200 million tweets, or the equivalent of a 10-million-page book, are being sent each day. Large portions of those tweets reference sports. In fact, Hernandez (2012) reported that 8 of the

top 15 events earned the largest number of “tweets per second” in 2012 were sports-related events such as the Super Bowl, a Tim Tebow touchdown in the NFL playoffs, and the NBA Finals—events representing the dwindling number of media offerings considered to be DVR-proof.

For sports fans, social media has transformed the manner in which they consume sports. The lines and barriers that formally existed between fans, athletes, and the media have been somewhat blurred by the use of Facebook and Twitter. Rather than simply watching the action on television, social media use gives fans a more interactive and engaging experience while providing them with a wealth of sports knowledge (Sanderson, 2011). Thus, sports fans are also utilizing social media to express their fandom with certain individual athletes. Several studies have determined a parasocial interaction often occurs between fans and athletes on Twitter (Sanderson, 2008, Kassing & Sanderson, 2009; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010). Consequently, fans develop relationships with athletes that are perceived to mirror actual social relationships. Through social media, fans often advise athletes, express excitement while watching athletes play, seek information about athletes, and show disappointment when athletes make mistakes (Sanderson, 2011). Showing disappointment when athletes make mistakes and advising them on a better path forward illustrates one way in which fans have inserted themselves into sports-related incidents. Yet, professional athletes do not always welcome advice from their fans. For example, after fumbling the ball twice during a regular season game against the Dallas Cowboys, New York Giants running back David Wilson tweeted, “Ayy to fantasy participants and pissed Giants fans ur irrelevant to me!!! Nobody wants me to succeed more than ME!! WATCH US WORK!”

Scholars have claimed the primary user benefits Twitter provides are camaraderie and social connection with like-minded individuals (Hambrick et al., 2010). Chen (2011) cites camaraderie as a primary motivation for Twitter use, which should come as no surprise because the website is referred to as a *social* network. However, one of the primary motivations for social media use moves beyond the realm of camaraderie to include gaining access to information (Greer & Yan, 2010). Once stakeholders began connecting with one another and seeking out information through social media, public relations practitioners knew that these websites would need to be utilized during times of crisis (Coombs, 2011). Crisis managers noted that social media's ability to form online communities based on brands and groups that are self-selected by stakeholders gives corporations access to their most engaged audience, allowing them to disseminate important information to them about the company's events, sales numbers, product releases, etc. (Kamhaug, 2013). While an increased connectivity among stakeholders does worry some crisis scholars regarding the speed with which rumors can spread and create a crisis (Coombs, 2011), others have noted that stakeholders have used this connectivity to seemingly benefit organizations (Brown & Billings, 2013).

Brown and Billings (2013) noted that fans were quite willing to comment on crisis situations that plagued their preferred sports team. Because of the powerful connection that exists between a fan and his/her preferred team (Wann, 2006), Miami fans felt the need to rush to the defense of their football team when it faced damaging NCAA allegations. Fans utilized many methods in order to force a positive message in the midst of the negativity that often surrounds a crisis. For instance, after news broke about Miami's NCAA troubles, fans began tagging their tweets with the hashtag, #IStandWithTheU, in an attempt to refute the report and broadcast positive facts about the University of Miami athletic program. This fan-driven effort

caused the hashtag to trend worldwide, showing the ability of average sports fans to create a viral message (Coombs, 2011). Before, fans felt powerless in the storm of a scandal; now, social media provides an outlet for fans to attempt to shape or shift the story in a manner where they feel some meager degree of control, acted out within the guise of their team identification.

In the case of Penn State, stakeholders utilized social media to run and promote a fundraiser meant to raise money for child sex abuse prevention. Fans tweeted the hashtag #ProudPSUforRAINN to promote the good work that Penn State fans were doing in the midst of the scandal. While the Penn State administration dealt with the legal issues surrounding the scandal, Penn State fans rallied and found a way to compensate the victims (Brown, Brown, & Billings, 2014).

Purpose of the Dissertation

This dissertation intended to experimentally test the ability of fan-enacted crisis communication via social media to affect people's evaluations of crises, analyzing several factors (organizational responsibility, crisis responsibility, positive word-of-mouth, potential fan-enacted crisis communication behavior) to understand the value of this emerging form of crisis communication strategies (attack the accuser, ingratiation, apology). First, this study will determine which of the strategies sports fans employ when a sports organization is involved in a crisis lead to the largest attitude change concerning an organization's reputation, evaluation of crisis responsibility, positive word-of-mouth, and potential fan-enacted crisis communication behavior. Coombs (2011) notes that an organization can utilize several different response strategies when attempting to assuage the negative consequences that often result from a crisis.

This study will use a 3 X 2 X 3 factorial design to determine how different response strategies, fan associations and crisis types impact fan-enacted crisis communication's effects on

an individual's evaluations of organizational reputation and crisis responsibility. This dissertation seeks to establish whether stakeholders can affect an organization's ability to salvage and restore their reputation during a crisis. In doing so, this study will analyze how existing crisis theories can be applied in a corporate world that is often impacted by online communication.

Previous studies have identified three primary strategies often used by sports fans during times of organizational crisis: attack the accuser/scapegoating, reminder, and ingratiation (Brown & Billings, 2013; Brown, Brown, & Billings, 2014). Some studies have found that previous uses of the attack strategies seemed arrogant or disassociated from the "team culture" of sport (Brazeal, 2008). Thus, it is important to determine whether the strategies from Coombs' (2007) denial posture are more effective than the strategies found in the bolstering posture when fans disseminate them. Fan-enacted crisis communication's ability to positively impact organizational reputation must be properly established before it can be included as a useful and necessary component within crisis literature.

In sports literature, several types of incidents have led to crises, both on and off the field of play. Therefore, this study will analyze how the type of crisis impacts the overall fan-enacted crisis response. One of the necessary components of Coombs' (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) includes the proper evaluation of the reputational threat a crisis presents to an organization. Coombs and Holladay (2002) developed a list of crises that could affect a corporation and the amount of crisis responsibility that was associated with each crisis type. Using a methodology similar to Coombs and Holladay's (2002) initial study, Brown and Brown (2013) developed a list of sports-specific crises, arranged according to the amount of crisis responsibility that was attributed to them. Thus, this dissertation will include crises that

have a low, moderate, and high amount of crisis responsibility attributed to them by stakeholders according to the classifications established by Brown and Brown (2013).

In addition to exploring the impact of crisis type, this dissertation considers the impact that fan association has on the crisis response. Generally, sports literature acknowledges that one's fandom has a large impact on how a person consumes sports media (Wann, 2006). Therefore, this phenomenon of fandom must be explored within sports crisis literature. To do so, this dissertation will examine crises that occur at (a) the collegiate institution with which the participant identifies, (b) a neutral institution, and (c) the rival of the institution with which the participant identifies.

Significance of the Dissertation

This dissertation includes three important implications for both crisis communication literature and public relations practitioners in the sports industry. First, this study experimentally tests the effects of fan-enacted crisis communication strategies. Previous studies suggest that fans have harnessed the power afforded to them by social media websites to speak out on behalf of the sports organization or individual with which they are most heavily identified (Brown & Billings, 2013; Brown, Brown, & Billings, 2014). Sports crisis literature (Brown & Billings, 2013; Brown, Brown, & Billings, 2014) acknowledges that fans are most likely to employ crisis response strategies from Coombs' (2007) denial posture (attack the accuser or scapegoating) and the bolstering posture (reminder and ingratiation). Yet, scholarship has not evaluated the how well these strategies are used by sports fans on behalf of an organization. Both crisis scholarship and crisis managers benefit from determining whether this emerging type of crisis communication could benefit an organization in crisis by impacting stakeholders' evaluations of organizational reputation and crisis responsibility.

Second, this dissertation will determine how the Internet and new communication technologies transformed the role of the stakeholder in crisis communication literature. Coombs (2011) notes that social media allows messages crafted by “average” people to reach a potentially large audience. Brown, Brown, and Billings (2014) determined that stakeholders who are particularly associated to a specific organization (such as a sports team) will actively speak out on behalf of the organization or individual to which they feel a connection. The authors defined this group as active stakeholders, meaning 1) they are individuals who experience a powerful connection with an organization or individual and 2) they are willing to publicly speak out on their behalf (Brown, Brown, & Billings, 2014). By empirically testing the effects of this communication, crisis scholars and crisis managers will be able to better understand the role of stakeholders in a world that is becoming more connected and influenced by communication technologies. More specific to sports, this dissertation will provide insight about the cognitive tendencies of the modern sports fan. As the connection between sports media and social media has been cemented in a deal between ESPN and Twitter (Stadd, 2013), it is imperative that scholars determine how sports fans will utilize this technology to express their fan allegiance and consume sports news.

Third, this dissertation applies and empirically tests Coombs’ SCCT in a social media setting. While Coombs (2011) addresses the recent growth of social media use, he argues that the emergence of the medium has not revolutionized crisis communication research. Coombs (2011) stresses that the increased connectivity of stakeholders increases the threat of a crisis developing, as rumors can spread very quickly and easily in an online environment. However, the role of active, engaged stakeholders attempting to help an organization’s brand during times of crisis has not been addressed. This dissertation explores whether attribution theory--the

theoretical linkage that connects the crisis type with an appropriate response strategy in Coombs' SCCT--is present in an online environment. Thus, this dissertation seeks to help crisis scholarship effectively expand into an online world.

Overview of the Dissertation

The first chapter of this dissertation describes the relevance and significance of the role that fan-enacted crisis communication plays in sports-related crises. The first chapter established that the purpose of this study is to empirically test the effects of this emerging genre of crisis response. Chapter 2 provides a review of the relevant, existing literature primarily in the three areas of crisis communication, sports fandom, and social media. Additionally, the literature review helps explain important findings leading to the inclusion of particular variables in this study. The literature review is comprised of three distinct parts: a) crisis communication theory, b) crises in sports, and c) the amalgamation of sports, crisis response, and new media. Part I summarizes the primary theories used to analyze crisis in public relations scholarship: William Benoit's (1995) Image Repair Theory and Timothy Coombs' (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory. Part II specifically discusses the studies examining crisis management in the context of sport. Part III explains how crisis literature, fan identification, and the power of social media combine to form a new type of crisis response that empowers stakeholders: fan-enacted crisis communication.

Chapter 3 serves three main methodological purposes in this dissertation. First, it provides a summary of the research questions and hypotheses that this study explores. Next, this chapter delineates the three main independent variables that will be included in the study: fan association, crisis response strategy, and crisis type. Finally, Chapter 3 will specify the approach and procedures utilized in the experimental design of this study. Chapter 4 presents the results

from the experiment. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses how the results found in this study add to the body of knowledge within crisis literature, sports fandom literature, and social media literature. In addition, this chapter will discuss the implications that the study's results have on both crisis scholarship and crisis managers. Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research will then be offered before offering cumulative concluding comments.

CHAPTER 2 – REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter of the dissertation provides an overview of the literature to provide proper context of the research questions and hypotheses that were explored in this study. This experiment explores how crisis strategies, crisis type, and fan association affect organizational reputation, crisis responsibility, positive word-of-mouth, and potential fan-enacted crisis communication behavior. The first section explores crisis communication theory research, focusing largely on Image Repair Theory and Situational Crisis Communication Theory. The second section of this literature review offers an overview of crisis response in sports, both from an individual athlete perspective and an organizational perspective. Finally, the amalgamation of sports, crisis response, and new media is explored.

Crisis Communication Theory

Crisis Communication research is typically discussed through Bill Benoit's (1995) Image Repair Theory or Timothy Coombs's (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory. The two theories attempt to explain how an organization or individual can recover from the negative effects often left in the wake of a crisis situation. Yet, each theory comes from a unique background, providing different approaches in exploring crisis communication.

Crisis literature was initially explored through Bill Benoit's Image Repair Theory, which evolved from a rhetorical background. Benoit grounded his theory in the idea that "human beings engage in recurrent patterns of communicative behavior designed to reduce, redress, or avoid damage to their reputation (face or image) from perceived wrongdoing" (1995, p. vii). The work

of several scholars contributed to Benoit's IRT (Rosenfield, 1968; Burke, 1973; Kruse, 1977; Ryan, 1982; Ware & Linkugel, 1973). As one of the initial scholars in the genre of apologia, Rosenfield (1968) examined the rhetoric of self-defense within the mass media. Yet, Benoit considered Rosenfield's (1968) analog criticism, based on situation and genre, to be too limited and simplistic (Benoit, 1995). Burke (1970; 1973) expanded this area of research to include the concept of guilt for wrongdoing. He noted that the unpleasant feelings that result from an offending action motivate individuals to restore their reputations in order to reduce their feelings of guilt (Burke 1973).

Ware and Linkugel (1973) sought to provide an extensive list of rhetorical strategies found in apologia. The theory of apologia states that it is natural for a person to respond when their character or worth is attacked. A person is especially motivated to respond when his/her character is attacked in a public setting (Kruse, 1977). Kruse (1981) noted that apologia research needed move beyond the examination of an apologetic admission of guilt to encompass any situation that requires an element of self-defense. This self-defense response often culminates in the use of one of the four rhetorical strategies outlined by Ware and Linkugel (1973). The first strategy is denial, where a person claims that they were not involved in the offending action. For example, when Alex Rodriguez first faced allegations that he used performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs), he denied the allegations, calling the reports "not legitimate" (Duke, 2013, p.1). The second strategy is bolstering. When using this strategy, the accused attempts to identify with something that is favorable to the audience. For example, an athlete engaging in the bolstering strategy to combat PED allegations would promote the charity work they have done in the community. The third strategy is differentiation, which occurs when the accused attempts to separate from the negative context to demonstrate that it was the action, rather than the accused,

that was deemed offensive. For example, to combat PED allegations, an athlete might blame their desperate desire to win for the action. The final strategy is transcendence. By utilizing this strategy, the accused will attempt to associate the unpleasant action with something in a larger, more positive context than the one the audience currently views the action. For example, an athlete might explain PED allegations by stating that they felt a responsibility to their teammates to perform at a high standard, placing the focus on the values closely associated with sport and teamwork.

Ware and Linkugel's (1973) strategies certainly provided an important foundation for future research in the genre of apologia. Ryan (1982) expanded on their work by including policy creation and the character of policy creators in his "kategoria and apologia." Ryan (1982) noted the importance of examining self-defense according to the initial attack on his/her image. Benoit's IRT sought to expand the original rhetorical strategies Ware and Linkugel (1973) defined to provide a more comprehensive list of the strategies that could be utilized to repair one's image in times of crisis. Thus, Benoit's IRT also sought to expand apologia so that it could be applied to a variety of media campaigns rather than simply being utilized to examine political rhetoric (Benoit & Lindsey, 1987).

Benoit's Image Repair Theory was originally known as the "Image Restoration Theory." However, Benoit (2000) noted that there were two main problems with this name that reveal much about the image repair process. First, the nature of the name "Image Restoration Theory" suggested that a person could always restore his/her reputation to its previous standing, whereas a majority of the time, it could only be repaired. Sometimes the negative results of a crisis can be so large that a reputation cannot be restored. Thus, an accused person must be satisfied with simply being able to make repairs to his/her image. Benoit (2000) also noted that the name

“restoration” assumes that every image is “good” before a crisis strikes and can subsequently be returned to its positive state, arguing that “repair” ultimately pertained to the desire to return to a stasis position that was generally occupied pre-crisis.

The central tenet of Benoit’s (1995) Image Repair Theory posits that because a person’s image is important to them, when they perceive that their image has been threatened by an attack, they will be induced to protect it. Benoit rooted his theory in the assumption that communication is a goal-oriented activity that is centered on maintaining a favorable public image. He notes that upholding a positive public image is valuable, because a positive image contributes to a healthy self-image. On the other hand, a negative public image can lead to guilt, stress, or anxiety that can be detrimental to a person’s health (Benoit, 1995). Also, a favorable public image is crucial for persuading audiences, as source credibility is often called into question when audiences are choosing to accept or reject persuasive messages.

According to the theoretical concept of latitudes of acceptance, a favorable public image might help stakeholders view the persuasive message as a position that is in accordance with one’s preferred stand on the issue and is, thus, viewed as being generally acceptable (Sherif, 1963). Yet, no matter how important a favorable image is deemed to be, Benoit (1995) declared that attacks to a person’s image are almost inevitable, typically involving two components: an action that was deemed to be offensive or undesirable and a person is held responsible for that action. Once something is deemed an attack, a person will attempt to repair their image.

During image repair, the persuasive message must resonate with the intended target audience. Petty and Cacioppo’s (1979) Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) notes the importance of persuasion on the formation of attitudes. ELM provides a theoretical explanation of how those persuasive messages are cognitively processed, noting that audiences can choose to

use two “routes” in which to process them: the central or the peripheral. A primary focus of ELM is the extent to which an audience is involved with the persuasive message. When an audience is involved, the elaboration with the message will be high. Elaboration means “the extent to which a person thinks about the issue-relevant arguments contained in a message” (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, p.128). When elaboration is high, audience members take the central route via deep contemplation about the content of the persuasive message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979). The central route causes the audience to utilize more cognitive processing to evaluate messages. The other “route”, the peripheral route, leads audiences to pass judgments on the message based more on external cues (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979). The audience may be led to take the peripheral route when they are not motivated and/or able to process the message. Several external cues such as décor, attractiveness of speaker, message quality, etc. have been found to lead to peripheral route processing. The peripheral route generally results in a more temporary change of attitude (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

Thus, Benoit called upon the earlier research within apologia (Rosenfield, 1968; Burke, 1970, 1973; Kruse, 1977; Ware & Linkugel, 1973; Ryan, 1982) to create a comprehensive list of strategies that could be used for this persuasive image repair. Benoit’s (1995) list features five main strategies: denial, evade responsibility, reduce offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification. Several strategies have different variations that people can use depending on the crisis. Table 2.1 outlines Benoit’s strategies in detail.

Table 2.1:
Strategies in Benoit’s (1995, 1997) Image Repair Theory

| Strategy | Variations of Strategy |
|--|--|
| <i>Denial</i> : person can choose to deny the fact that he/she performed the act in question | <i>Simple Denial</i> : person in question did not perform the offensive act |
| | <i>Shift The Blame</i> : stating that someone else performed the act, thus denying the accused |

| | |
|--|--|
| | person's responsibility |
| <i>Evade Responsibility</i> : reduce the responsibility for his/her actions | <i>Provocation</i> : (scapegoating) the person accused of the offense performed the act in response to someone else's wrongdoing |
| | <i>Defeasibility</i> : the accused performed the negative behavior because of a lack of control, lack of information, or misinformation. |
| | <i>Accident</i> : the person did not mean to perform the act in question. |
| | <i>Good intentions</i> : When performing the act in question, the person had good intentions. |
| <i>Reduce offensiveness</i> : using one of the six variations to reduce the negative impact of the action | <i>Bolstering</i> : referring to positive acts performed in the past by the accused that will help mitigate the negative perception. |
| | <i>Minimization</i> : making the audience believe that the offensive act is not as serious as he/she perceives it to be. |
| | <i>Differentiation</i> : comparing the act in question to other, more offensive acts to make the current accusations seem less offensive |
| | <i>Transcendence</i> : placing the act in a more favorable context to mitigate the negative perception. |
| | <i>Attack the Accuser</i> : reduce the credibility of the opposing party that is making the accusations |
| | <i>Compensation</i> : provide some type of monetary benefit or service to repay the victims who were harmed by the offensive act. |
| <i>Corrective Action</i> : The accused party restores the situation to its state before the incident or promises to prevent the reoccurrence of the incident | No variations |
| <i>Mortification</i> : party admits that they are responsible for the action and asks for forgiveness; makes a full apology | No variations |

The final two strategies of corrective action and mortification are often used together; however, they do not have to be. Benoit and Lindsey (1987) recognized that an accused party could take corrective action without fully apologizing for a wrong or admitting guilt.

As crisis communication scholarship evolved, scholars utilized another prominent theory in crisis communication research: Timothy Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). SCCT grew out of a call by Benson (1988) for scholars to address three key issues in order to advance crisis communication research. He noted a need for the creation of a typology of crises that could affect an organization, a list of crisis response strategies, and a theoretical approach that links the two lists. Coombs (1995) addressed this need through his symbolic approach to crisis communication, which was later changed to SCCT.

Whereas Benoit's research focuses on crisis response from the "source-oriented" view by focusing on the strategies that the source can use to repair their image (Benoit, 2000), Coombs' SCCT approaches crisis response from the audience's perspective. Benoit (2000) acknowledged that the audience should become a focus in future crisis research. Thus, Coombs' SCCT is primarily tested to determine which reputation repair strategies are most effective at improving an audience's perspective of a corporation.

SCCT argues that crisis managers must select their reputation repair strategies according to the reputational threat that the crisis situation presents. As the reputational threat intensifies, a crisis manager must utilize more accommodating reputation repair strategies (Coombs, 2011). Coombs (2007) synthesized previous research to form a useful definition of a crisis. He defines it as the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization's performance and generate negative outcomes (Coombs, 2007). Thus, a crisis possesses four distinct characteristics. First, it is perceptual. This characteristic means that a crisis occurs when stakeholders perceive one to have happened. Next, it is unpredictable, while this does not mean that a crisis is necessarily unexpected. Organizations know that a crisis will eventually affect them; however, they do not

know when one will happen. A crisis also violates expectations that stakeholders have about how an organization should act. Finally, a crisis has the potential to lead to negative or undesirable outcomes. Coombs (2007) notes that crisis management involves three distinct phases: pre-crisis, crisis response, and post-crisis. During the pre-crisis phase, organizations should be concerned with prevention of future crises and preparation for when a crisis eventually arises. During the crisis response stage, an organization must actually respond to the crisis situation. In the post-crisis phase, the organization must develop better crisis response strategies to use in the future and fulfill any commitments made to the public during the crisis response phase.

Crisis management remains a key area of emphasis for organizations. Coombs (2007) gave five reasons why effective crisis management is crucial to organizations. First, reputation is important in modern society as a favorable public image helps increase public trust in a company. Second, the growth of technology has completely revolutionized modern communication by increasing the connectivity of stakeholders. Third, stakeholders have become increasingly more vocal when an organization violates their expectancies during a crisis, showing a willingness to engage in both positive and negative word-of-mouth, especially online. Fourth, there is a broad view among stakeholders about what constitutes a crisis situation. Since a crisis exists when stakeholders perceive that it exists, this places organizations at a greater risk. Finally, organizations now face an increased legal responsibility to ensure that all foreseeable risks have been addressed or eliminated, increasing the importance of developing crisis management plans during the pre-crisis phase.

Grounded in Heider's (1958) attribution theory, Coombs followed the research of Weiner (1980) stating that attribution makes people "judges" (p. 188). He argued that when negative

events occur, the public seeks out an agent to blame or punish for the offending action. These attributions of blame and responsibility will color future interactions between the public and the agent involved. Coombs (2007) argued that since crises are negative and are often sudden, they create these attributions of responsibility. During a crisis, people will either blame the organization or the situation itself. If the blame falls on the organization, the public will react toward the organization negatively, causing potential harm to its reputation. Coombs and Holladay (2006) note that such negative reactions could also result in reduced purchase intentions, causing potential harm to an organization's profits. For instance, after the BP Oil spill, customers may have vowed to purchase gasoline from a different company. Perhaps most interesting to this study is the potential for the stakeholders to engage in negative word of mouth (Coombs & Holladay, 2006), which shows a willingness to speak out when inspired by a crisis situation. Most of the research using SCCT focused on establishing a link between the attribution of crisis responsibility and the threat to the organization's reputation (Sisco, 2012; Claeys, Cauberghe, & Vyncke, 2010; Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Coombs & Holladay, 2006).

Thus, the first stage of SCCT requires the crisis manager to determine the amount of crisis responsibility that the public attributes to the organization. Coombs and Holladay (2002) compiled three clusters of crisis types arranged from the least to the largest amount of crisis responsibility that stakeholders will attribute to an organization during a crisis, answering the first research call from Benson (1988). The clusters are victim crises, accident crises, and preventable crises and are listed in Table 2.2, featuring the three clusters of crisis responsibility and the crisis types included in each cluster:

Table 2.2:
SCCT Crisis Typology (Coombs & Holladay, 2002; adapted from Coombs, 2007)

| |
|---|
| Victim Crises: Minimal Crisis Responsibility |
| Natural disasters: acts of nature such as tornadoes or earthquakes |
| Rumors: false and damaging information being circulated about your organization |
| Workplace violence: attack by former or current employee on current employees on-site |
| Product Tampering/Malevolence: external agent causes damage to the organization |
| Accident Crises: Low Crisis Responsibility |
| Challenges: stakeholder claim that the organization is operating in an inappropriate manner. |
| Technical error accidents: equipment or technology failure that cause an industrial accident |
| Technical error product harm: equipment or technology failure that cause a product to be defective or potentially harmful |
| Preventable Crises: Strong Crisis Responsibility |
| Human-error accidents: industrial accident caused by human error |
| Human-error product harm: product is defective or potentially harmful because of human error |
| Organizational Misdeed: management actions that put stakeholders at risk and/or violate the law. |

After the crisis type has been identified, organizations must select a reputation repair strategy, or a combination of repair strategies, to use during crisis response. Coombs (2007) outlines ten strategies that organizations can use. They are divided into four different postures: denial posture, diminishment posture, bolstering posture, and the rebuilding posture. Coombs (2007) recommends that organizations only use the bolstering posture in conjunction with strategies from another posture instead of using it on its own. Table 2.3 defines each reputation repair strategy, hierarchically arranged from the least accommodating strategies to the most accommodating strategies.

Table 2.3:
Coombs (2007) Reputation Repair Strategies

| Posture | Strategy |
|----------------|--|
| Denial Posture | Attack the Accuser: Crisis manager confronts the person or group claiming something is wrong with the organization |
| | Denial: crisis manager asserts that there is no crisis |
| | Scapegoat: Crisis manger blames some person |

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| | or group for the crisis. |
| Diminishment Posture | Excuse: Crisis manager minimizes organizational responsibility by denying intent to do harm and/or claiming inability to control the events that triggered the crisis. |
| | Justification: crisis manager minimizes the perceived damage caused by the crisis |
| Bolstering Posture | Reminder: crisis manager tells stakeholders about the past good works of the organization |
| | Ingratiation: crisis manager praises the stakeholders for their actions |
| | Victimage: The organization explains how it, too, is a victim of the crisis |
| Rebuilding Posture | Compensation: crisis manager offers money or other gifts to victims |
| | Apology: Crisis manager indicated the organization takes full responsibility for the crisis and asks stakeholders for forgiveness. |

Coombs (2007) compiled the list of reputation repair strategies in Table 2.3 to answer another one of Benson’s (1988) needs in crisis communication research when he argued that crisis research should be very situational so that certain responses strategies could be matched with certain crises. When compiling that list, Coombs (2007) synthesized previous research in crisis communication, including Benoit’s (1995) Image Repair Theory. For instance, as seen in Table 2.3, Coombs included some of Benoit’s strategies in his own list of reputation repair strategies such as attack the accuser and compensation. Coombs (2007) notes that the strategies listed in Table 2.3 can be used during the crisis response phase, post-crisis, or both. Coombs (2007) also notes the importance of an organization considering their level of credibility and prior reputation with stakeholders when selecting a reputation repair strategy. Thus, if an organization has a low level of credibility or a history of dealing with similar crises, a more accommodative strategy would need to be selected for crisis response.

When discussing Benoit's (1995) Image Repair Theory and Coombs' (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory, there are clear differences in the way the two theories approach crisis communication research. Those differences begin with the foundation of the two theories. IRT was developed out of a rhetorical background and the theory of apologia; thus, Benoit's theory tends to focus only on the crisis-response stage, giving no attention to either crisis prevention or post-crisis response recovery but rather focusing on the rhetorical strategies invoked during a person's self-defense. However, Coombs has a background in public relations and corporate communications. This likely explains why Coombs' theory explores crisis response as a whole, as seen in his three-stage process.

The background of the theorists also identifies another clear difference between the two theories. Benoit's IRT has mainly been used to study crises facing individuals (Brazeal, 2008; Benoit & Hanczor, 1994). Thus, IRT is often applied to crises affecting political figures, celebrities, or athletes (Brown, 2012). In fact, a content analysis of 11 crisis communication research studies focused on crises affecting individuals, 10 used IRT, and the other article used a combination of both IRT and SCCT (Avery et al., 2010). However, Coombs' SCCT tends to focus more on organizational crises. It was primarily used to investigate how organizational crises affected stakeholder attitudes toward corporations (Brown, Brown, & Dickhaus, 2014). Thus, Coombs' theory would be ideally suited for a study evaluating BP's crisis response following the Gulf Oil spill while Benoit's IRT would more aptly be used to focus on the personal image repair needed by BP's CEO, Bob Dudley.

When synthesizing research based in either IRT or SCCT, more differences can be observed. For instance, Benoit's theory has primarily explored crisis communication from the source-oriented view. This approach likely stems from the theory's basis in rhetoric. Most IRT

studies rhetorically examine the accused party's strategies that were used during their attempt at image repair (Brazeal, 2008). On the other hand, Coombs' SCCT mainly explores crisis communication from the audience-oriented view (Coombs, 2011). This means that these studies seek to evaluate which strategies are the most successful in repairing the accused party's reputation with its stakeholders.

Another clear difference between the two theories is that Coombs' SCCT has a theoretical linkage based in attribution theory while Benoit's theory does not have a direct theoretical linkage. This, presumably, is one reason why Coombs' theory has been so widely used in crisis communication research. Through this link, SCCT allows organizations to match crisis types with crisis response strategies by analyzing the amount of responsibility the public attributes to the organization for the offending act (Coombs, 2011).

Finally, a difference between the two theories is observed in word choice. Benoit chose to call his theory *Image Repair Theory*, while Coombs intentionally avoids the word "image" in favor of the word "reputation." While the two words have often been used interchangeably in public relations literature, the word "image" tends to have a negative connotation in public relations (Sabater, Paolucci, & Conte, 2006; Grunig, 1993). Coombs (2005) noted that the negative connotation of the word "image" among public relations practitioners led to his decision to use "reputation." This negative connotation likely resulted from the idea that an image was a manipulated representation that is being projected to the public (Botan, 1993; Grunig, 1993). While clear differences between the two theories exist, both have been used to examine sports-related crises (Benoit & Hanczor, 1994; Brazeal, 2008; Len-Rios, 2010; Brown & Billings, 2013).

Crisis Response in Sports

The sports arena provides several instances from which a crisis can develop, including in-game competitions, off-field situations, or broader reflections about issues of identity (Billings, Butterworth, & Turman, 2011). Crisis management studies within the context of sport initially utilized rhetorical analyses to examine the strategies athletes used in an attempt to repair their image following an incident (Meyer, 2008). Decades ago, Kruse (1981) cast aside sports image repair as a topic worthy of scholarly exploration, suggesting that winning and team success was all that truly mattered to a sports' organization's stakeholders, rather than an athlete's character issues. While there is certainly evidence to support the idea that fans are primarily concerned with winning (Anderson, 2013; McCloskey & Bailes, 2005; Arnold, 1992), recent events have shown that crisis situations can still be quite detrimental for both athletes and sports organizations. Brazeal (2008) notes that the growth of the sports media led sports-related crises to become more prominent in sports news because there is simply more time to fill.

Crises also can hinder the success of sports organizations. For example, following an investigation, the NCAA levied heavy sanctions against the University of Southern California for rules violations regarding illegal extra benefits given to former USC running back Reggie Bush. These sanctions included four years of probation, a two-year postseason ban, the loss of 30 scholarships over three years, the vacation of 13 victories from 2004-2005, and the removal of Reggie Bush's Heisman Trophy (Real Clear Sports, 2013). Thus, this crisis situation certainly harnessed stakeholder attention by impacting the organization's recruiting efforts, win/loss percentage, and profit margin that results from bowl game participation.

Such negative consequences that result from poorly managed crises inspired a new desire to protect sports organizations and athletes through proper image repair and crisis management

(Wilson, Stavros, & Westberg, 2010). Issues such as the Tiger Woods and USC scandals captured the headlines of primary news outlets and showcased the growing prominence of sports-related crises. This increased attention, along with the rise of active sports fans, placed a larger emphasis on the importance of image repair in sports (Meyer, 2008). Recent events and crises have shown that a negative image can impact sponsorship and bowl money, leading sports organizations and individuals to place a larger importance on defending their reputations with key stakeholders (Sanderson, 2008).

Individual athlete crisis research. Most studies examining crisis response in the context of sport analyzed the response strategies using Benoit's (1995) IRT, likely because of the prevalence of individual crises being examined over organizational crisis response. Perhaps sport provides a unique context to analyze crisis communication because most crises are not system wide. For instance, during Michael Vick's dog fighting scandal, the public primarily blamed Vick for the problems before they blamed his team, the Atlanta Falcons. Benoit and Hanczor (1994) performed one of the initial sports image repair studies as they examined Tonya Harding's defense of her image on *Eye-to-Eye with Connie Chung* after the attack on her rival figure skater, Nancy Kerrigan. Leading up to the 1994 U.S. Figure Skating Championships, Harding's ex-husband launched a plan to attack Kerrigan, injuring her knee and eliminating Harding's competition. Benoit and Hanczor (1994) determined that Harding employed the bolstering, denial, and attacking the accuser strategies. Several important implications arose from this study. First, the authors noted that the selected image repair strategies must be consistent with the existing identity of the person engaging in it. Thus, it was ineffective when Harding attempted to transform her image from that of a "bad girl" to an apologetic, innocent victim. Second, when an organization or individual encounters a crisis, lying is not an option.

Finally, the authors encouraged other crisis scholars to examine image repair in sports, citing an increase in media coverage being allocated to sports crisis such as the O.J. Simpson double murder case in the 1990s.

Frandsen and Johansen (2007) followed Benoit and Hanczor's (1994) call when they explored the use of the apology strategy used by Danish handball coach Anja Andersen. The crisis occurred when Andersen withdrew her team in the middle of a match, citing a series of negative decisions handed down by two referees. The study evaluated Andersen's apology according to ethical standards developed by Hearit (2006), stating that an apology must be truthful, sincere, voluntary, and timely. He also decried that apologies should address all stakeholders and should be performed in an appropriate context. The study determined that Anderson was unsuccessful in her use of the apology strategy, as they noted that the increased connectivity brought by new communication technology makes it more difficult for individuals to properly deliver an apology that the public determines is real and genuine (Frandsen & Johansen, 2007).

Brazeal (2008) examined the image repair strategies Terrell Owens used when public sentiment about him was at an all-time low. A lack of public support is especially dangerous for a professional athlete, as the "market value" of an athlete's image often hinges on their reputation with the public (Brazeal, 2008, p. 146). During his contract negotiations with the Philadelphia Eagles, Owens was rude to the press and openly criticized his teammates, resulting in the Eagles deactivating him. His deactivation made it clear that Owens and his agent needed to engage in image repair. Brazeal (2008) analyzed the strategies used in Owens' press conference, which included mortification and bolstering strategies. However, he also launched attacks against his accusers that reinforced his prior reputation of being self-centered and

arrogant. Rather than accepting responsibility for his actions, Owens attempted to be the victim in the situation by having his agent, Drew Rosenhaus, paint the Eagles organization as selfish and ungrateful for all Owens' sacrifices and accomplishments. Brazeal (2008) noted that image repair in sports must understand the nature of team sport, which "demands unity, commitment, and sacrifice" (p. 145). Owens' attempt at image repair failed to portray him as a "team player."

Brown, Dickhaus, and Long (2012) built upon Brazeal's (2008) study to experimentally test the effectiveness of image repair strategies. The study examined LeBron James' image when he announced on an hour-long ESPN special that he was leaving his hometown Cleveland Cavaliers to play for the Miami Heat. The program, known as "The Decision," also harmed James' image, as many felt he appeared arrogant (Banagan, 2011). Similar to Owens, sports fans felt as though James' actions violated the "team culture" that sport possesses. Results from the study revealed that the mortification strategy improved James' image while both of the other strategies, shifting the blame and mortification, harmed James' image. This study provided an important addition to sports crisis research as it empirically tested the effectiveness of Benoit's (1995) image repair strategies.

Organizational sports crisis research. While numerous studies illustrated that athletes and sports organizations utilized Benoit's IRT, scholarship needed to determine what strategies were most prevalently implemented. Len-Rios (2010) performed a content analysis of the strategies Duke University exercised after members of the men's lacrosse team were accused of raping a female dancer at an off-campus party, an accusation that the players were never found guilty of committing. Results showed that Duke used the simple denial and mortification strategies to defend the athletes. The university also used the bolstering, corrective action, separation, and attack the accuser strategies to defend its own reputation. While it was certainly

useful to determine the preferred strategies Duke used, Len-Rios's (2010) study showed the value of content analysis research in examining crisis response from both an individual and organizational perspective. The results determined that the attack the accuser strategy resulted in the most positive media coverage. While content analysis research is typically limited by its inability to show the effects of a message, these results did lend support to the positive impact of that particular repair strategy. Len-Rios (2010) also suggested an addition of a new category of response called "expression of disappointment," suggesting that the response strategies included in traditional crisis theories might not fully encompass the issues encountered in sport. Such expressions of disappointment may allow for the bifurcation of instances in which a legal wrong is contrasted with a moral wrong.

Although the majority of cases examined individual athlete's crisis response strategies, there are a few cases devoted to organizational crisis response in sports. Similar to individual crisis response, scholars examined organizational crisis responses strategies largely using Benoit's (1995) IRT as the theoretical framework. For example, Fortunato (2008) also analyzed the Duke Lacrosse scandal. However, he focused on the internal communication Duke University used to frame the story in hopes of salvaging their reputation. In order to fully examine the strategies Duke University used, Fortunato (2008) applied both Benoit's (1995) and Coombs' (2007) strategies, finding that Duke first employed the corrective action and mortification strategies to repair the university's reputation. However, once the evidence, victim's testimony, and even the credibility of Durham District Attorney Mike Nifong were questioned, the university, instead, used the attacking the accuser strategy.

Williams and Olaniran (2002) used Coombs' (1995) response strategies to examine a crisis affecting both Texas Tech University and the city of Lubbock, TX. In 1998, the Texas

Tech Lady Raiders basketball team was scheduled to play Hampton University. Before the game, Lubbock police arrested Hampton University's head coach, assistant coach, and the head coach's husband, falsely accusing them of attempting a parking lot scam at the local Wal-Mart, resulting in allegations that racial profiling contributed to their arrest. Despite the fact that Texas Tech did not actually contribute to the crisis, the connection between the incident and the basketball team forced them to engage in crisis response. Texas Tech utilized Coombs' (1999) excuse strategy, claiming that the university had no control over the events that transpired. On the other hand, city officials provided conflicting crisis response strategies. In addition to utilizing Coombs' (1999) strategies, this study illustrated how sports crises can also be caused in a non-sports setting, obtaining national news coverage. This study also illustrates the unique connection that exists between a university, its sports teams, and the city in which it is located.

Bruce and Tini (2008) performed a textual analysis of news articles reacting to an alleged financial scandal within the Australasian Men's Rugby League. In 2002, the Canterbury Bulldogs allegedly breached the league salary cap by nearly \$1 million. In the article, Bruce and Tini (2008) noted that a new crisis response strategy of "diversion" might be particularly useful for sports organizational crises. Diversion allows sports organizations to capitalize on the intense, existing connection between fans and their favorite athletes when management's failures cause a crisis, as fans believe that athletes and management operate independently of one another. This study, combined with the findings of Len-Rios (2010) showed that the unique nature of sport may call for a more specific theoretical lens through which sports crises can be analyzed. In the case of the Canterbury Bulldogs, the organization responded to allegations of gross financial mismanagement by consistently offering up the Bulldogs' players as innocent victims, thereby minimizing the overall damage to the team. Thus, the organization shifted the

fans' focus to the players and coaches so that "the organization ensured that the relationship with at least one key stakeholder group would continue" (Bruce & Tini, 2008, p. 113). This case provided a strong example of the important role fans play in sports crises, an importance that has only grown with the materialization of new communication technologies.

Pfahl and Bates (2008) examined the image repair strategies used by all parties impacted after the Formula One and the Indianapolis Motor Speedway tire crisis. After Michelin tires appeared to cause two cars to crash during practice at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, racers using Michelin tires decided not to race in the United States Grand Prix at Indianapolis to the anger and dismay of Formula One fans. This crisis affected many different companies and individuals, including the Federation Internationale De L'Automobile (FIA), Michelin, Michelin racing teams, Indianapolis Motor Speedway, Bridgestone (and teams), and Formula One Management. This crisis study highlighted the number of entities that could be affected by one single crisis event. Thus, crisis managers must now address an even wider array of stakeholders during a crisis. Pfahl and Bates' (2008) study also raised the present conflict of who is more to blame during a crisis: the sports organization or the individuals associated with it.

Crisis research beyond SCCT and IRT. As crisis scholars began applying traditional crisis communication theories to sports and social media use, they realized that neither Benoit's (1995) IRT nor Coombs' (2007) SCCT fully encompassed all examples of crisis communication response strategies (Brown, Brown, & Billings, 2014). Brown and Brown (2013) noted that while existing crisis theories have certainly helped crisis scholars examine sports-related crises, the evolution and growing prominence of sports crises called for a sport-specific crisis theory. For instance, the authors argued that Coombs' (2007) SCCT theory was difficult to apply to sports crises due to the fact that its existing crisis typology was not fully inclusive of the crises

that typically befall sports organizations because Coombs' typology is grounded in technical issues that befall corporate organizations during the production of goods and services (see Table 2.2). Perhaps this issue with the existing typology is unsurprising given the corporate nature of SCCT that is grounded in a technical production of products and services.

While SCCT maintained its strength of a theoretical linkage between crisis types and response strategies, it was clear that the typology should be expanded to better examine crises in sport so that attribution theory could apply in the particular context of sport. Thus, Brown and Brown (2013) established a list of twelve sports-related crises. Following the methodological framework of Coombs and Holladay (2002), the authors organized the list according to the amount of crisis responsibility attributed to each crisis type. Thus, three distinct crisis clusters resulted from the study: Environmental/Individual Crises, Rules and Norms Violations, and Organizational Mismanagement.

The study determined that crises that fall within the Environmental/Individual Crisis cluster resulted in the smallest amount of crisis responsibility being attributed to the organization in crisis. Conversely, crises that fall within the Organizational Mismanagement crisis cluster resulted in the largest amount of crisis responsibility being attributed to the organization in crisis. This distinction is crucial for sports crisis studies in order to properly ascertain which crisis response strategy should be selected. Coombs (2007) suggested that the more crisis responsibility stakeholders attribute to an organization, the more accommodating the organization should be during the crisis response phase. Table 2.4 showcases the twelve crisis types, arranged from the least amount of crisis responsibility to the largest amount of crisis responsibility attributed to the organization.

Table 2.4
Sports Crisis Typology (Brown & Brown, 2013)

| Environmental/Individual Crises (Low Crisis Responsibility) |
|---|
| <i>“Act of God” Event:</i> actions that affect a sports figure or a team that were outside of his/her/its control. An example of this crisis type could be seen when the regular-season opener between the New York Knicks and the Brooklyn Nets was postponed due to Hurricane Sandy in November 2012. |
| <i>Controversial Statement/Action:</i> statements or actions made by a sports figure that are inappropriate or that caused some controversy, but did not lead directly to an arrest and/or conviction, and did not address some aspect of the team. An example of this type of crisis occurred when Voula Papachristou, a Greek Olympic Athlete, was expelled from the Olympic team after controversial statements on Twitter in July 2012. |
| <i>Personal Lifestyle Transgression:</i> actions involving a sports figure that affect his/her personal life, but do not lead to an arrest and/or conviction. This action is seen as being more morally wrong than criminally wrong. An example of this type of crisis occurred when Bobby Petrino was caught having an extramarital affair in April 2012. |
| <i>External Criminal Transgression:</i> actions involving a sports figure that lead directly to an arrest, legal action and/or conviction. The actions that led to the legal action did not happen during the course of competition. An example of this crisis type was observed when Chad Johnson, former NFL wide receiver, was arrested on counts of domestic battery in August 2012. |
| <i>Internal Criminal Transgression:</i> actions involving a sports figure that lead directly to an arrest, legal action and/or conviction that happened during the course of competition. An example of this crisis type occurred when NHL player Marty McSorley was found guilty of assault with a weapon in October 2000 after hitting Donald Brashear with a hockey stick during a game. |
| Rules and Norms Violations (Moderate Crisis Responsibility) |
| <i>Fan Involvement Issue:</i> actions or statements made by sports fans that result in negative consequences for a sports organization or athlete. This also includes actions by collegiate boosters that could result in NCAA sanctions. An example of this crisis type occurred when Ole Miss fans rushed the field after beating Mississippi State University in college football, leading to a \$5,000 fine for the University of Mississippi in November 2012. |
| <i>Amateurism Transgression:</i> issues that affect the amateur status of a sports figure (usually affect college or Olympic-style competitions). An example of this crisis type occurred when Shabazz Muhammad was declared ineligible to compete as a member of the UCLA basketball team by the NCAA in November 2012 for violating amateurism rules. |
| <i>Competition Transgression:</i> actions involving a sports figure or team that directly compromise the fair nature of competition. An example of this crisis type occurred when Yasmani Grandal, a catcher for the Padres, tested positive for synthetic testosterone. |
| Organizational Mismanagement (High Crisis Responsibility) |
| <i>League/Conference Management Issue:</i> issues surrounding a team affiliation or league operations that do not directly affect the course of competition. An example of this type of crisis occurred when Rutgers left the Big East for the Big Ten conference in November 2012. |

Logistical/Operational Issue: issues that affect the viewing of a sporting event that were not caused by an act of God. An example of this crisis type occurred when issues with temporary seating in Cowboy Stadium resulted in 400 ticket holders being unable to watch Super Bowl XLV.

Player/Coach Management Issue: issues surrounding a sports figure that would directly affect the team's active roster or coaching staff. An example of this crisis type occurred when the Los Angeles Lakers fired head coach Mike Brown, who was a month into his second season with the team after Laker management determined that the team was "not heading in the right direction."

Misleading Internal Information: statements made by a sports figure about internal operations that cause some controversy or compromise his/her position with the team. An example of this crisis type occurred when New York Jets players criticized the playing ability of backup quarterback Tim Tebow, adding to an existing quarterback controversy between Tebow and starter Mark Sanchez in 2012.

The Amalgamation of Sports, Crisis Response, and New Media

Social media and crisis communication. As new media emerged as a primary source of information, corporations quickly recognized the need to have an online presence, especially in times of crisis (Coombs, 2011). Crisis scholars began noticing the benefits associated with updating stakeholders through corporate websites as crises arose. Taylor and Kent (2007) determined that using corporate websites during crisis response was beneficial for distributing key content to stakeholders, as this practice ensured that they had the latest information as the crisis continued to develop. While the dissemination of information to stakeholders is important during times of crisis, new Internet technologies, especially social media websites, allowed for two-way communication, a key component of proper crisis management (Coombs, 2011). Thus, corporations bypassed traditional media gatekeepers to receive instant feedback from stakeholders, allowing for the revision and refinement of crisis management plans. This transformation also contributed to the rise in importance of user-generated content, placing power in the hands of a corporation's stakeholders (Brown & Billings, 2013).

In addition to web pages, blogs quickly became a popular format in which entities communicated with their key stakeholders. The rise of new media allowed corporations,

celebrities, athletes, and other prominent individuals an easier avenue to bypass traditional media gatekeepers, granting them a direct connection to their primary audiences (fans). Social media websites permitted athletes to correct media inaccuracies, explain previous behavior, and comment on developing crises (Sanderson, 2010). Sanderson (2008) noted that Major League Baseball player Curt Schilling started the blog 38pitches.com to communicate directly to fans and journalists, correcting any falsities that were being perpetuated in sports media. Specifically, when some posited that Schilling's famous "bloody sock" from the 2004 American League Championship Series was a plot or conspiracy developed by Schilling, he utilized his blog to vehemently refute the stories that could have damaged his reputation (Sanderson, 2008). Schilling used such moments to showcase the disdain and distrust he felt for sports journalists on his blog. In doing so, he responded to events in his own unique manner, devoid of any censorship or alterations by the Boston Red Sox organization, public relations staff, news outlets, and other traditional media gatekeepers.

Scholarship has certainly recognized that crises can have a detrimental impact on an organization (Benoit, 1995; Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Williams & Olaniran, 2002; Brazeal, 2008), and the rise of new/social media altered the manner in which crises develop and the practice of crisis response. Coombs (2011) noted that the Internet increased the pressure felt by organizations in crisis, as the definition of what constitutes a "quick" crisis response is synonymous with instantaneous crisis response. Pew Internet & American Life (2006) found that stakeholder social media use actually increases during a crisis, as they seek out additional information. As such, social media allows for a quick dispersal of information, especially during crises. Yet, Coombs (2011) warned that increased connectivity online could perpetuate rumors through social networks that develop crises or prolong existing crises. However, social media

can benefit crisis managers by providing immediate feedback from stakeholders, as well as an avenue for the efficient dispersal of subsequent information. Through the use of social media, organizations possess a direct link to stakeholders who have self-selected to receive information from the organization, ensuring that they care about the organization's message.

While the constant evolution and refinement of online technology does make it difficult for scholars to formulate a single definition of what constitutes a social media website, there are several categories of social media websites (See Table 2.5).

Table 2.5
Social Media Categories (Coombs, 2011; Fulkerson, 2010)

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Social networks | Individual webpages intended for social sharing of content and communicating with friends (Examples: Facebook, MySpace, Bebo, Google +) |
| Professional networks | This type of social media provides users with a virtual Rolodex of professional contacts. The goal of these sites is centered on building a strong professional network rather than socializing. (Examples: LinkedIn, Plaxo) |
| Blogs | Online journals where users post content and readers can comment on it. (Examples: WordPress, Blogger) |
| Wikis | Webpages where people work together to create and edit content (Example: Wikipedia, WikiAnswers) |
| Podcast | Audio and video content created and distributed through a subscription based service (Example: The B.S. Report with ESPN's/Grantland's Bill Simmons; This American Life by Chicago Public Media) |
| Forums | Online discussions revolving around specific interests and topics (Example: Comment section on newspaper websites) |
| Content communities | Places where people organize themselves around specific content that they create and comment on (Example: YouTube, Flickr) |
| Microblogs | Sites on which people share small amounts of information through posts (Example: Twitter, Tumblr) |
| Aggregators | Tools that collect content (news stories, blogs) from different sites in one site; content is frequently ranked by popularity and can include comments from users. (Example: Reddit, BuzzFeed) |
| Social Bookmarking | Tool with which people share and rate content they have found |

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| | online. (Example: Delicious, Digg, Pinterest) |
| Review & Recommendation Sites | Participants are able to review products, places, and services to give online recommendations. (Example: Yelp, TripAdvisor) |

Voit (2008) noted that all types of social media websites allow for participation, openness, conversation, communities, and connectedness. Essentially, social media creates a tool to engage stakeholders. When crisis managers engage and update stakeholders during a crisis, the public will perceive that the organization is being transparent while they deal with the looming situation. Organizations must understand that being “actually engaging and being open and transparent is much better than being silent” during a crisis (Kamhaug, 2013, p. 1). Overall, Kamhaug (2013) stressed that social media use must be a “good product” to ensure that the message captures stakeholders’ focus, noting that online conversation is neither limited by space nor filtered by journalists, therefore allowing organizations to give vested stakeholders the information that they crave.

The Internet also allowed for the creation of online communities consisting of like-minded individuals (Voit, 2008). This practice certainly aided corporations, as key consumers began self-associating with brands, celebrities, athletes, etc., that they supported, providing a direct link to the stakeholders that were most associated with their organization (Coombs, 2011). In 2010, Pampers showed how the benefit of using online communication during a crisis when social media users claimed that their diapers harmed infants by producing severe diaper rash. Pampers quickly responded to each negative Facebook post to combat this harmful rumor. In addition to actively responding online, Pampers hosted a conference of influential “mommy bloggers” to present important information that would help dispel the rumor (Coombs, 2011). By filtering their crisis response through these influential social media users, Pampers restored

faith in their product (Coombs, 2011). Thus, Pampers capitalized on the idea that social media had already provided them with a direct linkage to a variety of stakeholders.

When managing online crisis communication channels, Coombs (2011) suggested three main rules: “(1) Be present; (2) Be where the action is; (3) Be there before the crisis” (p. 27). Coombs’ rules illustrate that organizations should preemptively commit to the use of social media *before* a crisis strikes to ensure that key stakeholders have already joined the online community to obtain information. For instance, Pampers possessed the ability to respond quickly to the rumors that their products were harming infants because they had an established social media presence before the crisis struck. Also, since the rumors circulated through social media websites, it greatly aided the crisis response that the company addressed the rumors in the same medium. Thus, this situation provided an ideal model of proper online crisis management.

Fan identification. During crisis response, organizations need to quickly disseminate up-to-date information to their most invested stakeholders. In the case of sports organizations, these stakeholders are fans. During the course of each sporting event, the visible, emotional reactions on the faces of coaches, athletes, and fans lend support to the enduring truth that sports matter to people. Yet, an apparent difference exists between a sports fan that has been brought to tears after their favorite team loses and the fan that simply shrugged off the loss with the promise that the team “would get them next time.” Scholars analyzed the differing degrees of sports fandom, seeking a way to quantify the visible passion, or lack thereof, fans felt for their respective teams (Devlin, Brown, & Billings, 2012). This social phenomenon has primarily been explored through the concept of team fan identification, which is defined as “the extent to which a fan feels a psychological connection to a team and the team’s performances are viewed as self-relevant” (Wann, 2006, p. 332).

Wann (2006) noted that sports “fans wish to feel unity and cohesion with others” (p. 334). A sports setting provides such feelings of unity with visible delineations between one’s own team and one’s rival team, which is often displayed proudly by team jerseys and other memorabilia. Branscombe and Wann (1991) stated, “sports viewing provides individuals with something grander than themselves that they can feel a part of, without requiring any special skills, knowledge, or acceptance of particular institutional values” (p. 116). Donovan, Carlson, and Zimmerman (2005) found several personality traits affecting this need for team affiliation, including extroversion, agreeability, the need for arousal, and materialism.

Fan identification largely developed from the earlier concept of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1972; Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Tajfel (1972) defined social identity theory as “the individual’s knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership” (p. 292). Social identity theory is largely concerned with the formation of social groups “according to the self-conception of group members” (Hogg, 2006, p. 111). People generally classify themselves socially based on a number of factors, including social activities (e.g., sports fan, Kiwanis member, fisherman), familial relationships (e.g., father, mother, wife, daughter), and/or their professions (e.g., lawyer, doctor, professor) (Brown, Devlin, & Billings, 2012).

Social identity theory posits that social classifications help people locate other like-minded individuals with similar interests, causing a feeling of instant solidarity with that group, organization, or team (Donovan et al., 2005). In the case of sport, these like-minded individuals are cheering for the same team, sporting the same colors, and yelling the same rallying cries, leading to the formation of an “in-group.” In opposition, the rival team’s fans often play the role of the villain, forming an “out-group” that is often demonized by the “in-group” (Brown, Devlin,

& Billings, 2012). This sense of in-group favoritism and out-group scorn creates an “us vs. them” dichotomy and strengthens the perceived social identity that is felt by identifying with a certain sports team (Wann & Grieve, 2005). Social comparison theory explains how one’s social identity as a sports fan is impacted by his/her team’s performance (Festinger, 1954). This theory suggests that a person can elevate their own self-esteem by comparing their situation to a person who is less fortunate (Wills, 1981). In the case of sports, a fan can elevate their own self-worth by comparing their own team’s performance to a team who has a lower winning percentage. In fact, the disposition theory of sports spectatorship suggests that fans achieve maximum enjoyment while watching a sporting contest when a favored team defeats a hated one (Zillmann et al., 1989). Thus, for sports fans to experience a “perfect” sports day, they not only want their own team (the “in-group”) to be successful, but they, also, desire their rival team (the “out-group) to lose. For instance, in Boston Red Sox team apparel stores, t-shirts are sold with the saying “I have two favorite professional teams: The Boston Red Sox and whoever is playing the Yankees.” In fact, Frommer and Frommer (2005) note that a large part of Red Sox fandom involves hating the New York Yankees.

Several different scales have been created in order to measure this concept of fandom, including Wann and Branscombe’s (1993) Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) that is illustrated in Table 2.6. The SSIS is an eight-item Likert scale with responses ranging from 1 to 8, where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 8 = Strongly Agree. A participant’s fan identification score results from a sum of his/her responses. Participants who score an 18 or below are classified as having a low level of fan identification; participants whose score ranges from 19-34 maintain a moderate level of fan identification. Participants who score above 35 are classified as highly-identified fans (Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001).

Table 2.6
Sports Spectator Information Scale (Wann & Branscombe, 1993)

| Scale Items |
|--|
| 1. How important to YOU is it that the (team) wins? |
| 2. How strongly do YOU see YOURSELF as a fan of the (team)? |
| 3. How strongly do your FRIENDS see YOU as a fan of the (team)? |
| 4. During the season, how closely do you follow the (team) via ANY of the following: a) in person or television, b) radio, or c) television news or a newspaper? |
| 5. How important is being a fan of the (team) to YOU? |
| 6. How much do YOU dislike the (team's) greatest rivals? |
| 7. How often do YOU display the (team's) name or insignia at your place of work, where you live, or on your clothing? |

Thus, fan identification provided researchers with a useful independent variable to predict behaviors such as attitudes toward teams, purchase of memorabilia, game attendance, and purchase intention toward sponsor goods (Wann, 2006). Higher levels of fan identification contribute to many types of increased sport consumption, including increased game attendance, increased attention devoted to sports media, and increased patronage of sponsors' products (Wann, 2006). Raney (2006) notes that the positive self-esteem resulting from associating with a successful sports team serves as an important motivation for sports consumption. When a sports team wins, fans generally experience a sense of pride that scholarship refers to as "basking in reflected glory" (BIRG) as they wish to associate with the winning team (Cialdini et al., 1976). Conversely, the damage to ones' self-esteem that results from a loss causes people to disassociate themselves from the team's performance in what scholarship refers to as "cutting off reflected failure" (CORF) (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980). These phenomena result in sports fans using the term "we" to describe the events that led to a team win and "them" to describe the actions that led to a team loss (Raney, 2006).

This literature demonstrates the powerful effects that both on- and off-field events can have on sports fans. When a crisis strikes a sports team, fans feel threatened by it, as they are

negatively affected by any source of team failure. Wann (2006) notes that highly identified sports fans are unable to disassociate from their preferred team, because their role as a sports fan is too vital to their own identity. Thus, the problematic psychological state resulting from sports crises can cause fans to act out to salvage their damaged self-esteem (Wann, 2006). Scholarship determined that sports fans utilize social media to speak out during times of crisis (Brown & Billings, 2013). Wann (2006) notes that fans will cope with team problems by making bold predictions and recalling team successes--similar to the reminder strategy found within Coombs' (2007) SCCT. Wann (2006) also notes that during times of team failure, highly identified fans will rally together and believe that their fan base is better behaved than their rival's fan base--similar to the ingratiation strategy found within Coombs' (2007) SCCT. In fact, findings of "in-group bias" are so strong among sports fans that they are more likely to support charitable organizations that are associated with their own team rather than a rival team (Wann, 2006). This type of donation was especially observed following the Penn State sex abuse scandal, as Penn State fans raised millions of dollars for organizations devoted to the prevention of sexual abuse (Brown, Brown, & Billings, 2014). Thus, these linkages between fan identification literature and crisis literature need to be explored within sports scholarship.

The emergence of the active stakeholder in fan-enacted crisis communication.

Despite Coombs' (2011) argument that the rise of the Internet and new media technologies did not completely "revolutionize" crisis response, Brown, Brown, and Billings (2014) noted that the formation of online communities has allowed stakeholders to enter into traditional crisis response models. Traditional public relations research examines the potential for stakeholders to engage in positive word-of-mouth (PWOM). Coombs (2011) notes that word-of-mouth is a "serious force that can shape consumer decisions" (p. 49). More specifically, *positive* word-of-mouth

endorses a product or service in such a way that encourages another person to choose that product or service through an initial purchase or by switching from another brand (East, Hammond, & Lomax, 2008). PWOM is an important concept in public relations research because it is the primary reason for brand choices, as customers tend to trust their peers' reviews and opinions. Scholars have investigated the antecedents to PWOM in an attempt to foster this unique relationship that occurs between brands, companies, etc. and its stakeholders. Brown et. al (2005) found that consumer satisfaction, commitment to the brand, and identification with the brand all increased a stakeholder's likelihood of engaging in PWOM. Romaniuk, Beal, and Uncles (2013) discovered that heavy brand users were the most likely stakeholders to engage in PWOM on social media. Thus, the growth of social media increases the potential and power of word-of-mouth with engaged stakeholders. The presence of a highly-identified fan base and brand-loyal fans suggest that sport is a robust context in which scholars can examine PWOM online.

Because stakeholders are speaking out on behalf of organizations, it is important to determine the reach of their comments. Watts, Peretti, and Frumin (2007) detailed two distinct approaches corporations can use to filter messages to their target audience: "big seed marketing" and "small seed marketing". Corporations utilizing these strategies hope to create a viral message; however, the methodology used to cause the "viral" nature of the message differs between the two approaches. In small seed marketing, corporations concern themselves with reaching a small number of influential people in hopes that the message will resonate with them, and they will be inspired to share it with their friends. This marketing strategy was quite similar to the "two step flow of information theory," as it initially targets influential "opinion leaders" in hopes that the message will spread (Lazarsfeld et al., 1944). In contrast, when a corporation used

“big seed marketing,” they target a large number of people with their message at one time. Watts, Peretti, and Frumin (2007) advised a combination of both traditional and new media advertising to heighten the success of the campaign and truly cause a message to go “viral.” These two strategies are quite important to crisis management practitioners who monitor the environment in which their corporation exists. Coombs (2011) noted that these two marketing strategies alert crisis practitioners to monitor a variety of stakeholders rather than simply focusing on a few, influential stakeholders.

The success of the “big seed” marketing strategy suggests that average Internet users possess much power to establish the stories that would trend online. Computer modeling conducted by Yahoo! Researcher Duncan Watts showed that average people are the most likely to spring a viral message rather than the traditional “influencers” that are often coveted by marketers (Coombs, 2011). Thus, Watts’ findings showed the vast reach of a seemingly “average” social media post, which shifted power to stakeholders during all phases of crisis communication (pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis). In fact, Watts noted that the most important predictor of a viral message was an interested audience who was willing to endorse a product (Schaffner, 2011). Coombs (2011) suggested that the rise of social media websites and increased connectivity among stakeholders placed organizations at a greater risk for crises to develop; however, other scholars have noted that organizations might be able to benefit from this new, powerful form of stakeholders who have a very strong connection to the organization (Brown & Billings, 2013).

Sanderson (2012) noted that social media websites allow fans a unique opportunity to proclaim their sports fandom. The inherent social nature of sports led fans to form specific online communities to interact with other sports fans, athletes, celebrities, and commentators.

The experienced self-relevance of sports team success explored within fan identification theory helps to explain how fans can feel quite threatened when a crisis befalls their preferred team. The extreme connection that heavily identified sports fans feel with their chosen teams and athletes transforms these organizations and individuals into entities that, in the fan's opinion, must be protected (Wann, 2006). Social media websites provide a tool that allows sports fans to publicly state their opinion regarding crises, integrating the online community of sports fans as an integral part of crisis response as they attempt to utilize their social media accounts to help shape developing stories (Brown & Billings, 2013).

Sanderson (2010) described how sports fan participation on social media can "introduce and perpetuate framing for athletes' behavior that contests mass-media portrayals" (p.449). In this study, Sanderson (2010) analyzed how sports fans responded to Tiger Woods' infamous extramarital affairs on Facebook after they were revealed in November 2009. The revelation of his affairs decimated his prior image as a successful, honorable athlete (McShane, 2009). As Woods' crisis began to evolve, his fans rushed online to defend him, championing both his right to privacy and the need for separation between off-field and on-field issues (Sanderson, 2010). While this study explored how fans combat the framing of certain stories found within the sports media, it also provided an important foundation for examining how fans enter into traditional crisis response. Sanderson's (2010) findings suggested that sports figures with a large social media following can benefit as fans "voluntarily perform public relations work" on their behalf, thus providing them with an "unprecedented means to generate support and promulgate favorable public representations" (p. 449).

Thus, Brown and Billings (2013) placed this type of online communication into the context of crisis communication theory. Their study examined sports fan response to NCAA

allegations facing the University of Miami football team. The allegations arose after Yahoo! Sports writer Charles Robinson reported that Nevin Shapiro, an athletic booster for Miami, provided 72 scholarship athletes with a number of impermissible benefits such as gifts of thousands of dollars, illegal parties featuring prostitution and drug use, and the funding of at least one abortion (Robinson, 2011). Brown and Billings (2013) content analyzed the tweets of 75 highly identified Miami fans (n = 425) using Coombs' (2007) reputation repair strategies within his SCCT. Results showed that fans were most likely to utilize three strategies: (a) ingratiation, where fans rallied together as a fan base; (b) reminder, where fans recounted the historical success of their athletic program; and (c) attack the accuser, where fans attempted to harm the credibility of both Nevin Shapiro and Charles Robinson. Overall, fans showcased a willingness to utilize traditional crisis response strategies in defense of their preferred team. Fans inserted their own positive message among the negative headlines being circulated about the University of Miami. Through a fan-generated effort, thousands of fans tweeted one uniting message, the Twitter hashtag “#IStandWithTheU,” causing it to trend nationwide. This finding illustrated that, through the use of social media, fans became an effective arm of a university's crisis response.

Brown, Brown, and Billings (2014) expanded this type of crisis communication research, coining the term “fan-enacted crisis communication”. This study explored a very unique type of crisis situation as it examined fan reaction to the Penn State sex abuse scandal. On November 5, 2011, news broke that former Penn State assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky sexually assaulted eight boys over a 15-year period. Penn State graduate assistant coach Mike McQueary corroborated the allegations, having witnessed Sandusky assault one of the young boys in the Penn State locker room showers. The scandal unquestionably tarnished Penn State's image,

which had traditionally been known as being one of the “cleanest” programs in the country. Prior to this incident, Penn State was one of four NCAA Division I programs that had never been found guilty of an NCAA rules violation. Many contributed this positive reputation to head coach Joe Paterno, the legendary coach that, at the time, held the all-time NCAA victories record (Paterno’s wins were later vacated by the NCAA following the Penn State Sex Abuse scandal, leaving Bobby Bowden with the all-time victories record). However, the public immediately questioned how much Paterno knew about Sandusky’s actions, establishing him as a key figure in the developing crisis at Penn State. Penn State fired Paterno on November 9, 2011, cementing Paterno’s role as a central figure in the crisis (CNN Wire Staff, 2011).

Brown, Brown, and Billings (2014) sought to establish which traditional theoretical underpinning allowed scholars to properly examine fan-enacted crisis communication: Benoit’s (1995) Image Repair Theory or Coombs’ (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory. Fan-enacted crisis research brought a new type of crisis research from the audience-oriented view, which is meant to measure how audiences respond to an organizational crisis response (Coombs & Schmidt, 2000). The authors discovered that Coombs’ (2007) reputation repair strategies encompassed 98.4% of fan responses and Benoit’s (1995) theory encompassed 29% of fan responses, establishing SCCT as the theoretical framework through which the Penn State fan responses were analyzed. The Brown, Brown, and Billings (2014) content analysis showed that Penn State fan tweets engaged in several different traditional crisis responses strategies, primarily the reminder, ingratiation, and scapegoat strategies. While the strategies selected by Penn State fans largely echoed the Miami crisis response, an important difference arose. Whereas Miami fans acted on behalf of their university, Penn State fans scapegoated the Penn State administration even more often than the actual perpetrator, Jerry Sandusky. This finding

highlighted the importance of one's fan identification when a person selects whom they will defend during a crisis. In this case, fans strongly identified with Paterno, causing them to defend him over their own institution. The unique nature of these sports-related crises also highlighted the need for a new crisis typology developed by Brown and Brown (2013).

Brown, Brown, and Billings (2014) also defined the role of the "active stakeholder" as they sought to determine what type of sports fans were willing to enter the traditional crisis response models on behalf of the sports team or individual with which they were most heavily identified. The authors delineated two factors that establish a sports fan as an "active stakeholder" for an organization. First, a fan must be clearly and visibly highly identified with their preferred sporting organization or sports figure. This important connection the fan feels for their team must be on display for others to witness. Second, a person must be willing to speak out publicly about the crisis that has affected the sporting organization or sports figure with which they identify.

Thus, because fan identification is such an integral component to fan-enacted crisis communication, it is clear why sport provides a proper context in which to explore this emerging type of crisis response. Few commercial corporations or other organizations resonate so powerfully with their stakeholders, as they are not so closely tied to a person's own sense of identity. As such, corporate crises may not inspire stakeholders to act out on behalf of most organizations when a crisis strikes. For example, a sports fan's unique connection to a sports team is more likely to engage in fan-enacted crisis response during a crisis than a BP consumer would following the Gulf oil spill. While consumers may appreciate the service and products BP provides, it is unlikely that connection will be displayed in a manner similar to sports. For instance, a person would not be likely to wear BP shirts, discuss BP with friends and coworkers,

or follow their performance as compared to their closest competitors. Coombs (2011) stated that the rise of social media use hastened the evolution of crisis response rather than completely revolutionizing the former models. While this might be true in corporate crisis response, the concept of fan identification clearly shows that fans have harnessed power afforded to them by social media to garner some control of an organizational crisis response (Brown & Billings, 2013).

The idea of fan-enacted crisis communication and the ability of active stakeholders to aid during a crisis can be quite beneficial for sports organizations and individuals, especially when their official crisis response is limited. The Miami case showed active stakeholders' willingness to utilize social media and serve as unofficial spokespersons on behalf of the university. This practice is especially helpful given the fact that the governing body of college football, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), limited Miami's official organizational response. For instance, the NCAA maintains a strict policy that their member institutions cannot formally comment on ongoing infractions cases (Katz, 2011). This policy severely limits the crisis response strategies that are available to collegiate organizations during times of such crises. While the organizational response is limited, the response of active stakeholders is not. Thus, this type of crisis communication allowed universities to benefit from fans' social media posts without being held responsible for their content.

In order to truly harness the power of fan-enacted crisis communication, sports organizations, athletes, and journalists must recognize the prominence of social media use within the sports world. Davis (2013) noted that many professional baseball teams "embraced the power and immediacy of social media" and attempted to join the online conversation that has become such an integral part of sports fandom (p. 1). As social media rose in popularity, fans

harnessed a powerful ability to establish and comment on the main sports storylines. Yet, it is imperative that organizations follow Major League Baseball's lead and understand that this power-shift has occurred. Organizations can no longer underestimate the power of an individual sports fan. For instance, in 2012, disgruntled Kansas City Chiefs fan Travis Wright tweeted, "I'm not much of a @kcchiefs fan anymore. Clark Hunt's yearly 30m under the cap [expletive] is unethical. Greedy bastard owners can F.O. cc @nfl." In response to the negative comments about Chief's owner Clark Hunt, the Chief's social media manager responded to Wright by tweeting, "Would help if you had your facts straight. Your choice to be a fan. CC: get a clue."

The hasty response from the Chief's organizational account provided an important social media lesson regarding the online power of some sports fans. While Travis Wright was certainly a Chiefs fan, he was also a social media manager for a Silicon Valley company and boasted more Twitter followers than even the Chief's organizational account (Laird, 2012). Unhappy with the Chief's response, Wright screen-captured the tweet and posted it on Reddit, the self-proclaimed "front page of the Internet," resulting in the message going viral and forcing an apology from the Chief's account (Laird, 2012). This case shows the negative consequences that result when an organization fails to truly understand the power held by sports fans in the era of new media. While fans can help organizations by using this power on behalf of an organization during fan-enacted crisis response, they can also harm an organization. Thus, sports organizations should strive to maintain a positive relationship with their primary stakeholders to reap the positive benefits and minimize the negative consequences that can result from fan social media use.

While the Kansas City Chiefs failed to recognize the power of online audiences, professional golfer John Daly utilized them to combat one of his critics. Gary Smits, golf writer for the *Florida Times-Union*, obtained data from Daly's PGA Tour personnel file, revealing

details of his previous disciplinary issues along with unsavory information that Daly felt harmed his image. Daly fired back by tweeting, “Here’s the JERK who writes NON-NEWS article on debut of my show—CALL & FLOOD his line and let’s tell him how WE feel.” Sanderson (2010) noted that Daly’s fans began calling Smits immediately after the tweet was posted, leaving messages that were sometimes abusive, showcasing the willingness of sports fans to act on behalf of a team or individual with which they identify. Also, it provided an example of a sports figure utilizing his fan base in order to protect his reputation.

Overall, the Tiger Woods, Miami, Penn State, Kansas City Chiefs, and John Daly cases collectively show that fans grasp the power provided to them by social media to engage in crisis response. Yet, this concept features the importance of fan identification when determining the manner in which sports fans will engage in crisis response. In the case of Miami, the institution drew the fan’s loyalty along with their crisis response strategies; however, in the case of Penn State, fans were more highly identified with Joe Paterno than the institution itself, leading them to turn on the institution in favor of Paterno (Brown, Brown, & Dickhaus, 2014). In the case of Tiger Woods, fans rushed to Woods’ defense, and in the case of John Daly, he utilized active stakeholders to fight back against one of his critics (Sanderson, 2010). Taken as a whole, these studies have clearly shown that fans are utilizing social media websites to engage in crisis response; yet, it is important to determine whether fan-enacted crisis communication can help salvage an organization’s reputation during times of crisis.

Coombs (2011) states that the purpose of crisis response is to contain and combat the damage to an organization’s reputation. However, no study has clearly established whether this emerging genre of fan-enacted crisis response helps to improve and/or sustain organizational reputation during different types of crisis. While it is certainly valuable to crisis scholars to

understand that this type of crisis response occurs, organizations must learn whether fan response can actually benefit an organization during times of crisis. This study seeks to explore the power that fan-enacted crisis communication possesses to impact the public perception of a sports organization or individual facing a crisis. Thus, the following research questions and hypotheses are posited:

- RQ₁: To what extent does the response strategy employed by a sports fan impact a collegiate sports team's change in organizational reputation during a crisis?
- RQ₂: To what extent does the type of crisis an organization faces impact the change in reputation that is experienced during a crisis?
- RQ₃: To what extent does one's fandom impact the change in reputation that is experienced during a crisis?
- RQ₄: To what extent does the response strategy employed by a sports fan impact the resulting level of crisis responsibility attributed to an organization after a crisis?
- RQ₅: To what extent does the type of crisis an organization faces impact the resulting level of crisis responsibility attributed to an organization in crisis?
- RQ₆: To what extent does one's fandom impact the resulting level of crisis responsibility attributed to an organization in crisis?
- RQ₇: To what extent does the type of response strategy a fan utilizes impact the resulting potential for a participant to engage in fan-enacted crisis communication on behalf of the team?
- RQ₈: To what extent does the crisis type impact the resulting potential for a participant to engage in fan-enacted crisis communication on behalf of the team?

RQ₉: To what extent does one's fandom impact the resulting potential for a participant to engage in fan-enacted crisis communication on behalf of the team?

RQ₁₀: To what extent does the type of response strategy a fan utilizes impact the potential for a participant to engage in positive word-of-mouth on behalf of the team?

RQ₁₁: To what extent does the crisis type impact the resulting potential for a participant to engage in positive word-of-mouth on behalf of the team?

RQ₁₂: To what extent does one's fandom impact the resulting potential for a participant to engage in positive word-of-mouth on behalf of the team?

H₁: There will be a positive correlation between organizational reputation and positive word-of-mouth.

H₂: There will be a positive correlation between organizational reputation and fan-enacted crisis communication behavior.

H₃: There will be a positive correlation between fan identification and fan-enacted crisis communication behavior.

H₄: There will be a positive correlation between fan-enacted crisis communication behavior and positive word-of-mouth.

H₅: There will be a positive correlation between fan identification and positive word-of-mouth.

H₆: There will be a positive correlation between social media use and fan-enacted crisis communication.

H₇: There will be a positive correlation between social media use and positive word-of-mouth.

- H₈: There will be a negative correlation between the amount of crisis responsibility attributed to an organization in crisis and the organizational reputation score.
- H₉: There will be a positive correlation between a participant's fan identification score and his/her level of social media use.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

This dissertation examined the impact of fan-enacted crisis communication conducted on behalf of a collegiate sports organization involved in a crisis. This chapter discusses experimental design, the independent and dependent variables used in the study, the participants who were recruited, and the procedure that the researcher followed during the study. It also discusses how the researcher ensured both the reliability and validity of the study before briefly describing the statistical analyses that were performed.

Experimental Design

To properly investigate the research questions and hypotheses in this study, a factorial experimental design was employed. Wimmer and Dominick (2011) note that a factorial design allows researchers to simultaneously investigate two or more independent variables. Factorial designs allow researchers to explore the possibility that the independent variables in a study are interdependent in the effects they have on the dependent variables in the study (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011).

Wimmer and Dominick (2011) identify three important advantages that experimental research provides researchers. First, and most importantly, experimental research provides evidence of causality, establishing a cause and effect relationship between variables. The second advantage to experimental research is the potential for replication. Through this chapter's thorough description of the instrumentation and procedures utilized in this study, future scholars will be able to confirm the initial results of this project. The final advantage to experimental

research is control. Experiments allow researchers to control the selection of variables, participant recruitment, and the setting in which the study is administered. Since this study will be conducted online, some aspects of control will be lost. For instance, the researcher cannot be certain as to who is participating in the study, nor can he/she control the time participants take to complete the study. However, this online setting eliminates some aspects of artificiality that would be associated with a laboratory setting. Also, the web survey company hosting the experiment, Qualtrics, allowed participants to be randomly assigned to each condition, eliminating the potential for researcher bias. Finally, conducting the experiment online allowed for larger participant recruitment, as participants were able to complete the experiment at their own leisure.

To explore the variables in this study, a quasi-experiment was embedded within an online survey. This experiment featured a 3 (crisis response strategy, [attack the accuser; ingratiation; apology] X 2 (crisis type, [environmental/individual crises; organizational mismanagement]) X 3 (fan association [identified, rival, neutral]) factorial design, producing 18 distinct questionnaires. All three variables were between-subjects variables. Because the acceptable number of participants required for each “cell” of the experiment was 25, meeting the requisite requirements for experimental research outlined by Reinard (2006). Several dependent variables were included in the study to examine participants’ attitudes and behavioral intentions toward an organization in crisis. The dependent variables were as follows: organizational reputation, crisis responsibility, positive word-of-mouth, and potential fan-enacted crisis communication behaviors. The researcher presented each participant with a crisis described in an online news article from BleacherReport.com, which is one of the top 100 websites visited in the United States and one of the Top 5 sports websites visited in the world (Alexa, 2013). After viewing the

crisis article, each participant was exposed to a manipulated Twitter feed displaying crisis response strategies. The use of Twitter was important given recent connections observed between sports fans and the popular social media website (see Stadd, 2013).

Independent Variables

This study used a 3 (crisis response strategy) X 2 (crisis type) X 3 (fan association) factorial experimental design to determine how the process of fan-enacted crisis communication impacts the resulting a) crisis responsibility, b) organizational reputation, and c) positive word-of-mouth.

Independent variable #1: Crisis type. Coombs (2011) defined a crisis type as the “frame that is used to interpret the crisis” (p. 157). Crisis communication research often uses the crisis typology provided by Coombs and Holladay (2002) to determine which crisis response strategies should be selected for each impending crisis situation. One of the central tenets of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) is a direct correlation between the level of crisis responsibility associated with the type of crisis and the level of accommodation of the resulting crisis response strategy (Coombs, 2011). Thus, it was important to select crisis types with varying levels of crisis responsibility to test SCCT in a social media setting. The researcher manipulated the independent variable, crisis type, in a series of news articles from *The Bleacher Report*. Each manipulated *Bleacher Report* article provided details about a crisis affecting a university baseball team.

Because this study examines crises in a sports context, the researcher utilized the crisis typology developed by Brown and Brown (2013), involving 12 different crisis types divided into three crisis clusters, ranging from a low level of crisis responsibility to a high level of crisis

responsibility. Thus, one crisis type from the cluster with the lowest expected level of crisis responsibility and the cluster with the highest expected level of crisis responsibility were used.

The first cluster “environmental/individual crises” results in a low level of crisis responsibility. The crisis of “*External Criminal Transgression*” was selected from this cluster. The “external criminal transgression” type is operationally defined as “actions involving a sports figure that leads directly to an arrest, legal action and/or conviction. The actions that led to the legal action did not happen during the course of competition” (Brown & Brown, 2013). These types of crises are increasingly common in collegiate athletics, especially as increased attention from the sports media on collegiate athletics causes such news to be circulated on social networking websites such as Twitter.

Lastly, the “Organizational Mismanagement” cluster results in a high level of crisis responsibility. The crisis of “Player/Coach Management Issue” was selected from this cluster. This crisis type is operationally defined as “an issue surrounding a sports figure that would directly affect the team’s active roster or coaching staff” (Brown & Brown, 2013). This crisis type is common in collegiate athletics as coaches are often fired in the middle of the season when a team is not performing well. Appendix A features each article that will be included in the study. The researcher ensured that the articles were similar in length (166-227 words) to prevent participants from dropping out of the study because of fatigue.

Independent variable #2: Fan association. Because previous research posits that fan identification is an important antecedent to fan-enacted crisis communication (Brown & Billings, 2013), fan association was included as a variable in the study. Wann (2006) notes that fan identification is the psychological connection that a fan feels with their selected team and the extent to which that team’s performance is self-relevant. Thus, participants’ level of fan

identification with their own institution impacted their fan association. To determine how one's fan association affects crisis communication, this study included three different types of schools that were presented to participants: the school they attend, their rival school, and a neutral school. Previous scholarship has examined the role that rivalry plays in one's sense of fandom (Raney, 2006). This study examined how such feelings impact the public's ability to evaluate a crisis situation.

Independent variable #3: Crisis response strategy. To properly examine the process of fan-enacted crisis communication, a social media Twitter feed was manipulated using Adobe Photoshop to include posts using traditional crisis communication response strategies. Each social media feed belonged to a "super fan" of the collegiate program that was affected by a crisis situation. The feed identified the poster as the team's number one fan who never misses a baseball game and was also featured in a local newspaper's list of "top fans." Brown and Billings (2013), along with Brown, Brown, and Billings (2014), found that fans typically utilized three distinct crisis strategies online: attack the accuser, ingratiation, and reminder. Since the ingratiation and reminder strategies are both located in Coombs' (2007) "bolstering" posture, only one strategy was included so that a more accommodating strategy could also be used. Coombs' (2007) SCCT posits that a crisis with a high level of crisis responsibility attributed to it will require a crisis manager to use a more accommodating strategy. Thus, the most accommodating strategy, apology, was included in the experiment.

Tweets were selected from previous content analyses conducted by Brown and Billings (2013) and Brown, Brown, and Billings (2014) to ensure that the tweets included in the experiment represented tweets that would be posted in a real-world setting. This process helped to ensure the face validity of the manipulations. The following tables include the tweets that

were featured on the manipulated Twitter feeds for each school in the fan association variable. Appendix B features each manipulated Twitter feed as it was presented in the experiment. First, Table 3.1 includes the tweets that represented the “attack the accuser” strategy in the experiment. Coombs (2007) operationally defines the “attack the accuser” strategy as when a person confronts the person or group that is making the claims of wrongdoing against the organization. The manipulated Twitter account featured a fan making those claims.

Table 3.1
Attack the Accuser Tweets

| Alabama Tweets |
|---|
| 1) Bleacher Report is just writing spin to cause problems for Alabama baseball and get people to visit their crappy website. |
| 2) Bleacher Report’s Alabama baseball story is just wrong. They don’t know what they’re talking about. #BleacherReportSucks |
| 3) Bama fans, don’t read the Bleacher Report story. Nobody else is. Bleacher Report’s article is based on the word of liars, and it is fake. #liarjournalism |
| 4) Terrible article on Bleacher Report today about the Alabama baseball situation. Players are misquoted and the information is wrong! |
| 5) The Bleacher Report should stop treating allegations as facts. Nothing has been proven yet. This is a pathetic excuse for journalism #IHateBleacherReport |
| Auburn Tweets |
| 1) Bleacher Report is just writing spin to cause problems for Auburn baseball and get people to visit their crappy website. |
| 2) Bleacher Report’s Auburn baseball story is just wrong. They don’t know what they’re talking about. #BleacherReportSucks |
| 3) Auburn fans, don’t read the Bleacher Report story. Nobody else is. Bleacher Report’s article is based on the word of liars, and it is fake. #liarjournalism |
| 4) Terrible article on Bleacher Report today about the Auburn baseball situation. Players are misquoted and the information is wrong! |
| 5) The Bleacher Report should stop treating allegations as facts. Nothing has been proven yet. This is a pathetic excuse for journalism #IHateBleacherReport |
| Arizona State Tweets |
| 1) Bleacher Report is just writing spin to cause problems for Arizona State baseball and get people to visit their crappy website. |
| 2) Bleacher Report’s ASU baseball story is just wrong. They don’t know what they’re talking about. #BleacherReportSucks |
| 3) Sun Devil fans, don’t read the Bleacher Report story. Nobody else is. Bleacher Report’s article is based on the word of liars, and it is fake. #liarjournalism |
| 4) Terrible article on Bleacher Report today about the Arizona State baseball situation. Players are misquoted and the information is wrong! |

5) The Bleacher Report should stop treating allegations as facts. Nothing has been proven yet. This is a pathetic excuse for journalism #IHateBleacherReport

Next, Table 3.2 includes the tweets that represented the ingratiation strategy in the experiment. The ingratiation strategy is operationally defined as a person commending stakeholders for their actions in a message of unity. Brown and Billings (2013) note that fans will often use Twitter “hashtags” in order to coordinate a unified, positive message during a crisis.

**Table 3.2
Ingratiation Tweets**

| Alabama Tweets |
|---|
| 1) #IStandWithBama always. No matter what. Crimson and White all day long!! I love the Tide! Bama fans get turned up! #CrimsonPride |
| 2) I don't care-I'll rock crimson and white all day everyday. Bama is more than a school...it's a lifestyle. #IStandWithBama |
| 3) Bama has the greatest team and fans in the whole freaking country. This story doesn't change a thing! #RollTide #IStandWithBama |
| 4) Roll Tide Allllll day long. #BamaNation Stand UP! #IStandWithBama |
| 5) We Bama fans have seen troubles before. There is nothing we can't handle. #IStandWithBama |
| Auburn Tweets |
| 1) #IStandWithAuburn always. No matter what. Orange and Blue all day long!! I love the Tigers! Auburn fans get turned up! #AuburnPride |
| 2) I don't care-I'll rock orange and blue all day everyday. Auburn is more than a school...it's a lifestyle. #IStandWithAuburn |
| 3) Auburn has the greatest team and fans in the whole freaking country. This story doesn't change a thing! #WarEagle #IStandWithAuburn |
| 4) War Eagle Allllll day long. #AuburnNation Stand UP! #IStandWithAuburn |
| 5) We Auburn fans have seen troubles before. There is nothing we can't handle. #IStandWithAuburn |
| Arizona State Tweets |
| 1) #IStandWithASU always. No matter what. Maroon and Gold all day long!! I love the Sun Devils! ASU fans get turned up! #SunDevilPride |
| 2) I don't care-I'll rock maroon and gold all day everyday. ASU is more than a school...it's a lifestyle. #IStandWithASU |
| 3) Arizona State has the greatest team and fans in the whole freaking country. This story doesn't change a thing! #GoSunDevils #IStandWithASU |
| 4) Go Sun Devils Allllll day long. #SunDevilNation Stand UP! #IStandWithASU |
| 5) We Arizona State fans have seen troubles before. There is nothing we can't handle. #IStandWithASU |

Finally, Table 3.3 includes the tweets that represented the apology strategy in the experiment. The apology strategy is operationally defined as a person accepting responsibility for the event that led to the crisis and asking for forgiveness. Brown, Brown, and Billings (2014) noted that in the case of an extreme crisis such as the Penn State sex abuse scandal, fans engage in this strategy in an attempt to apologize on behalf of their team. Coombs (2011) notes that this is the most accommodating strategy that is utilized during crisis response.

Table 3.3
Apology Tweets

| Alabama Tweets |
|---|
| 1) Let me apologize on behalf of the #BamaNation for the story on Bleacher Report today. We will make this OK. |
| 2) Crap. I'm so sorry for the events in that Bleacher Report story. I'm sure the Athletic Dept. will fix this. |
| 3) Ugh. I HATE seeing stories like that Bleacher Report article. I hope that Bama will fix this situation FAST! |
| 4) I'm sure every Bama fan is sorry about the events that were in that Bleacher Report article. We all know when we just need to say "sorry." |
| 5) So upset about that Bleacher Report article. I am sure that Bama will fix this. #SoSorry #EveryoneMakesMistakes |
| Auburn Tweets |
| 1) Let me apologize on behalf of the #AuburnNation for the story on Bleacher Report today. We will make this OK. |
| 2) Crap. I'm so sorry for the events in that Bleacher Report story. I'm sure the Athletic Dept. will fix this. |
| 3) Ugh. I HATE seeing stories like that Bleacher Report article. I hope that Auburn will fix this situation FAST! |
| 4) I'm sure every Auburn fan is sorry about the events that were in that Bleacher Report article. We all know when we just need to say "sorry." |
| 5) So upset about that Bleacher Report article. I am sure that Auburn will fix this. #SoSorry #EveryoneMakesMistakes |
| Arizona State Tweets |
| 1) Let me apologize on behalf of the #SunDevilNation for the story on Bleacher Report today. We will make this OK. |
| 2) Crap. I'm so sorry for the events in that Bleacher Report story. I'm sure the Athletic Dept. will fix this. |
| 3) Ugh. I HATE seeing stories like that Bleacher Report article. I hope that Arizona State will fix this situation FAST! |
| 4) I'm sure every ASU fan is sorry about the events that were in that Bleacher Report article. We all know when we just need to say "sorry." |

5) So upset about that Bleacher Report article. I am sure that Arizona State will fix this.
#SoSorry EveryoneMakesMistakes

Dependent Variables

Crisis Responsibility. For the purpose of this study, crisis responsibility was operationally defined as the amount of blame stakeholders attribute to the organization for the resulting crisis. Table 3.4 details the crisis responsibility scale adapted from Griffin, Babin and Darden (1992) and McAuley et al. (1992). The variable was measured by using a seven-item, seven-point Likert scale, where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 7 = Strongly Agree. This variable was measured after each participant read the Twitter feed featuring a fan's reputation repair strategy responding to the crisis.

Table 3.4
Crisis Responsibility Scale (Griffin, Babin, & Darden, 1992; McAuley et al., 1992)

| |
|---|
| 1) The cause of the crisis was something the organization could control. |
| 2) The cause of the crisis is something over which the organization had no power. |
| 3) The cause of the crisis is something that was manageable by the organization. |
| 4) The cause of the crisis is something over which the organization had power |
| 5) Circumstances, not the organization, are responsible for the crisis. |
| 6) The blame for the crisis lies with the organization. |
| 7) The blame for the crisis lies in the circumstances, not the organization. |

Organizational Reputation. For the purposes of this study, organizational reputation was operationally defined as the manner in which stakeholders view the sporting organization and how stakeholders perceive the crisis response. The variable was measured by a seven-item, seven-point Likert scale, where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 7 = Strongly Agree. The scale was adapted from Coombs and Holladay (1996) and McCroskey (1966) to measure organizational reputation in the midst of a sports-related crisis. Table 3.5 showcases the items that were included on the questionnaire. This variable was measured twice: before a participant viewed the

crisis situation and after each participant read the Twitter feed that featured a fan's reputation repair strategy responding to the crisis.

Table 3.5
Organizational Reputation Scale (Coombs & Holladay, 1996; McCroskey, 1966)

| |
|---|
| 1) The organization is concerned with the well-being of its publics. |
| 2) The organization is basically DISHONEST. |
| 3) I do NOT trust the organization to tell the truth about the incident. |
| 4) Under most circumstances, I would be likely to believe what the organization says. |
| 5) The organization is NOT concerned with the well-being of its publics. |

Positive Word of Mouth. For the purpose of this study, positive word-of-mouth was operationally defined as informal online communication directed at other sports fans promoting the value of the team with which they identify. This variable was measured by a six-item, seven-point Likert scale where 1 = Not At All Likely and 7 = Very Likely. The scale was adapted from Coombs and Holladay (2007) and Brown et al. (2005) to measure positive word-of-mouth in a social media environment. Table 3.6 displayed the scale items that will be included on the questionnaire. A participant's likelihood to engage in positive word-of-mouth was measured after the participant viewed the Twitter feed displaying a reputation response strategy.

Table 3.6
Items Measuring Positive Word-of-Mouth (Adapted from Coombs & Holladay, 2007; Brown, Barry, Dacin, & Gunst, 2005)

| |
|---|
| 1) I would post messages on social media websites encouraging people to support this team. |
| 2) I would post messages on social media websites saying positive things about this team to other people. |
| 3) I would post messages on social media websites encouraging others to cheer for this team during games. |
| 4) I would post messages on social media websites to make sure that others know I support this team. |
| 5) I would post messages on social media websites to support this team. |
| 6) I would post messages on social media websites that point out the positive aspects of this team to those who criticize it. |

Items Measuring Fan-Enacted Crisis Communication. This study also measured a participant’s likelihood to engage in fan-enacted crisis communication strategies. This variable will be measured by a six-item, seven-point Likert scale where 1 = Not At All Likely and 7 = Very Likely. The researcher created this scale by adapting definitions of reputation repair strategies from Coombs (2007) that have been utilized by sports fans in previous research (Brown & Billings, 2013). Table 3.7 displays the scale items that were included on the questionnaire. This variable was measured after the participant viewed the Twitter feed displaying a reputation response strategy.

Table 3.7
Potential Fan-enacted Crisis Communication Scale

| Scale Item | Corresponding Strategy (Coombs, 2007) |
|--|--|
| 1) I would post messages on my social media websites that are meant to rally this team’s fan base. | Ingratiation |
| 2) I would post messages on my social media websites that remind others of the success this team has had in the past. | Reminder |
| 3) I would post messages on my social media websites that attack the credibility of anyone who writes a scathing report about this team. | Attack the accuser |
| 4) I would post messages on my social media websites that are meant to unite this team’s fan base. | Ingratiation |
| 5) If anyone says anything negative about this team, I would use my social media website to question his/her credibility. | Attack the accuser |
| 6) I would post messages on my social media website to remind others of all this team has accomplished. | Reminder |

Other measured variables. In order to examine participants’ sports fandom more closely, participants were asked to report how often they followed the following sports at their university: baseball, football, gymnastics, men’s basketball, men’s golf, softball, women’s

basketball, and women's golf. For the purpose of this study, it was also important to observe how participants gained sports information. Thus, participants were asked the degree to which they use the following outlets for sports information: event attendance, team websites, news websites, mobile devices, Twitter, Facebook, televised events, television news, sports radio, newspapers, and magazines. Participants were then asked to report which of the above outlets was their primary method for obtaining sports information. Next, participants were asked to choose one of the following social networks as their primary social network: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Vine, or other. Finally, participants were asked to describe their Twitter use on a five-point scale (1 = No Account, 5 = I use Twitter multiple times a day).

Participants

Participants for this study were recruited from a large, public, Southeastern university. The researcher sought to recruit between 360 and 450 participants for the experiment to ensure a proper number of participants in each "cell" of the factorial design. Reinard (2006) purports that 20-25 participants are needed for each level of each independent variable. While the use of college student samples is sometimes discouraged (Whaley, 1998), the use of college students is necessary and acceptable for this study (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Using college students allows the researcher access to highly-identified fans of the university that they attend. College students are also among the highest users of social media, adding a degree of validity to the study. After garnering IRB approval (Appendix D), the researcher recruited participants from several courses in both the College of Communication and the College of Business. All participation was voluntary, and all participants were over the age of consent (18).

To recruit participants, a brief description of the study was provided without fully revealing the study's intent. Once a person decided to participate in the study, they were able to

begin the questionnaire. The questionnaire took approximately 15 minutes for participants to complete. After the participant completed the study, he/she was fully debriefed about the purpose of the study and the manipulations that were used. A rigorous debriefing questionnaire was used to ensure that the participant understands that all crises presented during the study were fictitious.

Procedure

Once a person agreed to participate in the study, they were given a distinct web address to the Qualtrics website hosting the online questionnaire. The first document the participant saw was the informed consent document. The informed consent document provided a brief description of the study and disclosed any potential stress that a participant might endure during the course of this experiment. If the participant chose to continue, he/she was taken to a general questionnaire asking about his/her level of fan identification with his/her school, social media use, and sports media consumption. Next, he/she was randomly assigned to one of the 18 questionnaires. He/she answered the organizational reputation scale about one of the three schools (fan, neutral, rival) to garner an initial reputation score before exposure to any crises. Then, he/she read an article featuring one of two crisis types (external individual transgression or player/coach management issues) that affected one of three schools (identified, rival, or neutral). Filter questions were used to ensure that the participant was not a member or closely associated with the sports team featured in the story. Qualtrics allowed for participants to be randomly assigned to different conditions while relatively equalizing the numbers in each “cell.” After the participant read their assigned article, he/she answered two knowledge-based questions, which served as manipulation checks.

Next, participants were exposed to a Twitter feed responding to the crisis described in the news article. The feed included tweets using one of three crisis response strategies (attack the accuser, ingratiation, or apology). After the participant read the Twitter feed, he/she answered two manipulation checks. Then, they answered the crisis responsibility scale, the organizational responsibility scale, the positive word-of-mouth scale, the fan-enacted crisis communication scale, and demographic questions.

Finally, participants were directed to a debriefing statement that explained the purpose of the study. The debriefing page also required each participant to read and agree to statements meant to assure them that the school in the study was not facing any type of crisis or penalty (For the complete debriefing statement, please see Appendix C).

Reliability and Validity

Neuendorf (2002) notes that reliability is the extent to which a measuring procedure will repeatedly generate similar results. When a study is reliable, it is internally consistent. Thus, it is crucial that measures in a study yield consistent results so that proper conclusions can be drawn. In order to ensure that the measures used in this study are reliable, Cronbach's alpha was used. Generally, a Cronbach's alpha of .7 and higher is deemed "acceptable," a Cronbach's alpha of .8 and higher is deemed "good," and a Cronbach's alpha of .9 and higher is deemed "excellent" (George & Mallery, 2003).

Reliability is also related to the validity of a study. Validity is the degree to which an instrument measures what it intended to measure. Without properly establishing reliability, a study cannot be considered valid. However, reliability, alone, does not ensure that a study is valid. The validity of a study is closely related to all procedures used in an analysis. Wimmer and Dominick (2011) discuss several types of validity that should be addressed in a study: face

validity, construct validity, and content validity. First, face validity involves determining how well an instrument appears to measure key constructs on a superficial level. Ensuring that the material used in the manipulations was worded and Photoshopped achieved face validity correctly. Next, construct validity involves the idea that the measures in a study are related to similar measures (convergent validity) and unrelated to measures with which it should not be related (discriminant validity). Overall, construct validity involves the ability to generalize from the measures used in a study to the concepts involved in the study. Thus, this type of validity was achieved through the use of exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to ensure that the measures represented the concepts in the study. Through the use of EFA, the researcher was able to determine whether all items used to measure the variables loaded under one factor. The final type of validity is content validity. This type examines the extent to which a measure embodies all components of a construct. Content validity is often established through the evaluation of a panel of experts. In the case of this study, the researcher's dissertation committee evaluated the measures used in this study to determine whether they were valid.

Statistical Analysis

After the data was collected, Cronbach's alpha was used to ensure that all measures included in the study are reliable. In order to ensure validity, exploratory factor analysis was used. After the researcher establishes both reliability and validity, descriptive statistics summarized the demographic information of the experiment's sample. In order to answer research questions 1, 2, and 3, a repeated-measures ANOVA was used. By utilizing this statistical test, researchers determined how the dependent measures changed over time. In order to answer research questions 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, and 12, a one-way ANOVA was used. A one-way ANOVA was used when a categorical, independent variable had more than two levels and there

was no need to test for interaction effects between multiple independent variables. In order to answer research questions 5, 8, and 11, an independent samples t-test was used. An independent samples t-test was used when a categorical, independent variable had only two levels. In order to test hypotheses 1-9, correlation analysis was used. Correlation analyses allowed researchers to examine relationships between two continuous variables. The researcher evaluated the normality of the data to determine whether a Pearson's *r* or a Spearman's *rho* correlation was needed.

Table 3.8 provides a summary of the statistical analyses that will be used to answer all research questions and hypotheses.

Table 3.8
Summary of Research Questions/Hypotheses

| | Research Question/Hypothesis | Variables | Statistics |
|-------------------|--|--|----------------------------|
| RQ ₁ : | To what extent does the response strategy employed by a sports fan impact a collegiate sports team's change in organizational reputation during a crisis? | IV: response strategy DV: change in reputation | Repeated-Measures ANOVA |
| RQ ₂ : | To what extent does the type of crisis an organization faces impact the change in reputation that is experienced during a crisis? | IV: crisis type DV: change in reputation | Repeated-Measures ANOVA |
| RQ ₃ : | To what extent does one's fandom impact the change in reputation that is experienced during a crisis? | IV: fan association DV: change in reputation | Repeated-Measures ANOVA |
| RQ ₄ : | To what extent does the response strategy employed by a sports fan impact the resulting level of crisis responsibility attributed to an organization after a crisis? | IV: response strategy DV: Crisis responsibility | One-way ANOVA |
| RQ ₅ : | To what extent does the type of crisis an organization faces impact the resulting level of crisis responsibility attributed to an organization in crisis? | IV: crisis type DV: crisis responsibility | Independent samples t-test |

| | | | |
|--------------------|--|--|----------------------------|
| | | | |
| RQ ₆ : | To what extent does one's fandom impact the resulting level of crisis responsibility attributed to an organization in crisis? | IV: fan association DV: Crisis responsibility | One-way ANOVA |
| RQ ₇ : | To what extent does the type of response strategy a fan utilizes impact the resulting potential for a participant to engage in fan-enacted crisis communication on behalf of the team? | IV: response strategy DV: potential fan-enacted crisis communication behavior | One-way ANOVA |
| RQ ₈ : | To what extent does the crisis type impact the resulting potential for a participant to engage in fan-enacted crisis communication on behalf of the team? | IV: crisis type DV: potential fan-enacted crisis communication behavior | Independent Samples t-test |
| RQ ₉ : | To what extent does one's fandom impact the resulting potential for a participant to engage in fan-enacted crisis communication on behalf of the team? | IV: fan association DV: potential fan-enacted crisis communication behavior | One-way ANOVA |
| RQ ₁₀ : | To what extent does the type of response strategy a fan utilizes impact the potential for a participant to engage in positive word-of-mouth on behalf of the team? | IV: response strategy DV: Positive word-of-mouth | One-way ANOVA |
| RQ ₁₁ : | To what extent does the crisis type impact the resulting potential for a participant to engage in positive word-of-mouth on behalf of the team? | IV: crisis type DV: Positive word-of-mouth | Independent Samples t-test |
| RQ ₁₂ : | To what extent does one's fandom impact the resulting potential for a participant to engage in positive word-of-mouth on behalf of the team? | IV: fan association DV: Positive word-of-mouth | One-way ANOVA |
| H ₁ : | There will be a positive correlation between organizational reputation and positive word-of-mouth. | IV: reputation DV: word-of-mouth | Correlation Analysis |

| | | | |
|------------------|---|--|----------------------|
| H ₂ : | There will be a positive correlation between organizational reputation and fan-enacted crisis communication behavior. | IV: reputation DV: fan-enacted crisis behavioral intentions | Correlation Analysis |
| H ₃ : | There will be a positive correlation between fan identification and fan-enacted crisis communication behavior. | IV: fandom DV: fan-enacted crisis behavioral intentions | Correlation Analysis |
| H ₄ : | There will be a positive correlation between fan-enacted crisis communication behavior and positive word-of-mouth. | IV: PWOM DV: Fan Enacted | Correlation Analysis |
| H ₅ : | There will be a positive correlation between fan identification and positive word-of-mouth. | IV: Fan identification DV: positive word-of-mouth | Correlation Analysis |
| H ₆ : | There will be a positive correlation between social media use and fan-enacted crisis communication | IV: Social media use DV: fan-enacted crisis communication | Correlation Analysis |
| H ₇ : | There will be a positive correlation between social media use and positive word-of-mouth. | IV: Social media use DV: Positive word-of-mouth | Correlation Analysis |
| H ₈ : | There will be a negative correlation between the amount of crisis responsibility attributed to an organization in crisis and the organizational reputation score. | IV: Crisis responsibility DV: Organizational reputation | Correlation Analysis |
| H ₉ : | There will be a positive correlation between a participant's fan identification score and his/her level of social media use. | IV: Fan identification DV: Social Media use | Correlation Analysis |

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Demographic Profile of Sample

Once 37 participants were eliminated from the sample (due to incorrect answers on manipulation checks or a personal connection with one of the university baseball teams), the number of participants who were included in the analysis was 515. Participants were enrolled in one of the following courses: an introductory communication course, communication research methods, advertising and public relations design, or personal finance. The mean age of participants in the experiment was 20.87 years (SD = 3.85 years). The sample was 33.8% male (n = 174) and 66.2% female (n = 341). In terms of racial composition, the sample was largely White/Caucasian (n = 430; 83.5%); with the remainder being African-American (n = 59; 11.5%), Asian; (n = 16; 3.1%), or other (10; 1.9%). Qualtrics placed participants into one of the 18 conditions included in the 3 X 2 X 3 experiment. Table 4.1 displays the distribution of participants among the experimental conditions, indicating at least 25 participants were in each of the 18 cells.

Table 4.1
Participant Distribution among Experimental Conditions

| Condition | School Affiliation | Crisis Type | Response Strategy | Participants |
|-----------|--------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| A | Alabama | Organizational Mismanagement | Attacking the Accuser | 29 |
| B | Alabama | Organizational Mismanagement | Apology | 28 |
| C | Alabama | Organizational Mismanagement | Ingratiation | 27 |

| | | | | |
|---|---------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|----|
| D | Alabama | Individual Crisis | Attacking the Accuser | 29 |
| E | Alabama | Individual Crisis | Apology | 25 |
| F | Alabama | Individual Crisis | Ingratiation | 25 |
| G | Auburn | Organizational Mismanagement | Attacking the Accuser | 30 |
| H | Auburn | Organizational Mismanagement | Apology | 27 |
| I | Auburn | Organizational Mismanagement | Ingratiation | 27 |
| J | Auburn | Individual Crisis | Attacking the Accuser | 29 |
| K | Auburn | Individual Crisis | Apology | 30 |
| L | Auburn | Individual Crisis | Ingratiation | 28 |
| M | Arizona State | Organizational Mismanagement | Attacking the Accuser | 31 |
| N | Arizona State | Organizational Mismanagement | Apology | 27 |
| O | Arizona State | Organizational Mismanagement | Ingratiation | 31 |
| P | Arizona State | Individual Crisis | Attacking the Accuser | 31 |
| Q | Arizona State | Individual Crisis | Apology | 31 |
| R | Arizona State | Individual Crisis | Ingratiation | 30 |

In terms of sports consumption, participants reported a mean score of 5.37 (SD = 1.15) on the seven-item fan identification scale (where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 7 = Strongly Agree), suggesting that participants viewed themselves as “above average” in terms of their school sports fandom. Participants were asked to rate their fandom with certain school sports on a scale of 1 to 7. The highest ranked sport was football (M = 6.43, SD = 1.25), suggesting that participants would know if a crisis impacted this team due to their high degree of fandom. Baseball received an “average” rank (M = 3.43, SD = 1.77) from participants, suggesting that participants would

care if a crisis were to strike this team; however, their moderate level of fandom might leave them unaware that a crisis situation existed. These numbers confirm the use of the baseball team’s inclusion in the experimental manipulation, as the goal was to use a sport moderate in overall fandom.

Participants were also asked about their sports information and social media consumption. When asked to reveal their primary source of sports information, 25% of participants (n = 129) reported that they mostly used Twitter to gain sports information. Twitter received the highest percentage in the sample, with “game attendance” being the preferred method for 21.6% of participants (n = 111) to gain sports information. Participants were also asked to reveal the social network that they spent the most time using. Twitter was the top-ranked social media website (n = 210; 40.8%), with Facebook second (n = 160; 31.1%), and Instagram third (125; 24.3%). Participants were also asked to rate their Twitter use, and 64.7% (n = 333) of the sample reported being active on the social networking website. Table 4.2 showcases participants’ top sources of sports information.

Table 4.2
Participant Sports Information Preferences

| Information Source | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|--|-------------|---------------------------|
| Watching Games on television | 5.21 | 1.59 |
| Television News (ex. <i>SportsCenter</i>) | 4.75 | 1.88 |
| Game Attendance | 5.04 | 1.40 |
| Mobile Apps | 4.27 | 1.89 |
| Twitter | 4.56 | 2.20 |
| Facebook | 4.35 | 1.94 |
| News Website | 4.27 | 1.94 |
| Team Website | 3.83 | 1.85 |
| Newspaper | 3.17 | 1.77 |
| Sports Radio | 3.06 | 1.87 |
| Magazine | 2.84 | 1.70 |

Scale Reliability and Validity

The researcher utilized Cronbach's alpha to test the reliability of the scales used to measure the dependent variables in the experiment. In order for a scale to be considered reliable, a reported Cronbach's alpha of 0.7 and higher is deemed "acceptable," a Cronbach's alpha of 0.8 and higher is labeled as "good," and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.9 and higher is noted as being "excellent" (George & Mallery, 2003). The organizational reputation scale was measured twice in the study—both before the exposure to the manipulation and after exposure. Both organizational reputation scales were considered reliable (before: $\alpha = 0.932$; after: $\alpha = 0.811$). The next dependent variable was crisis responsibility, which was also found to be reliable ($\alpha = 0.919$). Finally, both the positive word-of-mouth ($\alpha = 0.977$) and the potential fan-enacted crisis communication behavior ($\alpha = 0.932$) scales were considered reliable. In addition to the scales used to measure the dependent variables, the fan identification scale ($\alpha = 0.900$) and the social media use scale ($\alpha = 0.755$) were also both considered reliable.

With the reliability of each measure confirmed, it is also imperative to assess the validity of the measures. Suter (2006) notes "validity is considered the most important quality of a dependent variable. This is because validity is concerned with whether the instrument used actually measures what it is supposed to measure" (p. 248). According to the recommendations set forth by Lu (2006), exploratory factor analysis (EFA) measured the construct validity of the instrument. No rotation was used, as all items were expected to load under one factor—and were removed if they loaded under a different factor.

EFA confirmed the construct validity of the following scales: organizational responsibility, crisis responsibility, fan identification, positive word-of-mouth, and potential fan-enacted crisis communication behavior. All items loaded under one factor and all individual

factors had acceptable loadings above a 0.60. Table 4.3 displays the variance and eigenvalues for all dependent variables.

Table 4.3
EFA Results

| Scale | Variance | Eigenvalues |
|--|----------|-------------|
| Organizational Responsibility | 68.79% | 5.50 |
| Crisis Responsibility | 71.73% | 4.30 |
| Fan Identification | 63.90% | 4.47 |
| Positive Word-of-Mouth | 89.72% | 5.38 |
| Potential Fan-Enacted Crisis Communication | 74.70% | 4.48 |

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question 1 queried the extent to which certain crisis response strategies employed by sports fan (attacking the accuser, apology, ingratiation) impact a collegiate sports team’s organizational reputation after a crisis occurs. Therefore, the categorical independent variable of “crisis response strategy” and the continuous dependent variable of “organizational reputation” with pre/post data required the use of a repeated-measures ANOVA. Because the p -value of Box’s Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices was not significant ($p > 0.05$), the requirement of equal variance was met. The analysis showed that there was a significant effect for organizational reputation over time ($F(1, 512) = 67.78, p < .001$). However, there was no significant interaction effect between organizational reputation over time and the selected crisis response strategy ($F(2, 512) = 0.52, p = .60$). Results showed that the selected strategy utilized by a sports fan engaging in fan-enacted crisis communication had no effect on the organization’s reputation during a crisis; answering Research Question 1.

Research Question 2 queried the extent to which different types of crises (organizational vs. individual) impact a collegiate sports team's organizational reputation after a crisis occurs. Therefore, the categorical independent variable of "crisis type" and the continuous dependent variable of "organizational reputation" with pre/post data required the use of a repeated-measures ANOVA. Additionally, the standardized residuals were checked for normality. In order for the data to be considered normal, the skewness should be between -1 and 1 and the kurtosis should be between -1 and 2. Because both skewness and kurtosis fell within these levels, this data was considered normal. Because the p-value of Box's Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices was not significant ($p > 0.05$), the requirement of equal variance was met. The analysis showed that there was a significant effect for organizational reputation over time, and a significant interaction effect for both organizational reputation over time and crisis type ($F(1, 513) = 15.47, p < .001$).

Before being exposed to the manipulation, participants rated organizational reputation similarly for both the Organizational Mismanagement crisis type ($M = 4.60, SD = 1.27$) and the Individual crisis type ($M = 4.59, SD = 1.33$). After being exposed to each crisis, a significant difference existed in the organizational reputation scores for each crisis type. Participants rated the organizational reputation significantly lower for organizations dealing with an individual crisis ($M = 3.91, SD = 0.99$) rather than a crisis dealing with organizational mismanagement ($M = 4.36, SD = 0.88$). Overall, results showed that individual crises resulted in a more negative organizational reputation than organizational mismanagement crises; therefore, Research Question 2 is answered.

Research Question 3 queried the extent to which one's fan association (fan, rival, neutral) impacts a collegiate sports team's organizational reputation after a crisis occurs. Therefore, the categorical independent variable of "fan association" and the continuous dependent variable of

“organizational reputation” with pre/post data required the use of a repeated-measures ANOVA. Additionally, the standardized residuals were checked for normality. In order for the data to be considered normal, the skewness should be between -1 and 1 and the kurtosis should be between -1 and 2. Because both skewness and kurtosis fell within these levels, this data was considered normal. Because the p-value of Box’s Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices was not significant ($p > 0.05$), the requirement of equal variance was met. The analysis showed that there was a significant effect for organizational reputation over time ($F(1, 512) = 111.42, p < .001$). Also, there was a significant interaction effect for both organizational reputation over time and fan association ($F(2, 512) = 119.75, p < .001$). Because there was a significant interaction effect, a Bonferroni post-hoc analysis was conducted to determine where the significance was located among the groups. The post-hoc test revealed that there was a significant difference in the means of all three-fan association groups ($p < .05$).

Before being exposed to the manipulation, participants rated organizational reputation very differently in accordance to their fandom. Table 4.4 reports the p-values for the Bonferroni post-hoc analysis. On a seven-point scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree), participants rated their own school’s organizational reputation the highest ($M = 5.99, SD = 0.91$); the neutral school’s organizational reputation received a neutral score ($M = 4.05, SD = 0.49$); and the rival school received the lowest rating ($M = 3.84, SD = 1.16$). After being exposed to the crisis, a significant difference existed in the organizational reputation scores for each level of fan association. Participants still rated their own school highest ($M = 4.47, SD = 0.93$); however, the reputational score for their own school also dropped the most after exposure to the manipulations. The organizational reputation scores of the neutral school ($M = 4.08, SD = 0.79$) and the rival school ($M = 3.85, SD = 1.07$) did not appear to be as vastly impacted by the

exposure to the manipulations. Table 4.4 displays the Bonferroni post-hoc analysis of the repeated-measures ANOVA. Overall, results showed that a fan's rating of an organization's reputation will be greatly impacted by a crisis situation, while the organization's reputation will not be greatly affected among those who are neutral toward or even a rival of the team, providing an answer for Research Question 3.

Table 4.4
Research Question 3 Bonferroni post-hoc analysis

| School Affiliation | School Affiliation | Mean Difference | Significance |
|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Alabama | Auburn | 1.38 | .000 |
| | Arizona State | 1.16 | .000 |
| Auburn | Alabama | -1.38 | .000 |
| | Arizona State | -0.22 | .015 |
| Arizona State | Auburn | -1.16 | .000 |
| | Arizona State | 0.22 | .015 |

Research Question 4 sought to explore how different types of crisis response strategies (attack the accuser, apology, ingratiation) would impact the resulting level of crisis responsibility attributed to an organization in crisis. First, descriptive statistics were run to ensure the normality of the data. Because the skewness was between -1 and 1 and the kurtosis was between -1 and 2, the data was considered normal. A one-way ANOVA was used to answer Research Question 4 Because it compared a categorical independent variable with three groups and a continuous dependent variable. The p-value for the Levene's test was not significant ($p > .05$), confirming the appropriateness of a one-way ANOVA test. A one-way ANOVA indicated significant differences in crisis responsibility scores among the three crisis response strategies ($F(2, 512) = 3.12, p = .045$). To determine where the significance was located among the three groups, a Tukey post-hoc test was conducted. While the post-hoc analysis did not reveal any significant results among the individual levels at a .05 level ($p = 0.08$), the attack strategy ($M =$

3.87, $SD = 1.08$) had a lower mean than the apology ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.19$) and ingratiation ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.13$) strategies. Therefore, while the one-way ANOVA was significant, the resulting lack of significance in the post-hoc analysis does not allow for a confidence in the crisis responsibility score difference among the three crisis response strategies, providing the necessary evidence to answer Research Question 4.

Research Question 5 explores how different types of crises affecting an organization (individual vs. organizational mismanagement) impact the resulting level of crisis responsibility attributed to an organization in crisis. First, descriptive statistics were run to ensure the normality of the data. Because the skewness was between -1 and 1 and the kurtosis was between -1 and 2, the data was considered normal. An independent samples t-test was used to answer Research Question 5, because it featured a categorical independent variable with two groups along with a continuous dependent variable. The p-value for the Levene's test was not significant ($p > .05$), confirming equal variance. An independent samples t-test indicated significant differences in crisis responsibility scores between the individual and organizational crises ($t(513) = 2.23$, $p < .05$). Results showed that crisis responsibility was significantly higher for crises classified as organizational mismanagement ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.07$) as compared to the individual crisis classification ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.18$), answering Research Question 5.

Research Question 6 explored how different levels of fan association (fan, neutral, rival) impacted the resulting level of crisis responsibility attributed to an organization in crisis. First, descriptive statistics were run to ensure the normality of the data. Because the skewness was between -1 and 1 and the kurtosis was between -1 and 2, the data was considered normal. A one-way ANOVA was used to answer Research Question 6 since it featured a categorical independent variable with three groups along with a continuous dependent variable. The p-value

for the Levene's test was not significant ($p > .05$), confirming the appropriateness of a one-way ANOVA test. A one-way ANOVA indicated that no significant differences in crisis responsibility scores existed among the three levels of fan association ($F(2, 512) = 2.75, p > .05$). Therefore, results showed that one's fan association does not impact their evaluation of crisis responsibility toward an organization, answering Research Question 6.

Research Question 7 explored how different types of crisis response strategies (attack the accuser, apology, ingratiation) impacted the resulting potential for a participant to engage in fan-enacted crisis communication on behalf of the team. First, descriptive statistics were run to ensure the normality of the data. Because the skewness was between -1 and 1 and the kurtosis was between -1 and 2, the data was considered normal. A one-way ANOVA was used to answer Research Question 7 since it featured a categorical independent variable with three groups along with a continuous dependent variable. The p-value for the Levene's test was not significant ($p > .05$), confirming the appropriateness of a one-way ANOVA test. A one-way ANOVA indicated no significant differences existed in the fan-enacted crisis communication scores among the three crisis response strategies ($F(2, 512) = 0.23, p > .05$). Therefore, results showed that the type of crisis response strategy does not have a significant impact on a person's fan-enacted crisis communication behavior, answering Research Question 7.

Research Question 8 explored how different types of crises affecting an organization (individual vs. organizational mismanagement) might impact a participant's resulting fan-enacted crisis communication. First, descriptive statistics were run to ensure the normality of the data. Because the skewness was between -1 and 1 and the kurtosis was between -1 and 2, the data was considered normal. An independent samples t-test was used to answer Research Question 8 since it featured a categorical independent variable with two groups along with a

continuous dependent variable. The p-value for the Levene's test was not significant ($p > .05$), confirming equal variance. An independent samples t-test indicated no significant differences existed in fan-enacted crisis communication scores between the individual and organizational crises ($t(513) = 1.64, p > .05$). Results showed that the type of crisis an organization faces does not impact a person's fan-enacted crisis communication behavior, answering Research Question 8.

Research Question 9 explored how different levels of fan association (fan, neutral, rival) impact the resulting potential for a participant to engage in fan-enacted crisis communication on behalf of the team. First, descriptive statistics were run to ensure the normality of the data. Because the skewness was between -1 and 1 and the kurtosis was between -1 and 2, the data was considered normal. A one-way ANOVA was used to answer Research Question 9 since it featured a categorical independent variable with three groups along with a continuous dependent variable. The p-value for the Levene's test was not significant ($p > .05$), confirming the appropriateness of a one-way ANOVA test. A one-way ANOVA indicated significant differences in crisis responsibility scores among the three levels of fan association ($F(2, 512) = 45.55, p < .001$). To determine where the significance was located among the three groups, a Tukey post-hoc test was conducted. The post-hoc analysis revealed significant differences among all three fan identification levels ($p < .001$). The mean fan-enacted crisis communication scores for the fan school ($M = 3.90; SD = 1.07$) were significantly higher than the scores for the neutral school ($M = 3.22; SD = 1.27$); the rival school's scores were significantly lower than both of the other fan association levels ($M = 2.64; SD = 1.26$). Therefore, results showed that fans are much more likely to engage in fan-enacted crisis communication behavior according to their own fan association, answering Research Question 9.

Research Question 10 explored how different types of crisis response strategies (attack the accuser, apology, ingratiation) impact the resulting potential for a participant to engage in positive word-of-mouth on behalf of the team. First, descriptive statistics were run to ensure the normality of the data. Because the skewness was between -1 and 1 and the kurtosis was between -1 and 2, the data was considered normal. A one-way ANOVA was used to answer Research Question 10 since it featured a categorical independent variable with three groups along with a continuous dependent variable. The p-value for the Levene's test was not significant ($p > .05$), confirming the appropriateness of a one-way ANOVA test. A one-way ANOVA indicated no significant differences existed in the positive word-of-mouth scores among the three crisis response strategies ($F(2, 512) = 0.40, p > .05$). Therefore, results showed that the type of response strategy does not have a significant impact on a person's willingness to engage in positive word-of-mouth, answering Research Question 10.

Research Question 11 explored how different types of crises affecting an organization (individual vs. organizational mismanagement) might impact a participant's willingness to engage in positive word-of-mouth on behalf of the team. First, descriptive statistics were run to ensure the normality of the data. Because the skewness was between -1 and 1 and the kurtosis was between -1 and 2, the data was considered normal. An independent samples t-test was used to answer Research Question 11 since it featured a categorical independent variable with two groups along with a continuous dependent variable. The p-value for the Levene's test was not significant ($p > .05$), confirming equal variance. An independent samples t-test indicated no significant differences existed in positive word-of-mouth scores between the individual and organizational crises ($t(513) = 1.71, p > .05$). Results showed that the type of crisis an

organization faces does not produce significant differences in a person's willingness to engage in positive word-of-mouth on behalf of the team, answering Research Question 11.

Research Question 12 explored how different levels of fan association (fan, neutral, rival) impact the resulting potential for a participant to engage in positive word-of-mouth on behalf of the team. First, descriptive statistics were run to ensure the normality of the data. Because the skewness was between -1 and 1 and the kurtosis was between -1 and 2, the data was considered normal. A one-way ANOVA was used to answer Research Question 12 since it featured a categorical independent variable with three groups along with a continuous dependent variable. The p-value for the Levene's test was not significant ($p > .05$), confirming the appropriateness of a one-way ANOVA test. A one-way ANOVA indicated significant differences in crisis responsibility scores among the three levels of fan association ($F(2, 512) = 75.39, p < .001$). In order to determine where the significance was located among the three groups, a Tukey post-hoc test was conducted. The post-hoc analysis revealed significant differences among all three fan identification levels ($p < .001$). The mean positive word-of-mouth scores for the fan school ($M = 4.47; SD = 1.34$) were significantly higher than the scores for the neutral school ($M = 3.37; SD = 1.33$). The rival school's scores were significantly lower than both of the other fan association levels ($M = 2.67; SD = 1.36$). Therefore, results showed that fans are much more likely to engage in positive word-of-mouth according to their own fan association, answering Research Question 12.

Hypothesis 1 posited that there would be a positive correlation between organizational reputation and positive word-of-mouth, suggesting that as an organization's reputation increases, the likelihood of a participant engaging in positive word-of-mouth will also increase. Because the skewness was between -1 and 1 for both variables and the kurtosis was between -1 and 2, the

data was considered to have a normal distribution. Therefore, a Pearson correlation was utilized to explore the relationship between the two continuous variables. Based on the analysis, there was a significant, positive correlation between organizational reputation and positive word-of-mouth ($r_p(515) = .356, p < .001$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 is supported.

Hypothesis 2 posited that there would be a positive correlation between organizational reputation and fan-enacted crisis communication behavior, suggesting that as an organization's reputation increases, the likelihood of a participant engaging in fan-enacted crisis communication behavior will also increase. Because the skewness was between -1 and 1 for both variables and the kurtosis was between -1 and 2, the data was considered to have a normal distribution. Therefore, a Pearson correlation was utilized to explore the relationship between the two continuous variables. Based on the analysis, there was a significant, positive correlation between organizational reputation and fan-enacted crisis communication behavior ($r_p(515) = .337, p < .001$). Thus, Hypothesis 2 is supported.

Hypothesis 3 posited that there would be a positive correlation between fan identification and fan-enacted crisis communication behavior, suggesting that as a participant's level of fandom increases, the likelihood of a participant engaging in fan-enacted crisis communication behavior will also increase. Because the skewness was between -1 and 1 for both variables and the kurtosis was between -1 and 2, the data was considered to have a normal distribution. Therefore, a Pearson correlation was utilized to explore the relationship between the two continuous variables. Based on the analysis, there was a significant, positive correlation between fan identification and fan-enacted crisis communication behavior ($r_p(515) = .103, p < .05$). Thus, Hypothesis 3 is supported.

Hypothesis 4 posited that there would be a positive correlation between fan-enacted crisis communication behavior and positive word-of-mouth, suggesting that as a participant is willing to engage in positive word-of-mouth on an organization's behalf, the likelihood of that participant engaging in fan-enacted crisis communication behavior will also increase. Because the skewness was between -1 and 1 for both variables and the kurtosis was between -1 and 2, the data was considered to have a normal distribution. Therefore, a Pearson correlation was utilized to explore the relationship between the two continuous variables. Based on the analysis, there was a significant, positive correlation between fan-enacted crisis communication behavior and positive word-of-mouth ($r_p(515) = .890, p < .001$). Thus, Hypothesis 4 is supported.

Hypothesis 5 posited that there would be a positive correlation between fan identification and positive word-of-mouth, suggesting that as a participant's level of fandom increases, the likelihood of a participant engaging in positive word-of-mouth will also increase. Because the skewness was between -1 and 1 for both variables and the kurtosis was between -1 and 2, the data was considered to have a normal distribution. Therefore, a Pearson correlation was utilized to explore the relationship between the two continuous variables. Based on the analysis, there was a significant, positive correlation between fan identification and positive word-of-mouth ($r_p(515) = .113, p < .05$). Thus, Hypothesis 5 is supported.

Hypothesis 6 posited that there would be a positive correlation between social media use and fan-enacted crisis communication, suggesting that as a participant's level of social media use increases, the likelihood of a participant engaging in fan-enacted crisis communication behavior will also increase. Because the skewness was between -1 and 1 for both variables and the kurtosis was between -1 and 2, the data was considered to have a normal distribution. Therefore, a Pearson correlation was utilized to explore the relationship between the two continuous

variables. Based on the analysis, there was no correlation between social media use and fan-enacted crisis communication ($r_p(515) = 0.07, p = .09$). Thus, Hypothesis 6 is not supported.

Hypothesis 7 posited that there would be a positive correlation between social media use and positive word-of-mouth, suggesting that as a participant's level of fandom increases, the likelihood of a participant engaging in positive word-of-mouth will also increase. Because the skewness was between -1 and 1 for both variables and the kurtosis was between -1 and 2, the data was considered to have a normal distribution. Therefore, a Pearson correlation was utilized to explore the relationship between the two continuous variables. Based on the analysis, there was a very weak, significant, positive correlation between social media use and positive word-of-mouth ($r_p(515) = .092, p < .05$). Thus, Hypothesis 7 is supported.

Hypothesis 8 posited that there would be a negative correlation between the amount of crisis responsibility attributed to an organization in crisis and the organizational reputation score, suggesting that as the level of crisis responsibility attributed to an organization increases, the organizational reputation score of that organization will decrease. Because the skewness was between -1 and 1 for both variables and the kurtosis was between -1 and 2, the data was considered to have a normal distribution. Therefore, a Pearson correlation was utilized to explore the relationship between the two continuous variables. Based on the analysis, there was a very weak, significant, negative correlation between crisis responsibility and organizational reputation ($r_p(515) = -.117, p < .01$). Thus, Hypothesis 8 is supported.

Hypothesis 9 posited that there would be a positive correlation between a participant's fan identification score and his/her level of social media use. Because the skewness was between -1 and 1 for both variables and the kurtosis was between -1 and 2, the data was considered to have a normal distribution. Therefore, a Pearson correlation was utilized to explore the

relationship between the two continuous variables. Based on the analysis, there was a moderate, significant, positive correlation between fan identification and social media use ($r_p(515) = .448$, $p < .001$). This finding suggests that as a person's fandom increases, his/her rate of using social media also increases. Thus, Hypothesis 9 is supported.

Table 4.5
Summary of Results

| | Research Question/Hypothesis | Variables | Statistics | Finding |
|-------------------|--|--|----------------------------|---|
| RQ ₁ : | To what extent does the response strategy employed by a sports fan impact a collegiate sports team's change in organizational reputation during a crisis? | IV: response strategy DV: change in reputation | Repeated-Measures ANOVA | No significant interaction effect |
| RQ ₂ : | To what extent does the type of crisis an organization faces impact the change in reputation that is experienced during a crisis? | IV: crisis type DV: change in reputation | Repeated-Measures ANOVA | Significant interaction effect |
| RQ ₃ : | To what extent does one's fandom impact the change in reputation that is experienced during a crisis? | IV: fan association DV: change in reputation | Repeated-Measures ANOVA | Significant interaction effect |
| RQ ₄ : | To what extent does the response strategy employed by a sports fan impact the resulting level of crisis responsibility attributed to an organization after a crisis? | IV: response strategy DV: Crisis responsibility | One-way ANOVA | ANOVA significant; post-hoc not significant |
| RQ ₅ : | To what extent does the type of crisis an organization faces impact the resulting level of crisis responsibility attributed to an organization in crisis? | IV: crisis type DV: crisis responsibility | Independent samples t-test | Organization significantly higher than individual |
| RQ ₆ : | To what extent does one's fandom impact the resulting | IV: fan association | One-way ANOVA | Not significant |

| | | | | |
|--------------------|--|--|----------------------------|---|
| | level of crisis responsibility attributed to an organization in crisis? | DV: Crisis responsibility | | |
| RQ ₇ : | To what extent does the type of response strategy a fan utilizes impact the resulting potential for a participant to engage in fan-enacted crisis communication on behalf of the team? | IV: response strategy DV: potential fan-enacted crisis communication behavior | One-way ANOVA | Not significant |
| RQ ₈ : | To what extent does the crisis type impact the resulting potential for a participant to engage in fan-enacted crisis communication on behalf of the team? | IV: crisis type DV: potential fan-enacted crisis communication behavior | Independent Samples t-test | Not significant |
| RQ ₉ : | To what extent does one's fandom impact the resulting potential for a participant to engage in fan-enacted crisis communication on behalf of the team? | IV: fan association DV: potential fan-enacted crisis communication behavior | One-way ANOVA | Significant Differences; fan school higher than neutral or rival |
| RQ ₁₀ : | To what extent does the type of response strategy a fan utilizes impact the potential for a participant to engage in positive word-of-mouth on behalf of the team? | IV: response strategy DV: Positive word-of-mouth | One-way ANOVA | Not significant |
| RQ ₁₁ : | To what extent does the crisis type impact the resulting potential for a participant to engage in positive word-of-mouth on behalf of the team? | IV: crisis type DV: Positive word-of-mouth | Independent Samples t-test | Not significant |
| RQ ₁₂ : | To what extent does one's fandom impact the resulting potential for a participant to engage in positive word-of-mouth on behalf of the team? | IV: fan association DV: Positive word-of-mouth | One-way ANOVA | Significant differences; fan school higher than neutral and rival |
| H ₁ : | There will be a positive | IV: reputation | Pearson Correlation | Supported |

| | | | | |
|------------------|---|--|---------------------|---------------|
| | correlation between organizational reputation and positive word-of-mouth. | DV: word-of-mouth | | |
| H ₂ : | There will be a positive correlation between organizational reputation and fan-enacted crisis communication behavior. | IV: reputation DV: fan-enacted crisis behavioral intentions | Pearson Correlation | Supported |
| H ₃ : | There will be a positive correlation between fan identification and fan-enacted crisis communication behavior. | IV: fandom DV: fan-enacted crisis behavioral intentions | Pearson Correlation | Supported |
| H ₄ : | There will be a positive correlation between fan-enacted crisis communication behavior and positive word-of-mouth. | IV: PWOM DV: Fan Enacted | Pearson Correlation | Supported |
| H ₅ : | There will be a positive correlation between fan identification and positive word-of-mouth. | IV: Fan identification DV: positive word-of-mouth | Pearson Correlation | Supported |
| H ₆ : | There will be a positive correlation between social media use and fan-enacted crisis communication | IV: Social media use DV: fan-enacted crisis communication | Pearson Correlation | Not Supported |
| H ₇ : | There will be a positive correlation between social media use and positive word-of-mouth. | IV: Social media use DV: Positive word-of-mouth | Pearson Correlation | Supported |
| H ₈ : | There will be a negative correlation between the amount of crisis responsibility attributed to an organization in crisis and the organizational reputation score. | IV: Crisis responsibility DV: Organizational reputation | Pearson Correlation | Supported |

| | | | | |
|------------------|--|--|---------------------|-----------|
| H ₉ : | There will be a positive correlation between a participant's fan identification score and his/her level of social media use. | IV: Fan identification DV: Social Media use | Pearson Correlation | Supported |
|------------------|--|--|---------------------|-----------|

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Collegiate sports scandals have seemingly escalated in recent years (Snyder, 2012), placing the sports organization's reputation at risk with more regularity. This dissertation explored how social media impacts traditional crisis communication practices in three distinct ways. First, the study experimentally tested the effects of fan-enacted crisis communication strategies on the public's resulting crisis responsibility and organizational reputation evaluations. Next, this dissertation sought to better understand how the Internet and new communication technologies have transformed the role of the stakeholder in crisis communication literature. Finally, Coombs' (2011) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) was explored within an online setting. Overall, this study provided an important first step to empirically examining the role of average stakeholders who maintain an unofficial role with the organization, as crisis scholarship moves online.

This chapter will expand on the results of the study, discussing the implications of this dissertation. It will be divided into four distinct sections. The first section will provide a summary of the study's results. The second section will discuss the theoretical implications of this study and its contribution to crisis communication literature. The third section will explain this study's practical applications for public relations practitioners. Finally, the fourth section will outline the limitations of this study, providing examples for future research to be conducted regarding fan-enacted crisis communication.

Summary of Results

This dissertation yielded many important results from the research questions and hypotheses that were presented. Participants for the study were recruited from the communication and business schools at a large, public, Southeastern university. A majority of the participants in the study were white and female, which is largely due to the demographic makeup of the courses from which participants were recruited. The mean age of participants was 20.87 years, signifying that many participants were in introductory-level courses at the university, which led to the inclusion of students from a variety of majors. Participants reported being highly identified with their university. They also reported Twitter as the primary social media outlet that they utilize to gain sports information, confirming the use of Twitter as a proper outlet worthy of investigation in this study.

All scales used in the study were found to be both reliable and valid. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess scale reliability; all scales maintained a value above 0.75 or higher. EFA ensured that all scale items loaded under a single factor to assess the scale's construct validity. Overall, all scales used to measure the dependent variables in the study were reliable and valid.

This study's experiment was designed to examine how traditional crisis communication strategies impacted a stakeholder's evaluation of the organization in crisis. Results showed that the different traditional crisis communication strategies employed by sports fans (attacking the accuser, apologizing, or ingratiation) were not found to impact stakeholders' evaluation of the organizational reputation or the level of responsibility attributed to the organization. The strategy used by the "fan" in the experiment also did not impact a stakeholder's willingness to engage in fan-enacted crisis communication behavior or positive word-of-mouth on the sports organization's behalf.

This experiment also explored how the type of crises an organization faces can impact stakeholders' evaluations of that organization. An individual crisis resulted in a statistically significant lower organizational reputation score than did a crisis in the organizational mismanagement cluster. Also, stakeholders attributed a statistically significant increase in crisis responsibility to organizations that were faced with an organizational mismanagement crisis rather than an individual crisis. Finally, results indicated that the type of crisis that an organization faces does not impact a stakeholder's willingness to engage in fan-enacted crisis communication behavior or positive word-of-mouth.

This experiment was also designed to examine how a person's fan association affected a stakeholder's evaluation of an organization in crisis. Results revealed that fan ratings of an organization's reputation is greatly impacted by a crisis situation, whereas a person's rating who was neutral toward or was even a rival of the organization will not be greatly affected. Results also indicated that one's fan association does not impact his/her evaluation of the level of responsibility that should be attributed to an organization in crisis. Finally, results suggested that a stakeholder was willing to engage in both positive word-of-mouth and fan-enacted crisis communication behavior in accordance to his/her fan association. Unsurprisingly, he/she was willing to engage in both of these practices on their team's behalf and was least likely to engage in these practices on behalf of their rival team.

Finally, relationships among the dependent variables were analyzed. For instance, a positive correlation exists between a stakeholder's evaluation of an organization's reputation and their likelihood to engage in positive word-of-mouth and fan-enacted crisis communication behaviors, signaling that as a person's evaluation of an organization's reputation increases, their likelihood to speak positively about the organization online also increases. Additionally, a

strong, positive correlation was revealed between the variables of positive word-of-mouth and fan-enacted crisis communication behavior. Results also exposed a positive correlation between social media use and positive word-of-mouth, suggesting that heavier/regular users of social media will be more likely to engage in positive word-of-mouth online. Finally, a very weak, significant, negative correlation existed between the organizational reputation and crisis responsibility variables, signaling a slight tendency that as additional responsibility is attributed to an organization, reputation scores lessen.

Theoretical Implications

Implications for fan identification theory. This dissertation provides new insight to the importance of one's fan identification on crisis evaluations. Before being exposed to any stimulus material, participants ranked their own institution very highly ($M = 5.99$), the neutral school moderately ($M = 4.05$), and the rival school received the lowest ranking ($M = 3.84$). Turner et al.'s (1987) self-categorization theory lends explanation to the formation of one's group identity, which generates notions of in-group and out-group social demarcations. Thus, the "in-group" possesses some behavioral trait(s) that are relatively homogeneous, creating a single group identity. In this case, one's allegiance to his/her sports team creates an established "in-group." Therefore, these results suggest that the "us" vs. "them" dichotomy is not established simply on rivalries alone. The rival school was much closer to the neutral school in terms of their evaluations than the neutral school was to the identified school. This finding suggests that there is no "neutral" evaluation of a team; rather, fans are always left with a simple "us vs. them" dichotomy that is ever-present in sport.

However, after the crisis was reported, participants ranked their own institution much lower ($M = 4.47$), while the other two institutions' scores were not significantly affected (neutral:

$M = 4.08$; rival: $M = 3.85$). Clearly, crisis scholarship expects an organizational stakeholder to be greatly impacted by a crisis that affects his/her own organization. However, it is important to note that the organizational reputation scores were much more equalized after the crisis struck (post-test).

The disposition theory of sports spectatorship (Raney, 2006) posits that sports fans are happiest when their own team is successful and their rival team is unsuccessful. Yet, those feelings were not realized in the post-test organizational reputation scores. Rather, the pre-test organizational reputation scores seemed to be based on participant's predisposed ideas of fandom, as they had not been exposed to any stimuli at that point in the experiment. When asked questions such as "I believe this team is HONEST" and "I believe the university is concerned with the well-being of its publics," fans' mean scores revealed above average scores for their own organization, while allotting scores to their rival institution that were below the neutral (4) selection on the seven-point Likert scale. This result suggests that their fandom was the only source of this perceived organizational "dishonesty" that the rival school possesses in comparison with their own institution. While these findings were largely expected, the post-test data provided very interesting results. Instead of a crisis situation further harming the organizational reputation scores of the rival school, the scores stayed relatively stable. However, the organizational reputation score of the participant's own institution decreased. Thus, a relatively equalized organizational reputation rating was revealed following the crisis across all fan association levels. The lines separating the three levels of fan association were much less prominent after the crisis, suggesting that participants took a much more objective approach to evaluating the organization's honesty and care for stakeholders when asked to consider these characteristics in light of the presented crisis situation. While the post-test organizational

reputation scores were still impacted by fandom, they were clearly not as affected by preconceived fandom as were the pre-test scores.

Perhaps this finding should be considered in light of the elaboration likelihood model of persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979). ELM suggests that audiences have two routes to take when processing messages: the peripheral route and the central route. The peripheral route does not require much cognitive processing of the message. Rather, the message is processed based on other external cues such as the audience's prior feelings about the subject or, in this case, fandom. Initially, participants seemingly used their own fandom, rather than objectivity, to evaluate the schools' organizational reputation. In contrast, the central route requires audiences to think more about their evaluation of the message, because they are more motivated and able to comprehend the message's content. The ELM notes that when engaged in the central route, audiences may be persuaded to a position that was initially different than their own when high-quality arguments are presented (Severin & Tankard, 2001). Thus, it seems that after viewing an article about a crisis situation and the crisis response, participants' took more time to process the information, utilizing the central route to evaluate the organizational reputation during the post-test.

Fan identification is also important when determining the actions stakeholders will take after a crisis has occurred. Previous fan identification literature has determined that sports fans are more likely to want to share their sports knowledge, purchase memorabilia, and attend games (Wann, 2006). This study determined that highly identified fans are also more likely to engage in positive word-of-mouth and fan-enacted crisis communication behaviors using online platforms. Thus, fans will be willing to post positive messages online about their team after a crisis occurs. Sherif's (1963) latitudes of acceptance notes that audiences will find messages

acceptable when they are in accordance with their existing stand on the issue. Thus, fans who felt that messages were in accordance with their existing fan identification, were more likely to spread that positive message online. Results of this study also determined that highly identified sports fans are also high users of social media. Thus, since social media has become a primary source for sports information, it will also be a location where fans seek clarifying information during a crisis situation.

Implications for Situational Crisis Communication Theory. This study provides useful insight to the future of Coombs' (2011) Situational Crisis Communication Theory as new communication technologies continue to play a large role in today's society. Previously, Coombs (2011) stated that the Internet did not "revolutionize" crisis communication; rather, he purported that it "merely hastened the evolution" of crisis communication (p. 19). While this study's purpose was to empirically examine this "evolution" of SCCT in an online setting, it is important to note that not all of SCCT's primary assumptions were realized in this experiment. According to Brown & Brown (2013), stakeholders should attribute a larger amount of crisis responsibility to the organization following a crisis of organizational mismanagement as compared to an individual crisis. While the experiment confirmed this assumption, no statistical differences emerged among the three strategies presented in the experiment (attacking the accuser, apology, and ingratiation).

Coombs (2011) posits that as crisis responsibility increases, the level of accommodation of the selected reputation repair strategy should also increase. However, since the resulting organizational reputation scores were not impacted by the level of accommodation of the strategy that was presented to participants, this assumption was not supported. While Coombs (2011) suggests that social media helps "crisis managers execute existing communication-related

tasks rather than create the need for entirely new ones” (p. 30), this study provided actual empirical evidence to potentially suggest otherwise. Additional research should be conducted to determine whether this SCCT assumption holds in an online environment.

Yet, there are several factors that must be considered when analyzing why this key SCCT assumption did not hold in a social media environment, particularly on Twitter. Twitter limits user posts to 140 characters or less, substantially limiting the space needed to craft a proper crisis response that utilizes one of Coombs’ (2011) reputation repair strategies. In fact, Twitter’s interface and limitation should cause crisis scholars to query whether 140 characters are truly enough to exhibit these traditional reputation repair techniques outlined in SCCT.

While this study does conclude that Twitter is potentially an ineffective outlet for such persuasive crisis response strategies, these findings, of course, will not prevent stakeholders from attempting to use it as such (Brown, Brown, & Billings, 2014). Coombs (2011) acknowledged that stakeholders are increasingly more in control of content generation, thereby increasing their power in the crisis process. Thus, from an organizational standpoint, it is perhaps more important than ever to adhere to Coombs’ (2011) basic rules for organizational social media use: (1) be present, (2) be where the action is, (3) be there before the crisis (p. 27). Thus, even though results might suggest that Twitter may not be an effective outlet for persuasive crisis response strategies, if users are “present” and perceive it as a good outlet, then the organization must also utilize Twitter. Such practices will aid the organization in conducting proper environmental monitoring to receive proper warning as potential crises develop.

Previous empirical crisis communication research featured statements from the individual/organization in crisis in the form of a press release (Brown, Long, & Dickhaus, 2012). Going back to the previous examples from ELM, perhaps these different types of messages led to

different levels of cognitive processing. In a less official, social media environment, stakeholders could potentially use the peripheral route to process the response messages. However, when asked to read a more official statement, stakeholders are seemingly more likely to utilize central route processing. Thus, future examination is needed to determine whether a certain level of cognitive processing is required for these strategies to improve an organization's reputation.

This study also provides interesting insight within the growing subdiscipline of fan-enacted crisis communication. Coombs' (2011) SCCT is primarily concerned with organizational communication; yet, he recognized that social media has empowered organizational stakeholders to be the generators of online content. While previous studies noted that stakeholders of collegiate sports organizations utilized traditional crisis response strategies in their Twitter posts during a crisis (Brown & Billings, 2013; Brown, Brown & Billings, 2014), no previous study empirically examined whether these individual strategies impacted an organization's reputation.

This study discovered that the levels of accommodation of these strategies did not impact an organization's reputation or attribution of crisis responsibility, calling to question whether the posts of an average stakeholder possess an acceptable level of credibility with stakeholders. Traditionally, Coombs' (2011) SCCT has been concerned with the source-oriented view of crisis response, examining how the organization, itself, handles a crisis situation. The organization will likely have credibility with the audience when commenting on its own incident. Yet, that source credibility might not be as high in the audience-oriented view when the crisis response originates from an average stakeholder (i.e. a sports fan). The conversational nature of

stakeholder tweets likely read as nothing more than opinion, which does not inspire participants to cognitively process the strategies in each post.

Overall, if crisis scholarship continues to purport that the Internet has not revolutionized the field (Coombs, 2011), then scholars must continue to empirically examine online crisis strategies to ensure that they still do, indeed, hold the primary assumptions of SCCT. Because this study was the first to empirically examine SCCT's assumptions in a social media setting, perhaps further examination using different variables would yield different results. For instance, other social media websites boast similar levels of popularity (i.e. Facebook, Instagram, etc.), but do not have the same spatial limitations of Twitter.

Twitter also differs from other social networks (i.e. Facebook, Instagram, etc.) in terms of the relationships that exist among the members of a user's social network that is created by the website. For instance, Broström (2010) notes that Facebook friends are largely an extension of real-world relationships; whereas, Twitter followers are connected due to shared interests and a desire to obtain similar information. These unique relationships on each website will likely lead to differences in how users receive information on each platform. Because users are much more likely to know and have an established "real-world" relationship with a Facebook friend, he/she will likely be much more inclined to follow their advice and listen to other persuasive messages. Traditionally, positive word-of-mouth is the most coveted and powerful tactic in marketing communication. In fact, 92% of consumers report trusting recommendations from people they know (Zuberance, 2014). Since Facebook boasts a large social network of established connections, crisis scholars must examine the impact of more "social" networks' such as Facebook on crisis response.

Without length limitations of posts and a differing relationship among the members in one's social network, other social media websites might be more conducive to communicating traditional crisis strategies to organizational stakeholders. However, it is clear that in the instance of Twitter, if social media has "hastened an evolution of crisis communication" (Coombs, 2011, p. 19), SCCT's strategies might need to "evolve" for this online world.

Implications for Public Relations Practitioners

Because this study is the first to examine crisis response on Twitter, one must not haphazardly formulate broad generalizations based on a single experiment. Nonetheless, this study provides several implications for public relations practitioners. Results regarding one's fan association suggest that fans would not be opposed to posting positive comments about a neutral school. While results did not suggest that stakeholders would have a large propensity to engage in this type of communication, the changes in organizational reputation proposed that the public perception of a client likely would not change among those who are neutral toward it. This finding suggests that the organization may still possess the ability to win their support in the future with the potential to eventually court neutral fans--especially important in a collegiate context, as colleges are increasingly interested in recruiting out-of-state students. This idea is especially important considering that a majority of schools will be classified by most into the "neutral" category rather than being a favorite or rival.

While the organizational reputation scores of the "fan" school dropped after participants viewed the crisis, the scores of the "neutral" and "rival" schools largely remained the same. This result shows the importance of the relationship between a stakeholder and the organization. Without that relationship, perhaps participants simply do not care about an organization's crisis. Yet, even if fans do care, they might be left with a lack of surprise over the occurrence of such

events. As scandals have been increasingly present in sports news (Synder, 2012), fans may simply expect that similar crisis situations are likely occurring at several collegiate athletic institutions. Thus, when a crisis is reported, fans are becoming more immune to the “shock” of these stories, only allowing the event to impact their cognitive evaluations of organizational reputation if the crisis seizes their attention by threatening their own organization. Because evaluations of those who are neutral toward or competitors of the organization were not seriously affected by a crisis, practitioners should consider focusing primarily on repairing the relationship with their key stakeholders rather than allocating money and resources to repairing their reputation with the “public-at-large.”

Because participants did suggest a willingness to comment on such crisis events online, public relations practitioners should continue to emphasize the practice of environmental monitoring (Coombs, 2011). Through this process, practitioners can scan social media posts to watch for developing crises. While persuasive strategies did not yield positive results in this study, users still reported using Twitter as their primary source for obtaining sports information. Thus, when viewed through the concept of the “big seed marketing” techniques (Coombs, 2011), such informational posts from very average users can still lead to viral messages. Thus, social media websites such as Twitter have placed a certain amount of power in the hands of all people, rather than a few opinion leaders or influencers.

In terms of using persuasive reputation repair techniques, the lack of statistical difference among Coombs’ (2011) response strategies perhaps showcases a need for public relations practitioners to develop unique strategies that are specifically geared for online communication. If short bursts (i.e. 140 characters or fewer) of traditional crisis response strategies do not impact stakeholder evaluations of organizational reputation and crisis responsibility, then new or

modified strategies might be needed for this communication outlet since fans clearly are attempting to impact perceptions of a crisis using social media services. Empirical examinations of longer crisis response statements have been shown to improve one's reputation after a crisis (Brown, Long, & Dickhaus, 2012), so public relations practitioners should concentrate on developing tactics to post these via online formats. Marshall McLuhan (1967) first questioned whether the medium was, indeed, the message; perhaps in a new era of evolving communication technology, crisis practitioners must investigate this question. Being as this initial examination determined that strategies that have been effective in traditional media outlets did not yield similar effects on social media websites, practitioners may need to develop new practices to maximize results from each developing outlet. Future examinations should determine whether posting a single statement over the course of several sequential tweets is more effective than the approach utilized in this study.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While this dissertation does lend some insight to the effects of fan-enacted crisis communication, there are some limitations of the research that should be addressed. Because this study is the first to examine online fan-enacted crisis communication, addressing these limitations will help this study to serve as a catalyst for future crisis scholars to examine how new communication technologies have altered traditional crisis communication practices.

The first limitation is that the use of a convenience sample, such as one featuring college students, impacts the generalizability of the results. While college students were selected as participants for this study because of their clear connection to a university sports team, it must be acknowledged that university sports teams have highly identified fans of all ages and backgrounds. Thus, future research should seek to determine if a more generalizable sample

would impact the results of this study by employing the university fan identification scale to ensure that participants are, indeed, fans of the institution used in the experiment.

There are also methodological limitations that scholars would best alleviate as they seek to further explore crisis communication practices in an online environment. One of the primary manipulations in this study featured an artificial Twitter account. Wimmer and Dominick (2011) noted that a primary disadvantage to experimental research was the artificiality of the environment in an experiment. This study revealed that artificiality in experimental design will be a barrier that future crisis scholarship will have to overcome. Utilizing an artificial social media account presents several problems. First, the “fan” Twitter account presented in this study was nondescript and clearly had no association or connection with the participants. In a real setting, a person’s Twitter feed features posts from those who a user has chosen to follow. Even “retweets” are still posts that have been endorsed by a person the user has chosen to follow (Broström, 2010). This type of relationship is difficult to mimic; therefore, making it difficult for researchers to explore how friends’ post impact social media users.

Despite the problems with the artificial nature of these Twitter accounts, this will likely still be the preferred method for stimulus creation in future empirical examinations of online crisis communication. Yet, scholars should seek to create such stimulus material to be as realistic as possible in order to avoid some of these limitations. While this study intended to specifically explore fan-enacted crisis communication, future research should compare fans’ use of these strategies to other institutional and journalistic social media accounts in order to properly understand how online communication has altered traditional crisis techniques. The impact of source credibility should be a variable included in future studies.

Wimmer and Dominick (2011) also note that simply taking part in an experiment can alert participants to the study's artificial nature. This problem is especially difficult in crisis related research. This study featured a manipulated Bleacher Report article detailing a crisis situation as part of the stimuli. It is relatively hard to expect a person's preconceived ideas about an organization to be damaged by a crisis situation and then be repaired by a crisis response in such a relatively short period of time during the course of the experiment. In a real-world setting, crises and the ensuing response strategies often occur over the course of hours or days. Thus, it is relatively difficult to measure the way a stakeholder would realistically respond to a crisis situation with the singular "snapshot" that experimental research provides. Future research should examine crisis response longitudinally as a real crisis develops.

Also, while this study found that Coombs' (2011) SCCT strategies did not impact participants' evaluations of organizational reputation or crisis responsibility, future scholarship should examine whether this finding persists across different social media platforms. Posts on Twitter are clearly limited to 140 characters or less, a limitation that may make it difficult to relay a crisis communication strategy to stakeholders. Yet, social media users report that Twitter is a destination to obtain breaking news information (Berfield, 2012). In fact, Twitter has been heralded for its ability to provide its users with quick, informational updates during times of crisis such as safety updates during Hurricane Sandy. While previous examination has shown the social media websites' aptitude at spreading beneficial, informational posts, this study found that this outlet might not be best used for more persuasive, reputation repair strategies.

Also, Twitter is intended to be a social network where its users can receive quick, timely news updates to scan (Berfield, 2012), which could mean that a longer Twitter feed featuring more posts might be needed to ensure that participants spend enough time with the stimuli in

future studies. While users reported using Twitter as their primary social network, other social networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram also received high rankings. Future scholarship should explore whether certain social media outlets would still allow for more traditional crisis communication strategies.

From a theoretical perspective, this study used previous research (Brown & Billings, 2013; Brown, Brown, & Billings, 2014) to select the strategies to be used in this study. While this study found no statistical differences among the three strategies (attacking the accuser, ingratiation, and apology), future studies should examine Coombs' other reputation repair strategies to note their impact on organizational reputation, crisis responsibility, and future online communication intentions. Also, this study featured only two types of crises from the Brown and Brown (2013) crisis typology. Future research should include other types of crises to examine how sports-related incidents should be handled in an online environment. Because sports features an interesting combination of individual and organizational crises, future research should further explore how crisis response should differ for each. Also, crisis scholarship should further examine the relationship between the two parties to better understand how an individual athlete's crisis impacts the organization as well as how an organizational crisis impacts an individual athlete.

While this study intended to explore fan-enacted crisis communication in a sporting context, future scholarship should also examine this practice in other forums featuring impassioned stakeholders. For instance, highly-identified fans of certain celebrities have shown a tendency to use social media to post support that utilizes some of the same traditional crisis communication strategies that were featured in this experiment (Gruttadaro, 2013). Perhaps similar studies may also be conducted in political communication to see whether constituents

utilize social media to aid a politician in crisis. Overall, as social media has increased the ability of “average” people to comment on developing crises, there are several applications in which scholarship must determine

Conclusion

This study provides an important foundation for crisis communication scholars seeking to expand traditional crisis communication theories in an ever-increasing online world. Despite the hesitancy of some crisis scholars to recognize the vast changes brought forth by online communication technology (Coombs, 2011), traditional reputation repair strategies did not lead to a positive change in an organization’s reputation in this study. Thus, this finding suggests that further empirical examination of online crisis communication is warranted. This study determined that the relationship between an organization and a stakeholder should be an organizational priority, as fans are more likely to engage in positive word-of-mouth and potential fan-enacted behaviors on behalf of their respective organizations. As communication technology continues to evolve, crisis scholarship must continue to empirically examine whether the primary assumptions of Situational Crisis Communication Theory persist in online (and particularly social) environments. Crises will not disappear in the coming years, and neither will social media attempts to influence the perception of them. As such, exploring these connections will be academic imperatives of public relations scholars in the years to come.

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APPENDIX A: MANIPULATED NEWS ARTICLES FOR EXPERIMENT

Crisis Type: Environmental/individual Crises
Fan Association: Identified

The screenshot shows a web page from Bleacher Report. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the 'b/r bleacher report' logo and various sports categories: NFL, CFB, MLB, NBA, NHL, CBB, SOCCER, UFC, WWE, GOLF, OLYMPICS, MORE, SWAGGER, VIDEO, MY TEAMS. Below this is a sub-navigation bar for 'College Baseball' with links to Home, Archives, and Top Writers, and a 'Mobile site' link. The main article title is 'Bleacher Report Exclusive: Bama Player Avoids Arrest' by Lindsay Gibbs, a featured columnist. It has 100 Facebook shares, 12 tweets, and 112 total shares. The article features a large image of a baseball stadium at night. The text of the article describes an incident involving Alabama baseball pitcher Luke Blanchard in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, who was nearly arrested after a physical altercation with another student. The article mentions that Blanchard was let go after police learned of his position on the team. A quote from an unidentified Bama player is included: "Look, players get privileges. That's all this is,". The article concludes by stating that Bleacher Report expects to continue its investigation and that requests for comments from the Alabama Athletic Department and Tuscaloosa Police Department were not returned. At the bottom of the article, there are social media sharing icons for Facebook (100), Twitter (12), Google+, and a comment icon (7 comments). To the right of the article is a sidebar with a 'FOLLOW B/R ON FACEBOOK' section showing a 'Like' button and a list of users who liked the page. Below that is a 'B/R TEAM STREAM™' section with a list of related articles, each with a small thumbnail image and a title: 'Biggest Disappointments at the CWS', 'Olympians with Toughest Road to Sochi', 'Athletes Who Need Own Reality Shows', 'Sports Stars with Weird Obsessions', 'Insane Things Sports Parents Do', 'Athletes Who Are Terrible Singers', 'The Rise of Blake Griffin', '101 Greatest Sports Movies Ever', and 'Best Trolls in Sports'. At the bottom of the sidebar, there is a 'PREVIOUS' and 'NEXT' navigation bar, and a section titled 'OUT OF BOUNDS' featuring a photo of a woman and the text 'Epic Sports Photobombs' from Heavy.com, and 'Perfectly Timed Sports Pics' from TheChive.com.

Crisis Type: Environmental/individual Crises
Fan Association: Rival

b/r bleacher report

b/r NFL CFB MLB NBA NHL CBB SOCCER UFC WWE GOLF OLYMPICS MORE SWAGGER VIDEO MY TEAMS

College Baseball Home Archives Top Writers Mobile site

COLLEGE BASEBALL

Bleacher Report Exclusive: Auburn Player Avoids Arrest

By Lindsay Gibbs, Featured Columnist

f 100 | t 12 | 112 SHARES

Use your ← → (arrow) keys to browse more stories 1 of 14 NEXT »



AUBURN (AP) --Auburn baseball's starting pitcher, Luke Blanchard, was nearly arrested outside of a local bar in Auburn last night, according to an anonymous **Bleacher Report** source. According to this **Bleacher Report** source, Blanchard was stopped by police and placed in handcuffs following an apparent drunken altercation with another unidentified male student.

According to the **Bleacher Report** source, Blanchard, who is underage, had been drinking at the bar for several hours. Blanchard began to leave the bar and then got into a physical altercation with another male student. Security at the bar separated the two men and called the police.

After police arrived, Blanchard was placed into handcuffs. However, he was reportedly let go after police learned of his position on the Auburn baseball team. According to our source, Blanchard, then, stumbled to a car and left with a friend who took him home.

"Look, players get privileges. That's all this is," an unidentified Auburn player told **The Bleacher Report**.

Bleacher Report expects to continue the investigation into last night's events to determine whether Blanchard's status as an Auburn student athlete impacted the police's decision to let him go.

Bleacher Report's requests for comments from the Auburn Athletic Department and Auburn Police Department were not returned.

f 100 | t 12 | g+ | 7 COMMENTS

FOLLOW B/R ON FACEBOOK

Like Anelia Smith, Jeremy Dunagan and 753,486 others like this.

B/R TEAM STREAM™

-  **Biggest Disappointments at the CWS**
from Bleacher Report
-  **Olympians with Toughest Road to Sochi**
from Bleacher Report.com
-  **Athletes Who Need Own Reality Shows**
from Bleacher Report.com
-  **Sports Stars with Weird Obsessions**
from Bleacher Report.com
-  **Insane Things Sports Parents Do**
from Bleacher Report.com
-  **Athletes Who Are Terrible Singers**
from Bleacher Report.com
-  **The Rise of Blake Griffin**
from Bleacher Report.com
-  **101 Greatest Sports Movies Ever**
from Bleacher Report.com
-  **Best Trolls in Sports**
from Bleacher Report.com

« PREVIOUS NEXT »

OUT OF BOUNDS



Epic Sports Photobombs
From: Heavy.com



Perfectly Timed Sports Pics
From: TheChive.com

Crisis Type: Environmental/individual Crises
Fan Association: Neutral

b/r **bleacher report**

b/r NFL CFB MLB NBA NHL CBB SOCCER UFC WWE GOLF OLYMPICS MORE SWAGGER VIDEO MY TEAMS

College Baseball Home Archives Top Writers Mobile site

COLLEGE BASEBALL

Bleacher Report Exclusive: Arizona State Player Avoids Arrest

By Lindsay Gibbs, Featured Columnist

f 100 t 12 112 SHARES

Use your ← → (arrow) keys to browse more stories 1 of 14 NEXT »



PHOENIX (AP) --Arizona State University baseball's starting pitcher, Luke Blanchard, was nearly arrested outside of a local bar in Phoenix last night, according to an anonymous **Bleacher Report** source. According to this **Bleacher Report** source, Blanchard was stopped by police and placed in handcuffs following an apparent drunken altercation with another unidentified male student.

According to the **Bleacher Report** source, Blanchard, who is underage, had been drinking at the bar for several hours. Blanchard began to leave the bar and then got into a physical altercation with another male student. Security at the bar separated the two men and called the police.

After police arrived, Blanchard was placed into handcuffs. However, he was reportedly let go after police learned of his position on the Arizona State baseball team. According to our source, Blanchard, then, stumbled to a car and left with a friend who took him home.

"Look, players get privileges. That's all this is," an unidentified Bama player told **The Bleacher Report**.

Bleacher Report expects to continue the investigation into last night's events to determine whether Blanchard's status as an Arizona State student athlete impacted the police's decision to let him go.

Bleacher Report's requests for comments from the Arizona State Athletic Department and Phoenix Police Department were not returned.

f 100 t 12 g+ 7 COMMENTS

FOLLOW B/R ON FACEBOOK

Like Amelia Smith, Jeremy Dunagan and 753,486 others like this.

B/R TEAM STREAM™

- [Biggest Disappointments at the CWS](#)
from Bleacher Report
- [Olympians with Toughest Road to Sochi](#)
from BleacherReport.com
- [Athletes Who Need Own Reality Shows](#)
from BleacherReport.com
- [Sports Stars with Weird Obsessions](#)
from BleacherReport.com
- [Insane Things Sports Parents Do](#)
from BleacherReport.com
- [Athletes Who Are Terrible Singers](#)
from BleacherReport.com
- [The Rise of Blake Griffin](#)
from BleacherReport.com
- [101 Greatest Sports Movies Ever](#)
from BleacherReport.com
- [Best Trolls in Sports](#)
from BleacherReport.com

« PREVIOUS NEXT »

OUT OF BOUNDS



Epic Sports Photobombs
From: Heavy.com

[Perfectly Timed Sports Pics](#)
From: TheChive.com

Crisis Type: Organizational Mismanagement
Fan Association: Identified

b/r bleacher report

b/r NFL CFB MLB NBA NHL CBB SOCCER UFC WWE GOLF OLYMPICS MORE SWAGGER VIDEO MY TEAMS

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COLLEGE BASEBALL

Bleacher Report Exclusive: Conflicting Messages Coming from Bama

By Lindsay Gibbs, Featured Columnist

f 100 | t 12 | 112 SHARES

Use your ← → (arrow) keys to browse more stories 1 of 14 NEXT »



TUSCALOOSA (AP) -- Alabama baseball coach Mitch Gaspard will keep the current starting pitcher, Luke Blanchard, despite the Crimson Tide's 2-17 record. Gaspard has publicly stated that Blanchard gives the team its best chance to win. Yet, *The Bleacher Report* has discovered that there is a different opinion in the locker room, with a majority of the team believing Blanchard should be removed from the pitching rotation.

"He is simply awful," a starting outfielder told *The Bleacher Report*.

Despite Gaspard's continued assertions that Blanchard "will continue in his starting role," *The Bleacher Report* has learned that there might also be some dissent in the coaches' offices. One assistant coach was quoted as saying, "It appears that the team might need to go in a different direction, yet some of the leadership simply doesn't want to go there."

That other direction is likely due to the offseason addition of freshman phenomenon Jason Godfrey. Godfrey committed to the Tide as one of the top high school players in the country after being named the Gatorade Male Athlete of the Year. Surprising many, Godfrey chose to attend Alabama after the Philadelphia Phillies drafted him with their second round pick last year.

"You have essentially a professional athlete on your roster and you don't play him? That's ridiculous," another Bama player stated.

With such conflicting messages coming from the Alabama locker room, *The Bleacher Report* questions the future direction of the Alabama Baseball team. The Bleacher Report will continue covering this story as it develops.

f 100 | t 12 | g+ | 7 COMMENTS

FOLLOW B/R ON FACEBOOK

Like Amelia Smith, Jeremy Dunagan and 753,496 others like this

B/R TEAM STREAM™

- Biggest Disappointments at the CWS
- Olympians with Toughest Road to Sochi
- Athletes Who Need Own Reality Shows
- Sports Stars with Weird Obsessions
- Insane Things Sports Parents Do
- Athletes Who Are Terrible Singers
- The Rise of Blake Griffin
- 101 Greatest Sports Movies Ever
- Best Trolls in Sports

OUT OF BOUNDS

Epic Sports Photobombs

Perfectly Timed Sports Pics

Crisis Type: Organizational Mismanagement
Fan Association: Rival

The screenshot shows a web page from Bleacher Report. At the top left is the 'b/r bleacher report' logo. A navigation bar contains links for various sports: NFL, CFB, MLB, NBA, NHL, CBB, SOCCER, UFC, WWE, GOLF, OLYMPICS, MORE, SWAGGER, VIDEO, and MY TEAMS. Below this is a sub-navigation bar for 'College Baseball' with links for Home, Archives, and Top Writers, and a 'Mobile site' link. The main article title is 'Bleacher Report Exclusive: Conflicting Messages Coming from Auburn' by Lindsay Gibbs. It features social media share counts: 100 Facebook likes, 12 tweets, and 112 shares. The article text discusses Auburn baseball coach Sunny Golloway's stance on starting pitcher Luke Blanchard, despite a 2-17 record, and mentions dissent from other coaches. A photo of a baseball field at night is included. The right sidebar contains a 'FOLLOW B/R ON FACEBOOK' section, a 'B/R TEAM STREAM' with various video thumbnails, and an 'OUT OF BOUNDS' section with a photo of a woman. At the bottom, there are more social media share counts: 100 Facebook likes, 12 tweets, 7+ Google+ shares, and 7 comments.

b/r bleacher report

NFL CFB MLB NBA NHL CBB SOCCER UFC WWE GOLF OLYMPICS MORE SWAGGER VIDEO MY TEAMS

College Baseball Home Archives Top Writers Mobile site

COLLEGE BASEBALL

Bleacher Report Exclusive: Conflicting Messages Coming from Auburn

By Lindsay Gibbs, Featured Columnist

f 100 | t 12 | 112 SHARES

Use your ← → (arrow) keys to browse more stories 1 of 14 NEXT »



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That other direction is likely due to the offseason addition of freshman phenomenon Jason Godfrey. Godfrey committed to the Tigers as one of the top high school players in the country after being named the Gatorade Male Athlete of the Year. Surprising many, Godfrey chose to attend Auburn after the Philadelphia Phillies drafted him with their second round pick last year.

"You have essentially a professional athlete on your roster and you don't play him? That's ridiculous," another Auburn player stated.

With such conflicting messages coming from the Auburn locker room, *The Bleacher Report* questions the future direction of the Auburn Baseball team. *The Bleacher Report* will continue covering this story as it develops.

f 100 | t 12 | g+ | 7 COMMENTS

FOLLOW B/R ON FACEBOOK
Like Amelia Smith, Jeremy Dunagan and 753,496 others like this.

B/R TEAM STREAM™

- Biggest Disappointments at the CWS
- Olympians with Toughest Road to Sochi
- Athletes Who Need Own Reality Shows
- Sports Stars with Weird Obsessions
- Insane Things Sports Parents Do
- Athletes Who Are Terrible Singers
- The Rise of Blake Griffin
- 101 Greatest Sports Movies Ever
- Best Trolls in Sports

« PREVIOUS NEXT »

OUT OF BOUNDS



Epic Sports Photobombs
From: Heavy.com

Perfectly Timed Sports Pics
From: TheChive.com

Crisis Type: Organizational Mismanagement
Fan Association: Neutral

The screenshot shows a web page from Bleacher Report. At the top left is the 'b/r bleacher report' logo. A navigation bar contains links for various sports: NFL, CFB, MLB, NBA, NHL, CBB, SOCCER, UFC, WWE, GOLF, OLYMPICS, and MORE. Below this is a sub-navigation bar with 'College Baseball', 'Home', 'Archives', and 'Top Writers'. A 'Mobile site' link is on the right. The main header reads 'COLLEGE BASEBALL' with a baseball icon. The article title is 'Bleacher Report Exclusive: Conflicting Messages Coming from Arizona State' by Lindsay Gibbs. It features social media share buttons for Facebook (100), Twitter (12), and a '112 SHARES' button. A navigation bar below the article says 'Use your ← → (arrow) keys to browse more stories' and '1 of 14 NEXT'. The article text discusses Arizona State University baseball coach Tim Esmay's decision to keep starting pitcher Luke Blanchard, despite a 2-17 record and conflicting opinions from players and coaches. A large image of a baseball field is shown. On the right side, there is a 'FOLLOW B/R ON FACEBOOK' section with a 'Like' button and a list of 'B/R TEAM STREAM' items, including 'Biggest Disappointments at the CWS', 'Olympians with Toughest Road to Sochi', 'Athletes Who Need Own Reality Shows', 'Sports Stars with Weird Obsessions', 'Insane Things Sports Parents Do', 'Athletes Who Are Terrible Singers', 'The Rise of Blake Griffin', '101 Greatest Sports Movies Ever', and 'Best Trolls in Sports'. At the bottom right, there is an 'OUT OF BOUNDS' section with a photo of a woman and the text 'Epic Sports Photobombs' and 'Perfectly Timed Sports Pics'. A social media bar at the bottom shows Facebook (100), Twitter (12), Google+, and a '7 COMMENTS' button.

APPENDIX B: MANIPULATED TWITTER ACCOUNTS

*Response Strategy – Attack
Fan Association – Identified*

BAMA'S #1 FAN
Bama's #1 Fan
@Bamafan232
Roll Tide! Huge Bama fan and lover of all sports. Love talking football, basketball, softball, & gymnastics. RTR! National Champions in 4 sports!

1178 TWEETS
1121 FOLLOWING
1139 FOLLOWERS

Tweet
@Bamafan232

Tweets

- BAMA'S #1 FAN** Bama's #1 Fan @Bamafan2323 5h
Bleacher Report is just writing spin to cause problems for Alabama baseball and get people to visit their crappy website
- BAMA'S #1 FAN** Bama's #1 Fan @Bamafan2323 5h
Bleacher Report's Alabama baseball story is just wrong. They don't know what they're talking about. #BleacherReportSucks
- BAMA'S #1 FAN** Bama's #1 Fan @Bamafan2323 10h
Bama fans, don't read the Bleacher Report story. Nobody else is. Bleacher Report's article is based on the word of liars, and it is fake. #liarjournalism
- BAMA'S #1 FAN** Bama's #1 Fan @Bamafan2323 16h
Terrible article on Bleacher Report today about the Alabama baseball situation. Players are misquoted and the information is wrong!
- BAMA'S #1 FAN** Bama's #1 Fan @Bamafan2323 16h
The Bleacher Report should stop treating allegations as facts. Nothing has been proven yet. This is a pathetic excuse for journalism. #IHATEBleacherReport

Recent images

Similar to Kelso

- XFINITY Sports** @XFINITYSports Promoted · Follow
- Ashley Rae LouAllen** @ARaeLouAllen Follow
- Andrew Alexander** @andrew_ast Follow

Response Strategy – Ingratiation
Fan Association – Identified

BAMA'S #1 FAN
Bama's #1 Fan
@Bamafan232
Roll Tide! Huge Bama fan and lover of all sports. Love talking football, basketball, softball, & gymnastics. RTR! National Champions in 4 sports!

1178 TWEETS
1121 FOLLOWING
1139 FOLLOWERS

Tweet
@Bamafan232

Tweets
Following
Followers
Favorites
Lists
Recent images
Similar to Kelso

Tweets

BAMA'S #1 FAN Bama's #1 Fan @Bamafan2323 5h
#IStandWithBama always. No matter what. Crimson and White all day long!! I love the Tide! Bama fans get turned up! #CrimsonPride

BAMA'S #1 FAN Bama's #1 Fan @Bamafan2323 5h
I don't care-I'll rock crimson and white all day everyday. Bama is more than a school...it's a lifestyle. #IStandWithBama.

BAMA'S #1 FAN Bama's #1 Fan @Bamafan2323 10h
Bama has the greatest team and fans in the whole freaking country. This story doesn't change a thing! #RollTide #IStandWithBama

BAMA'S #1 FAN Bama's #1 Fan @Bamafan2323 16h
Roll Tide Alllllll day long. #BamaNation Stand UP! #IStandWithBama

BAMA'S #1 FAN Bama's #1 Fan @Bamafan2323 16h
We Bama fans have seen troubles before. There is nothing we can't handle. #IStandWithBama

XFINITY Sports @XFINITYSports
Promoted · Follow

Ashley Rae LouAllen @ARaeLouAllen
Follow

Andrew Alexander @andrew_ast
Follow

Response Strategy – Apology
Fan Association – Identified

BAMA'S #1 FAN
Bama's #1 Fan
@Bamafan232
Roll Tide! Huge Bama fan and lover of all sports. Love talking football, basketball, softball, & gymnastics. RTR! National Champions in 4 sports!

1178 TWEETS
1121 FOLLOWING
1139 FOLLOWERS

Tweet
@Bamafan232

Tweets
Following
Followers
Favorites
Lists
Recent images
Similar to Kelso

Tweets

- BAMA'S #1 FAN** Bama's #1 Fan @Bamafan2323 5h
Let me apologize on behalf of the #BamaNation for the story on Bleacher Report today. We'll make this OK.
- BAMA'S #1 FAN** Bama's #1 Fan @Bamafan2323 5h
Crap. I'm so sorry for the events in that Bleacher Report story. I'm sure the Athletic Dept. will fix this.
- BAMA'S #1 FAN** Bama's #1 Fan @Bamafan2323 10h
Ugh. I HATE seeing stories like that Bleacher Report article. I hope that Bama will fix this situation. FAST!
- BAMA'S #1 FAN** Bama's #1 Fan @Bamafan2323 16h
I'm sure every Bama fan is sorry about the events that were in that Bleacher Report Article. We all know when we just need to say "Sorry."
- BAMA'S #1 FAN** Bama's #1 Fan @Bamafan2323 16h
So upset about that Bleacher Report article. I am sure that Bama will fix this. #SoSorry #EveryoneMakesMistakes

XFINITY Sports @XFINITYSports Promoted · Follow
Ashley Rae LouAllen @ARaeLouAllen Follow
Andrew Alexander @andrew_ast Follow

Response Strategy – Attack
Fan Association – Rival



Auburn's #1 Fan

@Auburnfan232

War Eagle! Huge Auburn fan and lover of all sports. Love talking football, basketball, softball, & gymnastics. WDE!

1178 TWEETS

1121 FOLLOWING

1139 FOLLOWERS

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Tweet to

Tweets

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Followers

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Lists

Recent images



Similar

 **XFINITY Sports** @XFINITYSports
Promoted · Follow

 **Ashley Rae LouAllen** @ARaeLouAllen
Follow

Tweets

 **Auburn's #1 Fan** @Auburnfan232 5h
Bleacher Report is just writing spin to cause problems for Auburn baseball and get people to visit their crappy website

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Response Strategy — Ingratiation
Fan Association — Rival



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Recent images



Similar

 **XFINITY Sports** @XFINITYSports
Promoted · Follow

 **Ashley Rae LouAllen** @ARaeLouAllen
Follow

Tweets

 **Auburn's #1 Fan** @Auburnfan232 5h
#IStandWithAuburn always. No matter what. Orange and Blue all day long!! I love the Tigers! Auburn fans get turned up! #AuburnPride

 **Auburn's #1 Fan** @Auburnfan232 5h
I don't care—I'll rock orange and blue all day everyday. Auburn is more than a school...it's a lifestyle. #IStandWithAuburn.

 **Auburn's #1 Fan** @Auburnfan232 10h
Auburn has the greatest team and fans in the whole freaking country. This story doesn't change a thing! #WarEagle #IStandWithAuburn

 **Auburn's #1 Fan** @Auburnfan232 16h
War Eagle AlIIIIII day long. #AuburnNation Stand UP! #IStandWithAuburn

 **Auburn's #1 Fan** @Auburnfan232 16h
We Auburn fans have seen troubles before. There is nothing we can't handle. #IStandWithAuburn

Response Strategy — Apology
Fan Association — Rival



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@Auburnfan232

War Eagle! Huge Auburn fan and lover of all sports. Love talking football, basketball, softball, & gymnastics. WDE!

1178 TWEETS
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Promoted · Follow

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I'm sure every Auburn fan is sorry about the events that were in that Bleacher Report Article. We all know when we just need to say "Sorry."

 **Auburn's #1 Fan** @Auburnfan232 16h
So upset about that Bleacher Report article. I am sure that Auburn will fix this. #SoSorry #EveryoneMakesMistakes

Response Strategy — Attack
Fan Association — Neutral

ASU's #1 FAN **Arizona State's #1 Fan** @ASUfan232
Go Sun Devils! Huge Arizona State fan and lover of all sports. Love talking football, baseball, softball, & gymnastics. Love the Sun Devils!

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1121 FOLLOWING
1139 FOLLOWERS

Tweet
@ASUfan232

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ASU's #1 FAN **ASU's #1 Fan** @ASUfan232 5h
Bleacher Report is just writing spin to cause problems for Arizona State baseball and get people to visit their crappy website

ASU's #1 FAN **ASU's #1 Fan** @ASUfan232 5h
Bleacher Report's ASU baseball story is just wrong. They don't know what they're talking about. #BleacherReportSucks

ASU's #1 FAN **ASU's #1 Fan** @ASUfan232 10h
Sun Devil fans, don't read the Bleacher Report story. Nobody else is. Bleacher Report's article is based on the word of liars, and it is fake. #liarjournalism

ASU's #1 FAN **ASU's #1 Fan** @ASUfan232 16h
Terrible article on Bleacher Report today about the Arizona State baseball situation. Players are misquoted and the information is wrong!

ASU's #1 FAN **ASU's #1 Fan** @ASUfan232 16h
The Bleacher Report should stop treating allegations as facts. Nothing has been proven yet. This is a pathetic excuse for journalism. #IHATEBleacherReport

XFINITY Sports @XFINITYSports Promoted · Follow
Ashley Rae LouAllen @ARaeLouAllen Follow
Andrew Alexander @andrew_ast Follow

Response Strategy — Ingratiation
Fan Association — Neutral



Arizona State's #1 Fan

@ASUfan232

Go Sun Devils! Huge Arizona State fan and lover of all sports. Love talking football, baseball, softball, & gymnastics. Love the Sun Devils!

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Ashley Rae LouAllen @ARaeLouAllen
Follow

Andrew Alexander @andrew_ast
Follow

ASU's #1 Fan @ASUfan232 5h
#IStandWithASU always. No matter what. Maroon and Gold all day long!! I love the Sun Devils! ASU fans get turned up! #SunDevilPride

ASU's #1 Fan @ASUfan232 5h
I don't care—I'll rock maroon and gold all day everyday. ASU is more than a school...it's a lifestyle. #IStandWithASU.

ASU's #1 Fan @ASUfan232 10h
Arizona State has the greatest team and fans in the whole freaking country. This story doesn't change a thing! #GoSunDevils #IStandWithASU

ASU's #1 Fan @ASUfan232 16h
Go Sun Devils AlIIIIII day long. #SunDevilNation Stand UP! #IStandWithASU

ASU's #1 Fan @ASUfan232 16h
We Arizona State fans have seen troubles before. There is nothing we can't handle. #IStandWithASU

Response Strategy — Apology
Fan Association — Neutral

ASU's #1 FAN

Arizona State's #1 Fan

@ASUfan232

Go Sun Devils! Huge Arizona State fan and lover of all sports. Love talking football, baseball, softball, & gymnastics. Love the Sun Devils!

1178 TWEETS
1121 FOLLOWING
1139 FOLLOWERS

Tweet

@ASUfan232

Tweets

- ASU's #1 FAN** ASU's #1 Fan @ASUfan232 5h
Let me apologize on behalf of the #SunDevilNation for the story on Bleacher Report today. We'll make this OK.
- ASU's #1 FAN** ASU's #1 Fan @ASUfan232 5h
Crap. I'm so sorry for the events in that Bleacher Report story. I'm sure the Athletic Dept. will fix this.
- ASU's #1 FAN** ASU's #1 Fan @ASUfan232 10h
Ugh. I HATE seeing stories like that Bleacher Report article. I hope that Arizona State will fix this situation. FAST!
- ASU's #1 FAN** ASU's #1 Fan @ASUfan232 16h
I'm sure every ASU fan is sorry about the events that were in that Bleacher Report Article. We all know when we just need to say "Sorry."
- ASU's #1 FAN** ASU's #1 Fan @ASUfan232 16h
So upset about that Bleacher Report article. I am sure that Arizona State will fix this. #SoSorry #EveryoneMakesMistakes

Similar to Kelso

- XFINITY Sports** @XFINITYSports Promoted · Follow
- Ashley Rae LouAllen** @ARaeLouAllen Follow
- Andrew Alexander** @andrew_ast Follow

APPENDIX C: EXPERIMENT DEBRIEFING

Debriefing Statement

STOP AND READ:

Thank you for your participation in this study. It is important to know that this study was an experiment to help scholars learn how you would respond to certain crisis situations by using a fictional story about the Alabama baseball team. It is important to note that the story in this experiment was manipulated by the researcher. Please understand that the Alabama baseball team is facing no NCAA investigations or sanctions.

In order to submit your survey, please check the boxes below to show that you have read and understand each statement.

Please check the box below to show that you have read and understand the following statement:

- I understand that the story and Twitter accounts I just read were false and were used for academic research purposes only.

Please check the box below to show that you have read and understand the following statement:

- I understand that the Alabama baseball team is not facing an NCAA investigation.

Please check the box below to show that you have read and understand the following statement:

- I understand that this research was intended to measure my response to a fictional crisis situation.

Please check the box below to show that you have read and understand the following statement:

- I understand that it is the policy of the Alabama baseball team, along with all University of Alabama athletic teams, not to provide athletes with extra benefits and to act in accordance with all NCAA bylaws.

Please check the box below to show that you have read and understand the following statement:

- I understand that the quotes included in the story were also fictitious and were included for research purposes only. I understand that all members of the UA Athletics Department are committed to winning in a manner that abides by all NCAA rules.

APPENDIX D: IRB APPROVAL

December 20, 2013

Office for Research
Institutional Review Board for the
Protection of Human Subjects



Natalie Brown
College of Communication & Information Sciences
The University of Alabama
Box 870152

Re: IRB # 13-OR-394, "The Convergence of Situational Crisis Communication Theory and Social Media: Empirically Testing the Effectiveness of Sports Fan-Enacted Crisis Communication"

Dear Ms. Brown:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. You have also been granted the requested waiver of informed consent. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your application will expire on December 19, 2014. If your research will continue beyond this date, please complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, please complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, please complete the Request for Study Closure form.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,



358 Rose Administration Building
Box 870127
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487-0127
(205) 348-8461
FAX (205) 348-7189
TOLL FREE (877) 820-3066

Office for Research Compliance
The University of Alabama

IRB Project #:

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS
REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

DEC 06 2013 12:05

I. Identifying information

| | | | |
|-------------|--|---------------------|--------------------|
| | Principal Investigator | Second Investigator | Third Investigator |
| Names: | Natalie Brown | | |
| Department: | Communication and Information Sciences | | |
| College: | Communication and Information Sciences | | |
| University: | The University of Alabama | | |
| Address: | 901 University Blvd. | | |
| Telephone: | (256) 872-7898 | | |
| FAX: | (205) 348-2401 | | |
| E-mail: | nbrown25@crimson.ua.edu | | |

Title of Research Project: THE CONVERGENCE OF SITUATIONAL CRISIS COMMUNICATION THEORY AND SOCIAL MEDIA: EMPIRICALLY TESTING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SPORTS FAN-ENACTED CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Date Submitted: 11/4/2013
Funding Source: n/a

| | | | | | |
|--|---|-----------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Type of Proposal | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New | <input type="checkbox"/> Revision | <input type="checkbox"/> Renewal Please attach a renewal application | <input type="checkbox"/> Completed | <input type="checkbox"/> Exempt |
| Please attach a continuing review of studies form | | | | | |
| Please enter the original IRB # at the top of the page | | | | | |

UA faculty or staff member signature: _____

II. NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION (to be completed by IRB):

Type of Review: _____ Full board Expedited

IRB Action:

| | |
|---|-------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rejected | Date: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tabled Pending Revisions | Date: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Approved Pending Revisions | Date: _____ |

Approved-this proposal complies with University and federal regulations for the protection of human subjects.

Approval is effective until the following date: 12-19-14

| | | |
|-----------------|---|------------------|
| Items approved: | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Research protocol | (dated 12-20-13) |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Informed consent | (dated 12-20-13) |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Recruitment materials | (dated 12-20-13) |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Other | (dated _____) |

Approval signature _____ Date 12/20/2013