

THE CRISIS RESPONSE STRATEGIES OF SAN FRANCISCO
49ERS DURING THE NATIONAL ANTHEM CRISIS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: Field Notes	4
Chapter Three: Evaluation	12
Chapter Four: Work Product.....	15
Chapter Five: Analysis.....	18
Reference	51
Appendix A: Original Project Proposal	55
Appendix B: Coding Scheme.....	79
Appendix C: Textual Analysis Data	80

Chapter One: Introduction

As a graduate student studying strategic communications, my emphasis area is public relations. Upon graduation, I plan to practice communications and crisis management in the professional sports industry. Organizations and individuals in the sports industry are constantly battling various types of crisis situations. In the event of a crisis, public relations practitioners act as crisis managers on behalf of their client. Therefore, I am particularly interested in crisis communication.

My final research project is a combination of my interests and professional goal and will be dedicated to public relations strategies used by a professional sports organization during a crisis. The coursework that I have taken thus far has been insightful and educational. What I have learned from the following courses is especially helpful in preparing me for the final project.

The Mass Media Seminar class taught me well the fundamentals of how to conduct research and how to write a literature review. These are critically important skills for my final research project. Dr. Rodgers showed me how to effectively summarize and organize each academic literature in a way that not only pertains to my research goal but also logical to the writing process. I also realized the importance of paraphrasing other people's work in my own words and summarizing them accordingly to my research needs as I went through a lot of content that were based on empirical findings.

The class taught by Professor Stemmler taught me a great deal about the profession of public relations. Public relations exist as the way organizations, companies, and individuals communicate with the media as well as with the public. It is the job of public relations practitioners to effectively communicate with their targeted audiences through various media outlets to build and maintain a

positive brand image and a strong relationship with the audiences. The in-class assignments gave me the opportunity to work in small groups to practice different aspects of public relations such as conducting research, writing press releases, using written tactics, planning events, and creating social media content. I had the pleasure of working for the Health Communication Research Center (HCRC) as part of my graduate studies for the class. I was able to apply what I had learned from the lectures to real-world situations. I wrote two press releases for HCRC that were published by newspapers in parts of rural Missouri.

The class with Dr. Volz focusing on qualitative research methods is vital to my project. The methodologies that my research project will employ are textual analysis and case study. Dr. Volz provided me with readings that described the fundamental concepts of each method and their applications. She required me to jot down notes and/or any important quotes from the readings. The notes proved to be especially useful as I composed my methodology section of this proposal. In addition, I had opportunities to practice each method that helped me finally choose the method(s) that is most appropriate for my research topic.

Finally, Dr. Frisby's Sports and Entertainment Promotions class gave me the chance to work for a sports organization as a real client, Mizzou Athletics. The project required me to use everything that I have learned previously from other classes as well as use my background in business to come up with a comprehensive plan to promote the rebranding of Mizzou Athletics. Dr. Frisby is extremely knowledgeable and enthusiastic about topics in public relations and strategic communication and she is always eager to help and inspire her students.

To be an effective crisis communicator and manager in the professional sports industry will not be easy, as there will be unexpected difficulties and challenges. The completion of my research project, along with the coursework that I have had, however, will lead me to the right direction. I

now have a solid knowledge about the profession and know what strategies to use under different circumstances. I have also practiced and obtained such skills as leadership, teamwork and communication that will help me solve problems and make decisions in the real world. Equally importantly, the coursework and the professors have helped me build sufficient confidence for me to achieve my professional goals.

Chapter Two: Field Notes

Week 1: January 23, 2017 – January 28, 2017

After attending the orientation for interns on January 18, my internship officially started during the week of January 23. For the time being, my scheduled work hours are 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. I am working with the Stewardship and Events team for the Tigers Scholarship Fund. I spoke with my supervisor and I will most likely intern for marketing and/or strategic communications of athletics on Fridays so that I can gain experience in different areas of the sports industry. I spent my first day learning about the office phone system and learning to work the donor database. I also spent the afternoon shadowing one of the assistant directors of development to observe how they speak to donors over the phone. By the end of the day, I could work the database freely and took a donation payment over the phone. During the rest of my shifts last week, I oversaw the incoming calls and took care of donor paper work for the Tigers Scholarship Fund. Mizzou Athletics has some events coming up that could use interns for help; I signed up to work for a fundraising basketball game on Saturday, Feb. 4 and three Mizzou Men's Basketball games. I'm looking forward to assisting and working during the games.

Week 2: January 30, 2017 – February 4, 2017

We spent this week preparing invoices to send to donors of the Tigers Scholarship Fund (TSF) for 2017. I was amazed at the number of the total donors who contribute to the Tigers Scholarship Fund as well as other areas of athletics. My supervisor had sent out a list of events to the interns at the end of last week for us to sign up to work, I signed up for multiple basketball games throughout this month and my first game was the one on Saturday, February 4. On Thursday, I was given a list of the names of donors who TSF have invited to sit in the TSF suites. I had to use the databases in the office to complete a brief profile for each donor. I worked extra hours on

Friday and during my shift I was given a parking pass along with an all-access pass for interns at the game. The game was our annual Rally for Rhyon game in support for those affected by pediatric cancer. My main responsibilities were to arrive early to help with set up of marketing materials in the suites, manage the suites throughout the game, and socialize with the donors to ensure they have a pleasant experience. On game day, everything went seamlessly. The head intern showed me the ropes with set up; as donors began to arrive to the suites I introduced myself to each of them and had brief conversations. Everyone arrived in high spirits ready to cheer on the Tigers despite the team's losing record this season. The atmosphere was great and we ended up winning! I was told at the end that I did a great job. This experience further validated for me that I am on the right path career wise and I can truly say that I enjoyed every minute of work.

Research wise, to be perfectly honest, time has proven to be a challenge. Between my GA position at the International Center, my time spent at Athletics, and assisting at events, I am so exhausted by the end of each day that I sometimes can't even stay awake. I am trying to finalize my interview questions based on Dr. Frisby's review and edits of my first draft and I intend to start working to develop codes for the textual analysis of my research.

I am also planning on attending the NFL PR Meet & Greet in Indianapolis at the end of this month (February 28, 2017). Therefore, I am also working to perfect my resume before that event. This will be a great opportunity for me professionally. In addition, I hope to meet some communications professionals who will allow me to interview them for my research.

Week 3: February 6, 2017 – February 11, 2017

This was a relatively slow week in the office, however, the call volume in our office increased significantly as donors began to receive the invoices we sent out last week. The increase in calls kept me busy during my shifts and finally gave me the opportunity to learn to use our

database and how and where to look for answers. On Saturday, I worked the Mizzou basketball game against Vanderbilt. My responsibilities were like those from the game last week. In addition, the Tigers Scholarship Fund organized a reception before the game and invited some donors to attend. I assisted with the set up for the reception and was responsible to check in guests as they arrived. As I work these games I can meet different people on a weekly basis, I find that I enjoy networking and take part in event planning. This week I also officially registered for the NFL PR Meet & Greet at the end of the month. I plan to finish perfecting my resume by the end of this week and create business cards for myself to prepare for the event.

Week 4: February 13, 2017 – February 18, 2017

Again, this week was relatively slow in the office. We are in the process of preparing parking requests for donors for the upcoming football season. I am now proficient in answering all types of inquiries from donors' incoming calls. During my shifts this week I had a few opportunities to deliver tickets to donors in person. It was a nice break from being stuck inside all day and I realized I really enjoy the face-to-face interactions and the chances to network. To get ready for the NFL PR Meet & Greet coming up on February 28, I finished creating my calling card and my resume is almost ready to print pending on minor revisions. My plan is to attach a calling card to each resume before handing them out to potential employers. I also found the time and the focus needed to work on research this week. I organized the textual analysis data (49ers Facebook posts) in chronological order and I am in the process of developing the coding for analysis. The new interview questions based on past revisions are being worked on as well.

Week 5: February 20, 2017 – February 25, 2017

I must say this week was the slowest week at the office since my internship started. We are currently in the process of preparing parking requests for next football season therefore the

workload for interns was relatively light. I continued to take phone calls from donors and try to help them to the best of my abilities. I worked with another intern to research ideas on how to promote the clear bag policy via social media. We combed through many social media accounts for other schools and came up with a list of ideas for Mizzou Athletics. I used some of my free time at work to finalize my resume for the NFL PR event that will be taking place tomorrow.

Week 6: February 27, 2017 – March 4, 2017

This week I missed two days of work due to the NFL networking event in Indianapolis on Tuesday. At the event, I spoke with representatives in communications from 10+ teams. I did my best to try to make a lasting impression with each person that I spoke to. I walked away from the event feeling good and I know there is a lot of competition out there therefore I must work harder in the future. Athletics was hectic on Friday because of the softball game that was to be played at the new softball stadium. I spoke with many people on the phone who called in with questions about tickets and premium seating. In addition, everyone was running around getting last-minute decorations, promotional materials, and other items together in preparation for the evening game. I went to Walmart two different times picking up items the event staff needed.

Week 7: March 6, 2017 – March 11, 2017

This week was rather uneventful in the office. Besides the usual times spent on answering phone calls, I spent a lot of time organizing donor files that were built up over time into alphabetical orders and then filing them accordingly. In the beginning of the week I received an email from the media relations manager of the Carolina Panthers stating that he enjoyed meeting me at the NFL event and wanted to me to have his contact information. The email gave me a lot of confidence and motivation to keep pursuing a position within the sports industry. I wrote a cover letter and signed up with teamworkonline.com so that I can start applying for jobs in the industry.

I applied for internship positions with the teams I spoken with, sent follow-up emails to representatives who I met at the NFL event, and searched and applied for other positions that I am qualified for.

Week 8: March 13, 2017 – March 18, 2017

This week I have continued to apply for post-graduate internships and job opportunities. On Wednesday, Tiger Scholarship Fund held a donors' summit/reception at a country club in St. Louis. Myself and two other interns drove to St. Louis with our supervisor to work the event. Prior to the reception, I assisted with selling raffle tickets. During the reception, Coach Odom spoke, the coach and the donors were very optimistic and excited about the upcoming football season. And following the news about Cuonzo Martin coming to Mizzou as head coach for basketball, I could tell there were a lot of enthusiasm in the room. TSF also held an auction during the reception, my job was to get each auction winner's payment information as each item was actioned off. That was a long day for me as we did not get back to Columbia until 11 p.m. but I enjoyed working the event. On Friday, I was tasked with driving a loaner car back to St. Louis and picking up another car from the dealership. It was nice to be doing something different and getting to be out of the office.

Week 9: March 20, 2017 – March 25, 2017

This has been an exciting week at Mizzou Athletics. On Monday Mizzou Athletics held a press conference at Mizzou Arena officially introducing and announcing Cuonzo Martin as the Men's Basketball coach. I assisted with the set up for the press conference as well as the reception for Coach Martin and the Tigers Scholarship Fund donors. It's clear that everyone is very excited for the new era of Mizzou basketball. On Tuesday, I went to Nissan and picked up the car prepared for Coach Martin to drive. The rest of the week was spent preparing for football parking renewal

forms. Upon the completion of preparing 1,200 outgoing parking renewals, we prepared for invitations for the Blue Jean Ball. The most exciting day was Friday, we were in the middle of stuffing invitations and twenty minutes before the end of day, news came that Michael Porter Jr. had made the decision to commit to Mizzou. Couple members of our staff were running through the office and Athletic Director Jim Sterk was playing music from his office to celebrate.

I have been spending a lot of my time applying for post-graduate internships and jobs. The internships in the NFL are highly competitive. Most of the positions average about 300 applicants per each. An internship that I applied for with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers had 730 applicants. I am still trying to be positive and just keep trying. I had a conversation with my supervisor, Lorraine Rodriguez, about my future career. I know there won't be an open position in Development in the coming months but Lorraine told me she would speak to the other departments to see if there are any other positions open. I would love to be able to obtain a position in Mizzou Athletics. I have always been a Tigers fan and I cannot wait to see the future of Tigers basketball. As far as my project, as you all know I will be changing one of my methodologies. I am feeling good about the decision because I no longer have to depend on others for answers. It helps because I am responsible for what happens from here.

Week 10: March 27, 2017 – April 1, 2017

Week 11: April 3, 2017 – April 8, 2017

During spring break the new donor guidebooks for 2017-18 finally arrived so we started the massive task of preparing the donor mail each consisting of TSF renewal form, football parking renewal form, and guidebook. Only myself and one other intern worked during spring break and by the time the break was over and the other interns returned, everyone pitched in to help. By Friday we finished half of the total mailers needed and we will most likely be working on the rest this week. I have also been trying to dedicate a lot of time towards my research because I feel

behind with the limited free time I have had this semester. Both jobs are keeping me very busy especially since we have several special events on schedule for April in Athletics.

Week 12: April 10, 2017 – April 15, 2017

We finally finished up all the donor mail from the previous two week. By Wednesday they were picked up by campus mail and ready to be sent out. The interns returned to assisting with administrative duties around the office. Mizzou Athletics is in the middle of doing a Thank-a-Thon where student athletes call a list of randomly selected donors and thank them for their support. On Thursday, I assisted with the Thank-a-Thon with the Mizzou Women's Basketball team. We provided each player with a call list and a cellular phone. Players called their respective donors to show their appreciation. From the conversations that I heard while there, I could tell that the donors really appreciated hearing from the student athletes and that they truly care and support Mizzou Athletics. On Saturday, the morning of Mizzou Football's spring game, I arrived at the Columns Club of Memorial Stadium ready to work. In addition to the football game, we were hosting the Former Football Player Reunion that was to run from mid-day to the end of the football game. According to my supervisors, this is a big event where over 200 past football players have registered to attend and counting their family and friends, we were expecting over 800 people to be in attendance. My main responsibility was to check in the guests as they arrive, give each former player a wristband and a t-shirt. Ms. Vonda from football operations office checked in guests manually while I checked in guests on my phone using Eventbrite. My supervisor was impressed with the initiative that I took because the original plan was to have both Ms. Vonda and I at the check in table but as more people started to arrive that proved to be a flawed plan. So, I quickly went to the other side of the table and began another check-in line. Once everyone was checked in they were free to visit and watch the game from the Columns Club. The plan was to try to gather

everyone towards the end of half time and take them down to the field where they would be recognized. This was a little chaotic and difficult because by the time came, many people were having their own conversations and spread out everywhere. In the end, we managed to get everyone down to the field in a timely fashion. Although it turned out to be an exhausting day, I thoroughly enjoyed working the event, meeting different people, learning the ins and outs behind event planning for such occasions, and bonding with my coworkers through teamwork.

Week 13: April 17, 2017 – April 22, 2017

I continued to help donors this week by answering incoming calls regarding account renewals and premium seating and parking. We have seen an increase in volume of calls since the mailer that contained football parking information went out last week. In addition, I also assisted with Mizzou Thank-a-Thon with the gymnastics team. We held two Thank-a-Thon sessions to accommodate the swim and diving team. No one was available to work for one of the sessions so I volunteered to help. I oversaw the session on Tuesday after their practice. The student athletes spoke to the donors with enthusiasm and the donors were all appreciative to be receiving personalized calls from the student athletes.

Week 14: April 24, 2017 – April 29, 2017

This is my last week at my internship. I assisted with the Thank-a-Thon with the Mizzou Football team. There were more work and organization required due to the size of the football team. But all the players were very easy to work with and the graduate assistants for Mizzou football really helped us out. Otherwise, the end of the semester is a slow time for the development office in terms of events, so it has been business as usual in the office.

Chapter Three: Evaluation

My internship at Mizzou Athletics was a great working and learning experience that I enjoyed very much. I hope to have a professional career working in the sports industry doing communications, marketing, or event planning. The internship in Development at Mizzou Athletics allowed me the opportunity to gain firsthand experiences in these areas.

As an intern, one of my major responsibilities is to assist with day-to-day donor relations for Tigers Scholarship Fund, money donated to Mizzou for our student athletes. This means spending a lot of my time in the office answering phone calls from donors with questions regarding their accounts, donor statuses, premium seating and parking, and membership renewals. I enjoyed this aspect of the job for the most part. As a long-time fan of the Mizzou Tigers, it was great to see and experience donor support on a daily basis. At times though, this aspect of my job was challenging too. As the money-generating sports like football and men's basketball go through their rebuilding years, it is inevitable that some donors will express feelings of frustration. During those times, I maintained composure, remained understanding, and responded in a professional manner.

Approximately two interns are needed at each men's basketball game. The main duties for interns at basketball games are to set up Tiger Row and suites with stat sheet for both teams, greet donors as they arrive to suites, make sure donors' needs are being met during the game, and keep donors interested and engaged. There are three designated suites that belong to TSF inside Mizzou Arena. Our department invite randomly selected donors to watch the game from one of our suites. Every donor that I have encountered at games have always been very excited and grateful for the invite. The atmosphere inside each suite was always positive, passionate, and infectious.

One of Development's responsibilities is to setup and be responsible for the operation of various special events for Mizzou Athletics throughout the year. During my time as intern, I had the opportunity to work at several donor receptions, the press conference for the introduction of Coach Cuonzo Martin, and the former football players reunion. My supervisor, Lorraine Rodriguez, has been the Assistant Director of Development for Special Events at Mizzou Athletics for the past five years. Prior to coming to Mizzou, she had extensive experience in managing annual fund, donor relations, and special events for a Division II institution. Lorraine is organized and clear with her expectations of us. She is very knowledgeable about event planning and is good at solving problems quickly and creatively as they arise. It was an honor learning the ins and outs of running such events from someone with so much knowledge and experience.

During mid-semester, I was given the task of working with another intern to come up with a marketing proposal for implementing the Clear Bag Policy at Memorial Stadium for the upcoming football season. This project required me to put my research skills to work and use my marketing background from my undergraduate years. I enjoyed the process very much and hope to see the ideas outline in our proposal implemented in the near future.

This semester I had an unforgettable moment at work that will forever stay with me. On the afternoon of March 24, at 4:10 p.m., Michael Porter Jr., the number one basketball recruit in the country, announced his commitment to Mizzou via Twitter. Everyone in our office was so excited, some were running the halls out of joy. Athletic Director Jim Sterk played music from his office to celebrate.

Although I truly enjoyed every aspect of this internship position, I do wish that I would have gotten the opportunity to learn more about crisis communication. Mizzou Athletics has dealt with their share of crises in recent times. For example, the allegations from a former athletics tutor

claiming she was groomed by her superiors to commit academic dishonesty and the end of Kim Anderson's time at Mizzou. I would love to have had the chance to witness and learn from the behind-the-scenes work that goes into the decision-making process to handling these situations. Similarly, the hiring of Coach Cuonzo Martin and the signing of Michael Porter are events that I also would have enjoyed learning first hand from the strategic communications professionals at Mizzou Athletics. With that said, my work with the Tigers Scholarship Fund and the interaction with its donors have taught me valuable networking skills. By working at games and special events I discovered a newfound interest in event planning. Through my internship I also realized that I thrive in situations where passion and pressure coexist. The work environment at Mizzou Athletics reaffirmed for me that a career in the sports industry is truly what my heart is after.

Chapter Four: Work Product

Prompt

Come up with a marketing proposal for the implementation of the Clear Bag Policy at Memorial Stadium starting 2017-18 football season. Brainstorm Mizzou-tailored ideas that include:

- What our e-mail to season ticket holders should look like
- Some social media ideas
- Should we do some sort of giveaway?
- Do we work with local stores to promote compliant-size bags?

Proposal

Sample email to season ticket holders

Dear season ticket holder,

As we prepare for another exciting season of Mizzou Tigers Football, we wanted to inform you of Mizzou's implementation of the Clear Bag Policy on game days at Memorial Stadium starting the 2017-18 season.

The Clear Bag Policy was first employed by the National Football League as an extended effort for fan security on game days. Mizzou Athletics consider your safety as top priority. Therefore, starting Sept. 2, 2017, only bags that meet the following guidelines will be allowed into Memorial Stadium:

- Bags that are clear plastic, vinyl or PVC and do not exceed 12" x 6" x 12"
- One-gallon clear plastic freezer bags (Ziploc or similar)
- Small clutch bags, with or without a handle or strap, that do not exceed 4.5" x 6.5"

Fans are still allowed to bring cameras and binoculars in their approved bags.

For more information on the Clear Bag Policy and what is allowed inside the stadium, please visit <http://www.mutigers.com/sports/2017/2/22/clear-bag-policy.aspx>

Thank you and Go Tigers!

Mizzou Athletics

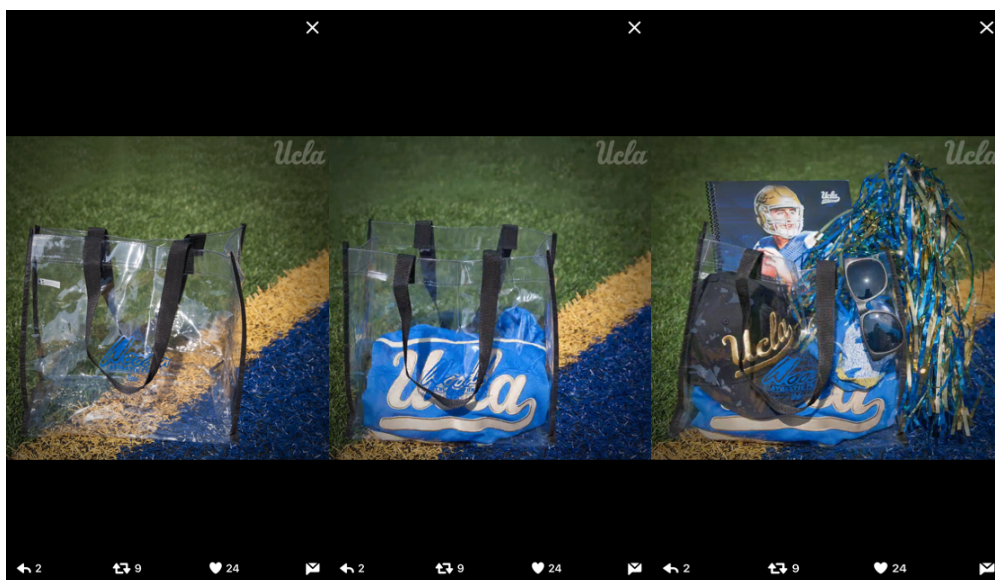
Giveaways

Yes, we think giveaways will be a great way to promote the Clear Bag Policy. Giveaway ideas are as follows:

- First 500 fans at the home opener game will receive a clear bag (within guidelines) with the Mizzou Tigers logo on it with Tigers accessories inside (if budget allows)
- Stock the suites with appropriate number of bags based on seats in the suites
- Donors of a certain level receive clear bags priors to the start of the football season
- To reach the student population, give away clear bags when students pick up their season tickets
- Giveaway clear bags at the spring game, to spread the word about the clear bag policy

Social Media Ideas

- The use of hashtags on social media
 - #MizzouGoesClear; #clearbagpolicy; #StayClear; #SeeThruSafety
- Creating a GIF that showcases the appropriate contents for gamedays, with Tigers logo



- Posts and tweets about the clear bag policy across all Mizzou Athletics-related accounts
 - Involve coaches and athletes personal accounts
- Promote any giveaways and local events that we hold to spread word about the clear bag policy
- Create a page for Clear Bag Q & A on Mizzou Athletics website, then promote the page across social media platforms

Local Partners

We think it would be beneficial to involve local stores with a lot of foot traffic to promote the Clear Bag Policy:

- Hyvee
- Lucky's
- Walmart
- Rally House
- Tiger Spirit

Chapter Five: Analysis

As part of strategic communication, the purpose of public relations is to manage information dissemination as well as maintain a mutually beneficial relationship between individuals and/or organizations and their external publics. Public relations practitioners are concerned with assisting their clients by maintaining a positive image in the public eye; they play a vital role in assisting organizations and/or public figures spread their intended messages. After conducting extensive interviews with many seasoned public relations practitioners, Reber and Cameron (2003) found that the public relations industry is an industry where the practitioners' main objective is bridge building between their client(s) and its targeted audience.

Crisis communication has become an important area of research within public relations literature. During a crisis, public relations practitioners take on the role as crisis managers who aim to improve an organization's reputation or image by first identifying the issue through primary or secondary research and then selecting the appropriate communication tactics to resolve the problem (Clark, 2000). Public relations at its finest can foster better relationships between the organizations and their public, greater organizational effectiveness, stronger ethics and higher profits. The need for public relations, especially in cases of public crises, exists across all industries. And speaking of public crises, an industry that seems to be prone to controversies and disorder is the sports industry.

Over the years, the sports industry has continued its growth and has evolved into a major driving force in people's lives. There are countless magazines dedicated to each individual sport, television networks committed to reporting everything sports related, and fans follow their favorite athletes and sports organizations on various social media platforms. The sports industry has endured its share of crises over time, both on an individual level and organizational level: Kobe

Bryant sexual assault allegations in 2003, Duke University's Lacrosse team rape scandal in 2006, Floyd Landis doping scandal during 2006 Tour de France, Tiger Woods's marriage crumbled in 2009 due to the revelation of his over 120 affairs, and the Jerry Sandusky sexual assault scandal at Penn State in 2011, just to name a few. The root causes for these crises were the player's or the organizations clear wrongdoings. However, in late August 2016, the sports industry and the San Francisco 49ers saw a different type of crisis, one that split public opinion and makes one wonder if the person in the center of everything is in the wrong.

There are a myriad of theories and strategies that can be implemented by public relations practitioners during crisis management. One theory, the interest of this research, is the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). This research seeks to use the SCCT as the underlying theoretical framework, and addresses the research question of what crisis response strategies were used and how the public relations practitioners for the San Francisco 49ers handled the National Anthem crisis.

The Crisis: National Anthem Protest

The American ritual for the national anthem has always been to stand and place one's right hand over his or her heart while facing the American flag during the national anthem, The Star-Spangled Banner. The gesture is a representation of respect for America, its history, and pride in being an American. However, the national anthem has also served as a vessel for patriotism and protest. Willingham (2016) claims that because sporting events are often closely tied to the rhetoric of American pride, the national anthem presents a particularly fraught dynamic for athletes. Therefore, when a highly visible opinion clashes with a highly visible symbol, it stirs up controversy and starts heated public debates (Willingham, 2016).

On August 26, 2016, during a NFL preseason football game between the Green Bay Packers and the San Francisco 49ers, a reporter for NFL.com noticed that while everyone else was standing for the singing of the national anthem, San Francisco 49ers backup quarterback Colin Kaepernick was sitting down on the sidelines. When Colin Kaepernick was asked why he did not stand with his teammates during the national anthem, he was ready with an answer: “I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color. There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder” (Leitch & Keith, 2016, p. 13). Kaepernick was referring to the series of cases of police brutality against African Americans in the United States, such as the deaths of Michael Brown, Sandra Bland, Alton Sterling, Tamir Rice, Eric Garner, and the list goes on and on. As these innocent lives fell victim to the justice system, the members of the police who committed the brutal acts have gone unscathed and unpunished.

Social media exploded as news of Colin Kaepernick’s national anthem protest became public. People expressed their opinions on the matter through different social media platforms. The court of public opinion seemed to be split on either end of the spectrum. Some supported Kaepernick and his cause while others became angry and highly offended by his seemingly unpatriotic actions. A video of a 49ers fan setting fire to Kaepernick’s jersey went viral in a matter of minutes. Kaepernick began to receive death threats if he continued his protest to the national anthem. He remained unwavered and unfazed in his efforts to bring awareness to this important social issue. He continued to sit out of the national anthem even as NFL regular season started in September. His teammates and other players around the league have joined him in protest by taking a knee on the field or standing with a fist in air during the national anthem. President Obama has praised Kaepernick for taking a stand for his beliefs. On the other hand, there are athletes,

managers, sports analysts, and politicians who publicly criticized Kaepernick's actions. Some fans of the San Francisco 49ers have threatened to stop supporting the football team if the executives of the organization continue to allow Kaepernick and company to protest from the sidelines.

The National Basketball Association (NBA) has an unequivocal rule about the national anthem: "Players, coaches and trainers are to stand and line up in a dignified posture along the sidelines or on the foul line during the playing of the National Anthem" (Official Rules of the NBA, p. 60). The San Francisco 49ers managers have their hands tied because, unlike the NBA, NFL has no official rules to impose on its players about the national anthem. Roger Goodell, NFL commissioner, released a statement saying the league merely encourages players to be respectful during the singing of the national anthem. Those sympathetic to Kaepernick's cause make the argument that Kaepernick is simply exercising his First Amendment rights as an American citizen. Therefore, he cannot be forced by management to stand during the national anthem.

Situational Crisis Communication Theory

A crisis can be defined as an unexpected or unforeseen event that poses as a threat to interrupt an organization's operations, negatively impact its finances, and damage organizational reputation in the public eye. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory, originally posited by W. Timothy Coombs (2004), suggests how "a crisis might shape the selection of crisis response strategies and/or the effect of crisis response strategies on organizational reputation" (p. 269). Simply put, when dealing with a crisis, it is essential for managers to match strategic responses to the level of crisis responsibility and reputational threat posed by that crisis. The theory provides framework for understanding how organizations can use crisis communication to protect reputational assets. Additionally, it is an essential tool used by public relations professionals to investigate which strategies to apply depending on specific types of crisis situations.

One cannot gain a full understanding of the SCCT without knowing the Attribution Theory. Attribution Theory suggests that people tends to search for causes of events especially when they are negative and unexpected (Coombs, 2007). The theory lays the groundwork for the SCCT by making connections between many of the variables found in SCCT. SCCT is an extension of the Attribution Theory by using the variables and building upon the theory to make predictions about the level of reputational threat a crisis poses to an organization. The variables also allow management to gain further insight to a crisis, determine level of reputational threat, identify the type of crisis, and subsequently decide the appropriate crisis response strategies to use to protect an organization's existing reputational capital. According to Coombs (2007), an organization's reputational threat is dependent on three factors: 1). Initial crisis responsibility, how much the organization is to blame for the crisis; 2). Crisis history, whether similar crisis have occurred in organization's past; and 3). Prior relational reputation, how an organization have treated stakeholders under other circumstances.

Based on SCCT research, Coombs identifies three types of crisis clusters that serve to guide crisis managers: victim, accidental and preventable or intentional. According to Coombs (2004), the victim cluster contains situations in which organizations are seen as the victim of the crisis due to external factors beyond their control, therefore this cluster contains very weak attributions of crisis responsibility; the accidental cluster consists of crises related to technical errors and/or breakdowns where organizations claim moderate responsibility or minimal attributions of crisis responsibility; finally, the preventable or intentional cluster includes crises caused by intentional human errors and organizational misdeeds. The events are considered purposeful, hence very strong attributions of crisis responsibility. These three categories of crises serve as frames to the

public's interpretation of each crisis. Coombs (2007) provides a summarization of crisis types by crisis clusters and its correlations to crisis responsibility and reputational threat (p. 168):

Victim cluster: In these crisis types, the organization is also a victim of the crisis.

Natural disaster: Acts of nature damage an organization such as an earthquake.

Rumor: False and damaging information about an organization is being circulated.

Workplace violence: Current or former employee attacks current employees onsite.

Product tampering/Malevolence: External agent causes damage to an organization.

Accidental cluster: In these crisis types, the organizational actions leading to the crisis were unintentional.

Challenges: Stakeholders claim an organization is operating in an inappropriate manner.

Technical-error accidents: A technology or equipment failure causes an industrial accident.

Technical-error product harm: A technology or equipment failure causes a product to be recalled.

Preventable cluster: In these crisis types, the organization knowingly placed people at risk, took inappropriate actions or violated a law/regulation.

Human-error accidents: Human error causes an industrial accident.

Human-error product harm: Human error causes a product to be recalled.

Organizational misdeed with no injuries: Stakeholders are deceived without injury.

Organizational misdeed management misconduct: Laws or regulations are violated by management.

Organizational misdeed with injuries: Stakeholders are placed at risk by management and injuries occur.

SCCT's crisis response strategies

When an organization is embroiled in public turmoil, it must assume accountability and take responsibility for its actions to some degree to appease the public. It is essential for crisis managers to decide suitable response strategies because they are considered as the organization's answer to the crisis. Coombs have spent extensive time over the years conducting research in the field of crisis communication. His earlier research found that there are three objectives for crisis

response strategies in reputation protection: to shape recognition of the crisis at hand, to change perception of the organization in crisis, and to reduce the negative impact caused by the crisis (Coombs, 1995). The crisis response strategies found in the SCCT are shaped by an organization's perceived acceptance or responsibility for a crisis.

SCCT first divide its list of crisis response strategies into primary and secondary categories. Based on previous research, primary crisis response strategies are further broken down into three groups: deny, diminish, and rebuild (Coombs, 2006). Under the primary crisis response strategies umbrella, deny strategies include attack the accuser, denial, and scapegoat. In circumstances where deny strategies are employed, organizations and its crisis managers attempt to place the blame on other party or parties because they do not accept any responsibility for the crisis. Therefore, deny strategies are designed to eliminate all connections between the organization and the crisis. The underlying rationale behind this type of response strategy is that if people are unable to make the association for organizational involvement in a crisis, then that organization will not suffer any reputational damage. Diminish strategies consist of excuse and justification. Here, crisis managers take some responsibility for the crisis but still attempt to use excuses to minimize responsibility on an organization's behalf or use justification to lessen apparent damage already caused by a crisis. Compensation and apology are strategies found under rebuild crisis response strategies. Crisis managers accept full responsibility for a crisis, become more accommodating, and show greater concern for the victim(s) to quickly pacify the situation and improve organizational reputation. The SCCT posits that the most appropriate response to intentional crisis is rebuild, followed by diminish response; accidental crisis calls for diminish response first followed by rebuild; and victim crisis uses deny as a first response followed by diminish as second response (Sisco, 2012).

Secondary crisis response strategies consist of bolstering strategies such as reminder and ingratiation, where it is the goal for crisis management to remind the public the positive works the organization has done in the past. Victimage is third and final strategy found under bolstering strategies in which crisis managers tries to remind others that the company is also a victim to the crisis.

Crisis response strategy guidelines

Coombs further proposed an eight-part model, which acts as a list of crisis response strategy guidelines for crisis managers. Sisco (2012) insists that based on Coombs's theory, managers should examine and evaluate each crisis based on factors outlined by the SCCT and crisis managers should then choose the appropriate corresponding strategy. The eight-part guidelines are as follows (Coombs, 2007, p. 173):

1. Informing and adjusting information alone can be enough when crises have minimal attributions of crisis responsibility (victim crises), no history of similar crises and a neutral or positive prior relationship reputation.
2. Victimage can be used as part of the response for workplace violence, product tampering, natural disasters and rumors.
3. Diminish crisis response strategies should be used for crises with minimal attributions of crisis responsibility (victim crises) coupled with a history of similar crises and/or negative prior relationship reputation.
4. Diminish crisis response strategies should be used for crises with low attributions of crisis responsibility (accident crises), which have no history of similar crises, and a neutral or positive prior relationship reputation.
5. Rebuild crisis response strategies should be used for crises with low attributions of crisis responsibility (accident crises), coupled with a history of similar crises and/or negative prior relationship reputation.
6. Rebuild crisis response strategies should be used for crises with strong attributions of crisis responsibility (preventable crises) regardless of crisis history or prior relationship reputation.
7. The deny posture crisis response strategies should be used for rumor and challenge crises, when possible.
8. Maintain consistency in crisis response strategies. Mixing deny crisis response strategies with either diminish or rebuild strategies will erode the effectiveness of the overall response.

Application of SCCT

Crisis communication research in the world of sports that uses the Situational Crisis Communication Theory as basis for research seems to be scarce. However, past studies exist from other industries. Howell and Miller (2010) conducted a study in which the crisis response strategies employed by Maple Leaf Foods Inc. during a large-scale product recall in 2008 were evaluated using the SCCT. Through textual analysis, the study analyzed online documents released by the company as well as available online media coverage regarding the case. The study defined the type of crisis faced by Maple Leaf Foods Inc. and identified response strategies the company used in dealing with the fiasco. In the case of the food product recall, the crisis was classified as under the accidental cluster due to technical errors by Maple Leaf Foods Inc. Although the cause of the crisis was not intentional on behalf of the company, the potential for reputational damage in this case was extremely high. The negative publicity would create tons of backlashes from the public and media. Maple Leaf Foods Inc. quickly accepted full blame and opted for rebuild strategies. Howell and Miller (2010) found that Maple Leaf Foods Inc. employed apology (a rebuild strategy) as its dominant strategy and used excuse (a diminish strategy) to deny any intentional harm, thereby reassert the crisis as an accident. According to Howell and Miller (2010), the reaction by Maple Leaf Foods Inc. is consistent with rules set out by Coombs's SCCT: "rebuild strategies should be used for crises with strong attributions of responsibility regardless of crisis history or prior relationship reputation" (Coombs, 2007, p. 173). By apologizing during the initial phase of the crisis and subsequently offering compensation to the victims, the company demonstrated great concern for the stakeholders, which eventually led to minimal reputational damage.

Sisco (2012) tested the applicability of each strategy as stated by the SCCT (deny, diminish, and rebuild) in situations where non-profit organizations were at the center of turmoil. The results

yielded from a 3 x 2 experimental design where participants were asked to read to an initial crisis response strategy from a fictitious non-profit organization in crisis. Participants were then asked to answer questions about how they view the organizational response, how much blame do they place on the organization, and how they perceive the organization in the future to measure the overall appropriateness and effectiveness of the strategies. The combined results of the study demonstrated that the SCCT is indeed an effective crisis management theory in public relations. The study was also able to prove that for non-profit organizations, the crisis response strategies suggested by Coombs did seem to reduce reputational damage and maintain positive image in the public eye (Sisco, 2012). The study concluded that in the real world, public relations practitioners working for non-profit organizations would find the SCCT to be a valuable tool to develop a crisis management plan before crises occur.

The SCCT has been applied to many crisis communications case studies in the modern business world. However, research for how the theory fits into crisis management in the sports industry is limited. This is unexpected considering its size, its dominant presence in people's lives, and the high frequency in which crises occur in sports. The research will hopefully produce findings that will be useful to crisis managers working in the sports industry.

Research Questions

RQ1: What were the strategies employed by the San Francisco 49ers in responding to the National Anthem crisis?

RQ2: To what degree did the response strategies selected by the San Francisco 49ers match the response strategies suggested by the Situational Crisis Communication Theory?

Methodology

Qualitative research methods, textual analysis and case study, will be the methodologies used for this research. Textual analysis is a research technique in which data are gathered to help researchers understand how other “human beings make sense of the world” (McKee, 2003, p. 1). Contemporary textual analysis has been used in a variety of ways by drawing from diverse interpretive strategies (Fursich, 2009). This approach focuses on the “underlying ideological and cultural assumptions of the text” (Fursich, 2009, p. 240) and allows the researcher to discover and understand the meaning behind the text in a broader cultural context. McKee (2001) asserts that context is imperative to textual analysis because it determines how texts will be interpreted.

McKee (2003) states that there are three levels of context one should consider when analyzing elements of a text: the rest of the text, the genre of the text, and the wider public context in which a text is circulated. The rest of the text means that researchers should ask what the element means in the context of a text. The genre of the text looks at the meaning of the element in a genre and how it will influence the audience’s overall understanding of the text. And finally, McKee emphasizes that it is easy to misunderstand a text if one does not examine the general context in which it circulates and its influence on the audience’s reading of the text. The more one understands about the context of a text, at all three levels, the more he or she will be able to make meaningful interpretations of a text.

Barrett (2005) employed textual analysis to examine the role of spokespersons and message control in the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) response to the anthrax crisis in 2001. Data for the study consisted of CDC press releases, CDC tele-briefing transcripts, and regional and national newspaper coverage published from October 2001 to February 2002 (Barrett, 2005). The study used press releases for background information and newspaper coverage to understand how the public received the CDC messages. Textual analysis was conducted on tele-

briefing transcripts and corresponding print media to “determine major communication themes, identify communication inconsistencies, and examine the role of CDC spokespersons during the crisis” (Barrett, 2005, p. 61).

Coding for the textual analysis for this research is decided by using the principles of directed content analysis. According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), directed content analysis is an approach used to “validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory” (p. 1281). Compared to the conventional approach, this method of coding takes a more structured approach by using key variables identified by the existing theory, the SCCT, as coding categories (see Appendix B). Data for the textual analysis are then analyzed using the coding scheme to classify major themes thereby identify what crisis response strategies are employed.

Data source for the proposed textual analysis will be relevant social media posts made on San Francisco 49ers Facebook page and official 49ers news releases at the start Keapernick’s boycott of the national anthem starting on August 26, 2016 to the end of the crisis, November 2016, as media ceased talks of the national anthem and Colin Kaepernick. The plan is to examine each post and identify the strategies employed by the football team based on key terms and/or phrases that reflect the characteristics of each crisis response strategy as outlined in the SCCT.

To assure the overall reliability and validity of this research, a second method, case study, will be used for data triangulation. Case study is a qualitative research method that has been cited by researchers as a method that is useful to study historical events (Baxter & Jack, 2008). By employing case study as a research methodology, Yin (2003) was able to explore her subject(s) through complex interventions, relationships, communities, or programs. Furthermore, a case study approach allows for the “deconstruction and the subsequent reconstruction of various phenomena” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544).

So how does one decide to use the case study approach for his or her research? Yin (2003) asserts that researchers should consider the case study method when (1) the aim of the study is to answer “how” and “why” questions; (2) the behaviors of those involved in the study are independent of the researcher therefore cannot be influenced or changed; (3) the subject is being studied because the researcher believes it to be relevant to the research topic at hand; or (4) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context. In addition, the case study method works to simplify complex issues and allows for great flexibility.

The purpose of this study is to examine how an organization responds to crisis in the public eye. And the National Anthem crisis experienced by the San Francisco 49ers is one that became an organizational crisis based on the behavior of a single player. Therefore, the case study analyses will come from organizational crises of similar nature.

The first scandal will be the 2014 incident involving Ray Rice and his then-fiancée Janay Palmer. A video surfaced online showing the Baltimore Ravens running back knocking out Palmer in a hotel elevator in Atlantic City. Players around the league and fans reacted with outrage. A closer examination of the crisis response strategies used by the Baltimore Ravens will reveal what tools were used during the process, how the response strategies affected the public perceptions of the team as well as its impact on the reputation of the Ravens organization.

Next, the study will look into the Michael Vick dog fighting scandal. News of Vick’s arrest for his role in a dog fighting ring shocked the NFL world. Following his arrest, the NFL took instant action against Vick. The Atlanta Falcons, Vick’s team at the time of his arrest, also responded immediately. This case study will be useful in identifying how the league and its executives used the appropriate strategies in handling this crisis to preserve and maintain their overall positive images despite the disgraceful actions of a single player.

The third and final case study will be conducted on the Kobe Bryant sexual assault scandal in 2003. The scandal hurt Bryant's image tremendously and it posed as a dilemma for the Los Angeles Lakers organization because Bryant is their star player. His actions both on and off the court have a direct impact on the Lakers. Considering the accusations against Kobe Bryant, how can the Lakers support their star player while protect the Lakers brand and maintain its favorable image in the public eye?

Conclusions will be drawn based on both methodologies upon the completion of the textual analysis and case studies. There will be drawbacks and limitations with both approaches; they will be discussed at the end of the research study.

Findings

Textual analysis

The textual analysis of sixteen 49ers Facebook posts and news releases produced the following findings:

- Eight of the dataset received code 8, meaning they showed qualities consistent with reminder, a bolstering strategy.
- Four of the dataset received code 9, meaning they showed qualities consistent with ingratiation, a bolstering strategy.
- Two of the dataset received code 5, meaning they showed qualities consistent with justification, a diminish strategy.
- Two of the dataset received code 6, meaning they showed qualities consistent with compensation, a rebuild strategy.

Half of the data suggests that the San Francisco 49ers used reminder as a crisis response strategy during the national anthem crisis. It is worthy to note though, these posts and news releases

made no mention of the crisis. This was done deliberately because, during that time, Kaepernick and the 49ers received plenty of backlash from the media and the public for Kaepernick not standing for the national anthem. The Facebook posts and news releases in this dataset served to remind the public the positive qualities of Kaepernick, from both a professional and personal standpoint.

Professionally, the 49ers highlighted Kaepernick's mental and physical toughness as a player by presenting him as someone who values his team as priority and is resilient through adversity. This is further supported by quotes from Kaepernick and his coaching staff such as: "I have to wait my time and work. I've been in this position before", "Kap has a history of being really good in this league", and "I'm always going to be prepared, always ready to put it on the line for this team". Additionally, the team also showcased Kaepernick's work with Camp Taylor, a charity for kids with heart diseases. Kaepernick has been involved with Camp Taylor since he was first drafted by the 49ers; he continues to not only donate to the charity but also spends quality time with the kids at the camp as if he is a kid himself.

Coombs (2007) defines ingratiation as a bolstering strategy where "crisis manager praises stakeholders and/or reminds them of past good works by the organization" (p. 170). A video posted on September 9, 2016 showing the 49ers safety Eric Reid, Kaepernick's teammate and supporter of his cause commending the football team's \$1 million donation towards improving social issues in America reminds the public of the good work by the organization. Three days later the team's Facebook page posted an image of members of the Santa Clara Police Department and Fire Department, thanking them for opening the locker room doors. The 49ers praise of the services of the police and fire departments is important because the main cause for Kaepernick to sit out of the national anthem is numerous acts of police brutality against African-Americans around the

country. The 49ers wanted to show people that their organization praises and appreciates the policemen and firemen.

The same night, 49ers also posted four images taken during the singing of the national anthem: three images showing the American flag in the center of the field, members of the military and players from the 49ers standing around the flag and one showing players in a team huddle. These imageries are powerful in that they highlight nationalism and promote unity. They also serve to praise the fans for their continued support for the team and more importantly, their respect for the American flag and the national anthem. At the start of the 2016-17 NFL season, many fans responded to Kaepernick's boycott of the national anthem by burning his jersey and vowing to stop attending 49ers games for as long as he is a member of the team. These images posted on September 13, 2016 tell a different story. This was done to also praise the fans and promote positivity at 49ers home games.

One Facebook post and one news release on 49ers official website from the start of the crisis employed justification, a diminish strategy, as initial crisis response. Justification is a crisis response strategy in which crisis manager tries to minimize the perceived damage caused by a crisis (Coombs, 2007). The team attempted to explain Kaepernick's reasoning for not standing during the national anthem to their audience. The news release denied "anti-America" sentiments from Kaepernick and stressed that the reasoning behind his actions is the intent to start social change. The show of support from others around the league further shows justification efforts.

Finally, statements from 49ers CEO Jed York regarding his \$1 million contribution towards the cause of improving racial and economic inequality and fostering communication between law enforcement and the public community can be classified as compensation, a rebuild strategy. The donation was made in the early stage of the crisis which helped the 49ers' public image and

reputation. Although the money is not compensation for victims, the purpose of the donation aligned with the ideals and goals offered by Kaepernick as explanation for not standing during the national anthem. The organization wanted to show that they are doing something good by giving money towards a cause that their community will benefit from.

Case study 1: Ray Rice

In February 2014, security footage surfaced showing Ray Rice, running back for the Baltimore Ravens, dragging his then-fiancé Janay Palmer’s limp unconscious body out of a hotel elevator by her feet. The National Football League issued a two-game suspension as damage control (Sweeney et al., 2016; Weathers et al., 2016). However, a second surveillance video was obtained and released by TMZ in September 2014 depicting exactly what transpired inside the elevator that rendered Palmer unconscious. The Ravens running back can be seen striking Palmer on two separate occasions while inside the elevator; his second blow struck so hard that Palmer passed out immediately, hitting the railing on the way down. The fallout from the second video stirred up uproar and brought about criticism from those within the league as well as the public. The following is a detailed timeline regarding the Ray Rice domestic violence incident:

February 15: Ray Rice and Janay Palmer are arrested and charged with simple assault following their physical altercation at the Revel Casino in Atlantic City (Fenton, 2014).

February 19: TMZ releases video showing Rice dragging the unconscious Palmer out of the elevator by her feet. Rice’s attorney makes the statement:

“We are confident that by the time all of the facts are in the open, the public will have a complete and true picture of what actually transpired, and we just ask the public remember what a high-character, good person Ray is, and that they reserve judgment until all the facts are out” (Gray, 2014, SB Nation).

The Baltimore Ravens also released an official statement: “We have seen the video, this is a serious matter and we are currently gathering more information” (Gray, 2014, SB Nation).

February 21: Heads of the Ravens organization came to Rice’s defense and maintain that he will remain to be part of the team. Raven’s head coach John Harbaugh defends Rice’s character, “There are a lot of facts and a process that has to be worked through in anything like this. There are a lot of question marks. But Ray’s character, you guys know his character. So you start with that” (Downing, 2014, Baltimore Ravens).

February 22: Ravens General Manager Ozzie Newsome comments, “I’m going to reserve all my comments until I’ve had a chance to talk to Ray. The whole video needs to be reviewed” (Kadar, 2014, SB Nation).

March 5: Baltimore Ravens (via Twitter) and Coach Harbaugh announce that Rice and Palmer will attend couples seminar. Coach Harbaugh states, “Ray has told me his side of it, and everything we’ve seen so far is very consistent with what he said” (Hensley, 2014, ESPN).

March 26: When asked if the league is aware of the Ray Rice incident and will there be discipline against Ray Rice, NFL commissioner Roger Goodell says, “The answer to that is yes. And I don’t know the second part. We will let the facts dictate that” (Mink, 2014, Baltimore Ravens).

March 27: Rice is indicted by a grand jury on third-degree assault charges. The Ravens releases a statement that read: “This is part of the due process for Ray. We know there is more to Ray Rice than this one incident” (ESPN.com news services, 2014).

March 28: Rice and Palmer get married.

May 1: Rice pleads not guilty on charges and applies for a pretrial intervention program. If accepted, he will avoid formal prosecution (Hensley, 2014).

May 20: Rice is accepted into the pretrial intervention program. His charges are to be dismissed upon his completion of the year-long program.

May 23: Rice and his now wife hold a press conference from the Ravens practice facility. The Ravens live-tweet the event. Ray Rice states, “I apologize for the situation my wife and I were in.” The Ravens also tweets, “Janay Rice says she deeply regrets the role she played the night of the incident” (Van Bibber, 2014, SB Nation).

July 27: The NFL announces a two-game suspension for Rice. Ozzie Newsome releases a statement: “While not having Ray for the first two games is significant to our team, we respect the league’s decision and believe it is fair” (@Ravens). Furthermore, Newsome maintains: “That night was not typical of the Ray Rice we know and respect” (@Ravens).

July 29: The NFL claims that they did not see the full video of the incident.

July 31: Rice tells reporters that his actions were inexcusable.

August 1: NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell defends his two-game suspension decision, “I take into account all of the information before I make a decision on what the discipline will be. In this case, there was no discipline by the criminal justice system. They put him in that diversionary program” (Graziano, 2014, ESPN).

August 28: Goodell and the NFL announce new domestic violence policy for the league. Goodell sent a lengthy letter to league’s team owners outlining a six-game suspension without pay for first-time offenders and lifetime ban for second offenders. Goodell also admits, “I take responsibility both for the decision and for ensuring that our actions in the future properly reflect our values. I didn’t get it right. Simply put, we have to do better. And we will” (McManus, 2014, ESPNW).

September 8: TMZ releases the video showing Rice striking Palmer. Hours later, Ravens announces Rice's contract had been terminated (@Ravens). The Baltimore Ravens also deletes tweet from Rice and Palmer's press conference. Roger Goodell announces Rice is suspended from the league indefinitely.

September 8: Coach Harbaugh says the Ravens did not see the video until released by TMZ (Sandritter, 2014).

September 9: The NFL says the video was never seen by anyone at the league until released by TMZ (Verderame, 2014). Roger Goodell also denies ever seeing the video, "We assumed that there was a video, we asked for video, we asked for anything that was pertinent, but we were never granted that opportunity" (Conner, 2014, SB Nation).

September 9: Ravens owner Steve Bisciotti issues an apology letter for their response to the incident:

"The decision to let Ray Rice go was unanimous. Seeing that video changed everything. We should have seen it earlier. We should have pursued our own investigation more vigorously. We didn't and we were wrong. Because of his positive contributions on and off the field over the last six years, Ray had earned every benefit of the doubt from our organization. We took everything we knew and decided to support Ray Rice until we could not. I am sorry we let you down"

(Hensley, 2014, ESPN).

September 10: The NFL announces an independent investigation of the incident and those involved.

September 16: Rice appeals the indefinite suspension.

November 28: Rice wins the appeal and is reinstated by the NFL.

With the emergence of the first video in February 2014, the Ray Rice incident became an instant crisis for the Baltimore Ravens and the National Football League. The crisis caused by the football running back should be considered as one belonging to the accidental cluster in that Rice's actions leading up to the crisis were unintentional in nature. According to the SCCT, the most appropriate response in accidental crises is diminish strategies, followed by using rebuild strategies. The football franchise and the league both employed diminish strategies as their initial crisis response strategies. For the Baltimore Ravens, their responses are critical as it has direct impact on its organizational image in the court of public opinion. As stated by the SCCT, the purpose of diminish strategies are to minimize an individual or an organization's role in the crisis and to reduce the offensiveness caused by the crisis. Upon seeing the video, the management of the Ravens did not take immediate actions against Rice but instead they appeared to be using still gathering information pertaining to the incident as excuse (a diminish strategy) for inaction on behalf of the organization. The Ravens also employed bolstering strategies, which the SCCT identify as secondary crisis response strategies. The heads of the Ravens, including the head coach, repeatedly attempted to remind the public the good qualities of Rice on and off the field. By bolstering Rice's character, the Ravens are attempting to distract the public from forming potential negative opinions against the running back and more importantly, against the Ravens organization. Roger Goodell and the NFL were slow in their response. When they did, they cited lack of information on the incident as well.

Following the grand jury indictment, Rice turned to the woman he assaulted to save his public image. Upon getting married, they held a press conference at the Ravens practice facility as husband and wife. Here, the Baltimore Ravens attempts to frame the incident under a different light by live-tweeting the press conference via Twitter. The team tweets, "Janay Rice says she

deeply regrets the role she played the night of the incident” (Van Bibber, 2014, SB Nation) shifts the blame by framing Janay Rice’s role in the incident from that of a victim to the role of a perpetrator. The guilt attached to Ray Rice seems to also transfer to Janay Rice. Therefore, the negative public perception towards Ray Rice and the Ravens organization may shift onto Janay Rice by using Janay Rice as scapegoat, which is considered a deny crisis response strategy by the SCCT. This strategy eventually backfired and the Ravens received much criticism for portraying Janay Rice as a party to blame. The Ravens, more than three months later, finally deleted the tweet from the organization’s official Twitter account (Brinson, 2014).

At the beginning of August 2014, NFL commissioner Roger Goodell finally acts and disciplines Rice for his actions based on the first video by imposing a two-game suspension on the professional running back. The court of public opinion deems the punishment too light. Past NFL history reflects that players received four-game suspension for violating the league’s drug policy; the punishment for Rice did not reflect the values we hold dear as a society in an impartial and just manner (NPR Special Series, 2014). Goodell subsequently tries to take corrective action again by implementing a new domestic violence policy within the league and openly taking responsibility for not “getting it right” with Ray Rice (McManus, 2014, ESPNW). At this point, any actions taken by the league were considered too late. Critics and franchise owners around the league expressed that the reputation of the NFL has been tainted by the Ray Rice incident due to the league’s “failure to hand out proper punishments” (Belson & Eder, 2015, nytimes.com).

The situation worsened for all involved by early September 2014 as TMZ released a second video showing Rice striking his then-fiancé in the elevator. Many media outlets reported that both the Baltimore Ravens and the NFL had seen the video months prior to its release. Deny strategies came to play once more as the Ravens and the NFL repeatedly denied the allegation against them

(Conner 2014; Sandritter, 2014; Verderame, 2014). The issue received mixed responses and the public may never know the truth behind such allegations. After the second video was made public, in addition to terminating Rice's contract, Raven's owner used rebuild strategies and attempted to restore the organization's image by publicly apologizing to the fans for the team's response. The apology would have been a more effective strategy had it been employed earlier in the crisis.

Case study 2: Michael Vick

Michael Vick, quarterback for the Atlanta Falcons from 2001 to 2006, was one of the most talented and explosive players of his generation out on the football field. Under his leadership, the Atlanta Falcons made the playoffs in 2002 and again in 2004; in 2006, Vick set the league's rushing yards record for a quarterback (Rapp, 2017). Despite Vick's impressive stats and electrifying performances on the field, perhaps what he will be known and remembered for the most does not have anything to do with football at all. In 2007, federal charges were brought against Vick and his associates for their roles in a dog-fighting ring and a list of related offenses. Vick eventually plead guilty to the charges and subsequently served time in federal prison as punishment. The scandal that surrounded Michael Vick received attention and coverage from every form of media outlet. The story not only destroyed his public image but also sent the Atlanta Falcons and the NFL into a frenzy to protect their organizational reputations. The following is a timeline of the Michael Vick dog-fighting ring scandal (ESPN.com news services, 2007; 2009):

April 25: The police serve a warrant to Vick's property and discover what appears to be an on-site dog-training facility. Officers seized 66 dogs during the search.

June 7: Another search of Vick's property is conducted by more than a dozen federal agents.

July 2: Official court documents are filed alleging Bad Newz Kennels had been operating from Vick's property for the past five years.

July 6: Federal agents conduct another search looking for evidence such as dog remains.

July 17: Michael Vick and three other men are indicted by a federal grand jury on dog-fighting charges that include activities such as force breeding and training fighting dogs, hosting fights, traveling to other states for dog fights, and killing dogs that are deemed unfit to fight over a six-year period.

NFL releases the following statement:

“We are disappointed that Michael Vick has put himself in a position where a federal grand jury has returned an indictment against him. The activities alleged are cruel, degrading and illegal. Michael Vick's guilt has not yet been proven, and we believe that all concerned should allow the legal process to determine the facts”.

The Atlanta Falcons posts a statement on the team's website, “We are disturbed by today's news. We will do the right thing for our club as the legal process plays out. We have a season to prepare for”.

July 20: Activists from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) protest in front NFL headquarter urging for the league to fire Vick.

July 20: The NFL Players Association, the Atlanta Falcons, and the NFL urge Vick to take voluntary leave of absence for the upcoming season.

July 23: Three days before first day of Falcons training camp, NFL commissioner Roger Goodell orders Vick to steer clear of Falcons training camp until the league reviews the charges against him. According to Associated Press (2007), in a letter addressed to the quarterback, Goodell stated:

“While it is for the criminal justice system to determine your guilt or innocence, it is my responsibility as commissioner of the National Football League to determine whether your conduct, even if not criminal, nonetheless violated league policies, including the Personal Conduct Policy”.

July 24: Atlanta Falcons owner Arthur Blank formally address the Michael Vick scandal in a press conference saying he is ready to impose the maximum 4-day suspension on Vick. He declares Vick’s involvement as “horrific” actions but does not make statements regarding Vick’s future career.

July 26: Vick pleads not guilty to charges against him in federal court.

July 30: One of Vick’s three co-defendants pleads guilty and agrees to testify against others involved. Vick tells an Atlanta-based radio station that he hopes to play with the Falcons again.

August 17: Vick’s other co-defendants plead guilty. They admit to traveling with Vick to other states for dog fights and describe details of the execution of six to eight dogs.

August 23: Vick pleads guilty to conspiracy in dog fighting ring and helping to kill dogs. He also admits to funding the dog fights. Goodell suspends Vick from the league indefinitely.

December 10: Vick receives a 23-month sentence from a federal judge who believed Vick to be “instrumental in promoting, funding and facilitating” the act of “inhumane sporting activity”.

February 19, 2009: Atlanta Falcons general manager Thomas Dimitroff makes statements on team’s website that the Falcons intends to trade Vick to another team.

May 21, 2009: Vick is released from prison after serving 18 months. Goodell maintains that he will review Vick’s status once the criminal case is over to decide whether Vick will be reinstated by the league.

June 12, 2009: Atlanta Falcons release statements on team's website permanently cutting ties with Michael Vick.

July 27, 2009: Vick is reinstated by the NFL.

Vick's dog-fighting crisis, by SCCT definition, is classified as a preventable or intentional crisis; he knowingly placed himself and his employers at risk with inappropriate as well as illegal behavior. In such crisis, rebuild strategies are deemed most appropriate, followed by diminish strategies.

Although case study revealed that organizations involved did not follow strategies and guidelines outlined by the SCCT, both the NFL and the Atlanta Falcons responded to the Michael Vick dog-fighting crisis in a manner that was considered appropriate and favorable by the public. Each made prompt public statements in the beginning as Vick and company were indicted by a federal grand jury. In the event of a crisis, the timeliness of response is crucial for organizational image to public perception. In this case, at a time when information was limited to the public, the reactions on behalf of the league and the Falcons franchise were sufficient. The organizations were clear in denouncing the Vick's actions so that there would be no confusion when it comes to their stance on the issue. The move to urge Vick to take a leave of absence and to stay away from training camp were good moves because to allow Vick further participation in league and team events send the message that Vick's employers condone his behavior off the field. After more details related to dog-fighting charges came to light, Atlanta Falcons owner Arthur Blank stated in an interview, "There was no indication, no sign, no whisper of that type of behavior. That [person in the indictment] is not the person I've known the past six years" (Fleming, 2007). This statement is an example of victimage, a bolstering strategy, where crisis manager attempts to remind others that his or her organization is also a victim of the crisis. As a franchise owner in the NFL, Blank

had previously believed in Vick so much that in 2004, he offered Vick a 10-year contract worth \$130 million (Fleming, 2007). Blank built a team based on Vick's needs. The reputation of the Falcons suffered minimal damage, if any, considering the severity of allegations and charges against Vick. By the time Vick plead guilty and was sentenced, the public viewed the Falcons as a victim of the ordeal.

In February 2009, while Vick was still serving his prison sentence, the Falcons expressed the team's intent to trade Vick to another franchise. The timing for this was most likely because Vick was set to complete his sentence therefore will be released later that year. Following his release, the Falcons knew that Vick will be seeking to be reinstated by the NFL. Therefore, General Manager Thomas Dimitroff said, "Michael remains suspended by the NFL. However, in the event NFL commissioner Roger Goodell decides to reinstate Michael, we feel his best opportunity to re-engage his football career would be at another club" (CNN, 2009). This was the way the Falcons chose to announce that the organization intends to permanently cut ties with Vick. The announcement came as no surprise since owner Arthur Blank has always maintained that Vick will never return to the Falcons. By late July 2009, Roger Goodell offered Vick the opportunity to return to the NFL. "Needless to say, your margin for error is extremely limited," Goodell said in his letter to Vick. "I urge you to take full advantage of the resources available to support you and to dedicate yourself to rebuilding your life and your career. If you do this, the NFL will support you" (ESPN news services, 2009). Goodell stressed to the media that he did not make the decision to reinstate Vick lightly; he consulted the opinions of numerous past and current coaches and players and received mixed answers. While the NFL commissioner recognized that some people may never forgive Vick for his actions, he urged the public to give Vick a second chance. Goodell's sentiments, coupled with Vick's own efforts to repair his image since the beginning of the scandal,

made it easier for the public to accept Vick's reinstatement. The timing was also a factor since it had been nearly two years since the scandal and Vick served time in prison for his crime. Many felt that Vick had been punished enough and chose to accept and welcome his return to the sport.

The primary response strategies used by the organizations involved in this case study are not consistent with the SCCT. It does prove, however, SCCT's claim that bolstering strategies are best used to supplement primary crisis response strategies and adjusting information (Coombs, 2007).

Case study 3: Kobe Bryant

In 1996, Kobe Bryant was a first-round draft pick for the Charlotte Hornets and became a professional basketball player for the National Basketball Association at the age of 17. He was traded to the Los Angeles Lakers later in the same year where he eventually became a franchise player for the organization. Merely two years after he turned pro, Bryant became the youngest player selected for NBA All-Star Game. Bryant was an integral part of the Lakers team that won three straight NBA championships during 2000-2002 seasons (CNN, 2003). In the summer of 2003, however, Bryant seemed to be on the verge of losing everything he has worked so hard for. A 19-year-old Colorado hotel employee came forth with rape allegations against the NBA star. Bryant was charged with one count felony sexual assault. The following is a timeline of the key events in the Kobe Bryant rape case (CNN, 2003; Chicago Tribune, 2017):

June 30: Bryant flies to Colorado for an upcoming knees surgery. A 19-year-old woman working at the front desk checks him in and accompany him on a tour of the hotel. She later goes to Bryant's room, where she claims the rape took place.

July 1: Bryant's accuser report the rape to Eagle County Sheriff's Department.

July 18: Bryant is officially charged with one count of felony sexual assault. Bryant holds a press conference at Staples Center during which he admits to sexual intercourse with the accuser but insists it was consensual and that he is innocent.

March 24, 2004: The accuser testifies behind closed doors regarding her sexual history.

May 11, 2004: Bryant pleads not guilty in criminal case.

June 24, 2004: A court reporter accidentally releases transcripts of the accuser's closed door testimony.

August 10, 2004: The accuser files civil lawsuit against Bryant in federal court.

September 1, 2004: The accuser no longer wishes to proceed with the criminal trial. Therefore, prosecution decides to drop the criminal charges.

March 2, 2005: Both sides reached settlement in the case, but no specific terms were made public.

The analysis for this case differs from the previous case studies because the organizations relevant to Kobe Bryant, the Los Angeles Lakers and the NBA, stayed away from making any comments regarding the scandal. Both organizations viewed the scandal as a personal crisis for Bryant rather than an organizational crisis. Further probe into the crisis response strategies used by the Lakers and the NBA in the Kobe Bryant rape scandal revealed nearly no results. David Stern, NBA commissioner at the time, decided to wait for the outcome of the trial before taking any actions against Bryant, citing the league's policy as reason. "As with all allegations of a criminal nature, the NBA's policy is to await the outcome of a judicial proceeding before taking any action. We do not anticipate making further comments during the pendency of the judicial process," Stern said (CNN, 2003). The Lakers defended Bryant's character while allowing the judicial process to take its course. Lakers commentator John Ireland stated:

“People won’t believe it unless [District Attorney Mark Hurlbert] can actually prove it to them. He says he’s got to prove it to a jury. He’s going to have to prove it to the people of Los Angeles, because [Kobe] has built up that much good over seven years” (CNN, 2003).

When it comes to Bryant’s scandal, while it can be viewed as an accidental crisis in that the actions leading to the crisis were unplanned (in the sense that Bryant most likely never intended for the public to find out about him committing adultery), it more so belongs in the intentional or preventable cluster. Coombs (2007) maintain that in this cluster perpetrators knowingly put others at risk and took inappropriate actions. According to the SCCT, the crisis responses strategies for the intentional or preventable cluster are rebuild followed by diminish. The way Bryant handled his crisis seem to validate this point in the SCCT. The basketball star employed both strategies in his public apology when he said:

“Although I truly believe this encounter between us was consensual, I recognize now that she did not and does not view this incident the same way I did. After months of reviewing discovery, listening to her attorney, and even her testimony in person, I now understand how she feels that she did not consent to this encounter” (Kenworthy & O’Driscoll, 2004).

His apology (a rebuild strategy) expressed deep remorse for his actions and heartfelt compassion for the alleged victim. However, Bryant also used excuse and justification (diminish strategies) by denying an ill intent and attempting to minimize the perceived damage caused by the crisis (Coombs, 2007).

Discussion

RQ1: What were the strategies employed by the San Francisco 49ers in responding to the National Anthem crisis?

Based on the textual analysis conducted in this study, the crisis response strategies that the San Francisco 49ers used are diminish strategies, immediately followed by rebuild strategies; bolstering strategies supplemented both primary response strategies. As stated in the previous section, the 49ers used justification, a diminish strategy, during the initial phase of the national anthem crisis to provide an explanation to the public and to minimize the perceived damage to the organization's reputation. Days later, the CEO of the football club used compensation, a rebuild strategy. Although there are no victims who endured physical pain from the crisis, the donation is intended to shine a positive light on the organization.

RQ2: To what degree did the response strategies selected by the San Francisco 49ers match the response strategies suggested by the Situational Crisis Communication Theory?

Case study 1 matched the response strategies suggested by the SCCT where in the event of an accidental crisis. An organization will first respond by using diminish strategies followed by rebuild strategies. However, conclusions regarding organizational primary crisis response strategies are inconclusive. While case study 3 lacked sufficient research relevant to crisis response strategies on behalf of the organization, research revealed that primary crisis response strategies used by the individual, who is at the center of the crisis, are consistent with strategies outlined by the SCCT. Furthermore, textual analysis and case studies confirmed the role of bolstering strategies as stated by Coombs (2007) amid crises. Bolstering strategies are supplemental to any primary crisis response strategies.

The answer to this research question is dependent on how one categorize the type of crisis experienced by the San Francisco 49ers. If one views the national anthem crisis one belonging to

the accidental cluster of the SCCT, then the primary response strategies agree with the guidelines suggested by the SCCT: diminish strategies are first, then rebuild strategies. If one identifies the national anthem crisis as an intentional crisis, then the strategies used by the 49ers do not match those suggested by the theory because the SCCT states that in such crisis clusters, rebuild strategies are used as primary response strategies followed by diminish strategies.

Limitations and Future Research

One of the major limitations of the research is the role of social media and its effect on crisis response strategies of cases such as Michael Vick and Kobe Bryant. Although both are significant crises in the sports industry, they occurred before social media platforms became a prevalent communications tool. Therefore, due to the timing of each crisis, research materials are extremely limited compared to that of the Ray Rice crisis. Secondly, given the research topic, in-depth interviews with professional public relations practitioners with knowledge and expertise in the sports industry would have been a more effective second methodology as opposed to case studies. But due to the researcher's limited time and inexperience, in-depth interviews did not come to fruition as originally planned before the research process began.

Although the crises selected for case studies are like the National Anthem crisis in that all are situations where the actions of a single player are the catalyst for the organizational crisis that followed, the case studies differ due to nature of the players' actions. Rice's and Vick's conducts were illegal crimes whereas Bryant's act was considered immoral. It is important to realize that organizations may react and respond to these situations differently.

Case studies of the Kobe Bryant's rape scandal, Michael Vick's dog-fighting charges, and Ray Rice's domestic violence controversy show that due to the existence and wide use of social media, the public demands more from organizations during a crisis. Future research of similar

nature should take into consideration how public relations and crisis communication have evolved over time, especially since the emergence of the Internet and social media.

Conclusion

This research has confirmed the validity of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory in crises experienced by the sports industry. The San Francisco 49ers employed primary response strategies indicated by the SCCT in the organization's handling of the national anthem crisis. Findings show that organizations must employ bolstering strategies to support primary crisis response strategies efforts. The results also suggest that additional research is necessary in uncovering how social media has influenced organizational crisis response strategies over time.

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Appendix A: Original Project Proposal

Introduction

As a graduate student studying strategic communications, my emphasis area is public relations. Upon graduation, I plan to practice public relations in general and crisis communication/management in the professional sports industry. Organizations and individuals in the sports industry are constantly battling various types of crisis situations. In the event of a crisis, public relations practitioners act as crisis managers on behalf of their client. Therefore, I am particularly interested in crisis communication.

My final research project is a combination of my interests and professional goal and will be dedicated to public relations strategies used by a professional sports organization during a crisis. The coursework that I have taken thus far has been insightful and educational. What I have learned from the following courses is especially helpful in preparing me for the final project.

The Mass Media Seminar class taught me well the fundamentals of how to conduct research and how to write a literature review. These are critically important skills for my final research project. Dr. Rodgers showed me how to effectively summarize and organize each academic literature in a way that is not only pertinent to my research goal but also logical to the writing process. I also realized the importance of paraphrasing other people's work in my own words and summarizing them accordingly to my research needs as I went through a lot of content that were based on empirical findings.

The class taught by Professor Stemmler taught me a great deal about the profession of public relations. Public relations exist as the way organizations, companies, and individuals communicate with the media as well as with the public. It is the job of public relations practitioners to effectively communicate with their targeted audiences through various media outlets in order to build and

maintain a positive brand image and a strong relationship with the audiences. The in-class assignments gave me the opportunity to work in small groups to practice different aspects of public relations such as conducting research, writing press releases, using written tactics, planning events, and creating social media content. I had the pleasure of working for the Health Communication Research Center (HCRC) as part of my graduate studies for the class. I was able to apply what I had learned from the lectures to real-world situations. I wrote two press releases for HCRC that were published by newspapers in parts of rural Missouri.

The class with Dr. Volz focusing on qualitative research methods is vital to my project. The methodologies that my research project will employ are textual analysis and in-depth interviewing. Dr. Volz provided me with readings that described the fundamental concepts of each method as well as ways of how to employ the methods. She required me to jot down notes and/or any important quotes from the readings. The notes proved to be especially useful as I composed my methodology section of this proposal. In addition, I had opportunities to practice each method that helped me finally choose the method(s) that is most appropriate for my research topic.

Finally, Dr. Frisby's Sports and Entertainment Promotions class gave me the chance to work for a sports organization as a real client, Mizzou Athletics. The project required me to use everything that I have learned previously from other classes as well as use my background in business to come up with a comprehensive plan to promote the rebranding of Mizzou Athletics. Dr. Frisby is extremely knowledgeable and enthusiastic about topics in public relations and strategic communication and she is always eager to help and inspire her students.

To be an effective crisis communicator and manager in the professional sports industry will not be easy, as there will be unexpected difficulties and challenges. The completion of my research project, along with the coursework that I have had, however, will lead me to the right direction. I

now have a solid knowledge about the profession and know what strategies to use under different circumstances. I have also practiced and obtained such skills as leadership, teamwork and communication that will help me solve problems and make decisions in the real world. Equally importantly, the coursework and the professors have helped me build sufficient confidence for me to achieve my professional goals.

The Professional Skills Component

For the professional skills component of my project I will be working for Development for Special Events within Mizzou Athletics. One of my major responsibilities will be assisting with donor relations for Tigers Scholarship Fund, money donated to Mizzou for our student athletes. This means I will be answering any questions donors may have relating to their account, premium seating and parking, and membership renewals. Additionally, Development interns are needed at athletic events such as Mizzou Basketball games. The main duties for interns at basketball games are to set up Tiger Row and suites with stat sheet for both teams, greet donors as they arrive to suites, make sure donors' needs are being met during the game, and keep donors interested and engaged. In addition, my department will be hosting a series of special events for Tiger Scholarship Donors throughout the semester. Interns are required to assist with the setup prior to each event as well as operations during each event. As student interns, we will also be assigned to conduct research and contribute ideas to projects relevant to Mizzou Athletics as they arise.

With my background in business with emphasis in marketing, my previous work experiences in the professional world, and the education I have received thus far in the Journalism School, I believe I will be able to handle this internship position with confidence and competence.

Research Topic

The research topic I intend to study is using the Situational Crisis Communication Theory as the underlying theoretical framework, what are the crisis response strategies that public relations practitioners for the San Francisco 49ers used in handling the National Anthem crisis.

Two research questions are proposed as follows:

RQ1: What were the strategies employed by the San Francisco 49ers in responding to the National Anthem crisis?

RQ2: To what degree did the response strategies selected by the San Francisco 49ers match the response strategies suggested by the Situational Crisis Communication Theory?

Theoretical Framework

The National Anthem crisis faced by the San Francisco 49ers is a complex sports crisis that involves social, race, and human rights issues. This research intends to examine the proactive and reactive strategies employed by public relations practitioners in response during the different stages of the national crisis, with public opinions split on either end of the spectrum, in a way that will satisfy both the organizations (49ers and the NFL) and its public. The underlying theoretical framework for this research is the Situational Crisis Communication Theory.

A crisis can be defined as an unexpected or unforeseen event that poses as a threat to interrupt an organization's operations, negatively impact its finances, and damage organizational reputation in the public eye. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), originally posited by W. Timothy Coombs (2004), suggests how "a crisis might shape the selection of crisis response strategies and/or the effect of crisis response strategies on organizational reputation" (p. 269). Simply put, when dealing with a crisis, it is essential for managers to match strategic responses to the level of crisis responsibility and reputational threat posed by that crisis. The theory is an essential tool used by public relations professionals to investigate which strategies to apply depending on specific types of crisis situations. Coombs (2007) identifies three types of crisis clusters and corresponding response strategies that serve to guide crisis managers: victim, accidental and preventable. Coombs (2004) states that the victim cluster contains situations in which organizations are seen as the victim of the crisis due to external factors beyond their control; the accidental cluster consists of crisis related to technical breakdowns where organizations claim moderate responsibility; finally, the preventable cluster includes crisis caused by intentional human errors and organizational misdeeds. Coombs further proposed an eight-part model that acts as a guideline for crisis managers. The eight-part model contains crisis response strategies in which

Coombs organized into three categories: deny, diminish and rebuild. Based on Coombs's theory, managers should examine and evaluate each crisis based on factors outlined by the SCCT and crisis managers should then choose the appropriate corresponding strategy (Sisco, 2012).

Crisis communication research in the world of sports that uses the Situational Crisis Communication Theory as basis for research seems to be scarce. However, past studies exist from other industries. Howell and Miller (2010) conducted a study in which the crisis response strategies employed by Maple Leaf Foods Inc. during a large-scale product recall in 2008 were evaluated using the SCCT. Through textual analysis, the study analyzed online documents released by the company as well as available online media coverage regarding the case. The study defined the type of crisis faced by Maple Leaf Foods Inc. and identified response strategies the company used in dealing with the fiasco. The food product recall was a crisis that was classified as an accident due to technical errors by Maple Leaf Foods Inc. Although the cause of the crisis was not intentional on behalf of the company, the potential for reputational damage in this case was extremely high. The negative publicity would create tons of backlash from the public and media. Maple Leaf Foods Inc. quickly accepted full blame and opted for rebuild strategies. Howell and Miller (2010) found that Maple Leaf Foods Inc. employed apology (a rebuild strategy) as its dominant strategy and used excuse (a diminish strategy) to deny any intentional harm, thereby reassert the crisis as an accident. Howell and Miller (2010) found the reaction by Maple Leaf Foods Inc. is consistent with rules set out by Coombs's SCCT: "rebuild strategies should be used for crises with strong attributions of responsibility regardless of crisis history or prior relationship reputation" (Coombs, 2007, p. 173). By apologizing during the initial phase of the crisis and subsequently offering compensation to the victims, the company demonstrated great concern for the stakeholders, which eventually led to minimal reputational damage.

Sisco (2012) tested the applicability of each strategy as stated by the SCCT (deny, diminish, and rebuild) in situations where non-profit organizations were at the center of turmoil. The results yielded from a 3 x 2 experimental design where participants were asked to read to an initial crisis response strategy from a fictitious non-profit organization in crisis. Participants were then asked to answer questions about how they view the organizational response, how much blame do they place on the organization, and how they perceive the organization in the future to measure the overall appropriateness and effectiveness of the strategies. The combined results of the study demonstrated that the SCCT is indeed an effective crisis management theory in public relations. The study was also able to provide evidence that for non-profit organizations, the crisis response strategies suggested by Coombs did seem to reduce reputational damage and maintain positive image in the public eye (Sisco, 2012). The study helped Sisco (2012) to conclude that in the real world, public relations practitioners working for non-profit organizations would find the SCCT to be a valuable tool to develop a crisis management plan before crises occur.

Literature Review

Crisis communication has become an important area of research within the public relations domain. An organization's need for effective public relations practices significantly increases when crisis situations occur. A crisis can be defined as an unexpected event or a series of events that poses as a threat to an organization (Coombs & Holladay 1996). During a crisis, public relations practitioners take on the role as crisis managers that aim to improve an organization's reputation or image by first identifying the issue through primary or secondary research, and then selecting the appropriate communication tactics to resolve the problem (Clark, 2000). The decisions made by public relations professionals during a crisis are critical to an organization's reputation as well as its relationship with stakeholders.

Researchers have conducted countless case studies of different organizations in crisis in the past. This literature review aims to examine previous studies and provide an overview of existing common crisis response strategies identified by past studies from three categories: defensive strategies, diversionary strategies, and corrective strategies.

Defensive strategies

The goal of employing defensive strategies is for the organization to remove itself from any connection with the negativity associated with a crisis. Crisis managers will typically choose defensive strategies when their organization is enthralled in a situation that threatens its reputation or damages its public image (Benoit, 1995). Common defensive strategies used when responding to a crisis are denial, attack the accuser, and/or scapegoat (Coombs, 2007; Len-Rios, 2010).

Denial strategy simply means the organization does not admit to performing the wrongdoing(s) that led to the crisis. Denial strategy is an effort made by crisis managers to attempt to frame the crisis event as something that never happened, thereby claiming the crisis is

nonexistent (Maresh & Williams, 2007; King III, 2006). Coombs (1999) states that since the denial strategy does not recognize the existence of a crisis, therefore organizations ignore the victims. In 2003, Franklin Raines, the CEO of Fannie Mae, a government-sponsored mortgage company, Franklin Raines repeatedly denied claims that the senior executives (himself included) of the company intentionally manipulated accounting practices to pay themselves millions of dollars in bonuses (Associated Press, 2006). Even as the Office of Federal Housing Enterprise Oversight (OFHEO) began its formal investigation against Fannie Mae, Raines maintained that the company's efforts to cooperate with OFHEO were in no way an admission of guilt (Harris & Singleton, 2004). After three years of investigation, senior executives of Fannie Mae were officially found guilty of accounting improprieties and manipulations in 2006. Fannie Mae was fined \$400 million, its stock plummeted, and its public image and reputation suffered tremendously (Associated Press, 2006).

Glantz (2010) examined the response efforts to the doping scandal involving 2006 Tour de France winner Floyd Landis, who initially denied using illegal substances during the competition. In fact, Landis used the deny strategy as an attempt to “maintain his image as a drug-free athlete and imply that he did not cheat to win the Tour de France” (p. 159). It was not until evidence surfaced that countered Landis's declaration of innocence that he decided to change his response strategies.

When public relations professionals for an organization decide to attack the accuser as a crisis response strategy, the organization at the center of the crisis views itself as a victim (Coombs, 2007); therefore, the accuser must be confronted in regards to any baseless accusations, unproven rumors, and/or false allegations. Granville King III conducted a case study of image restoration in the crisis faced by Brown and Williamson Tobacco Company when the company's former Vice-

President of Research and Development, Dr. Jeffery Wigand, accused the Tobacco maker and its senior officials of misconduct and inappropriate behavior in the production of tobacco products. Brown and Williamson used attack the accuser as well as denial as response strategies several times throughout the crisis. The tobacco company engaged in a public warfare with the accuser and attacked him on his intentions, character, and credibility (King III, 2006).

Terrell Owens, widely considered one of the NFL's most talented athletes, faced his greatest public relations challenge when he sabotaged his own image during his contract dispute with the Philadelphia Eagles in 2005 (Brazeal, 2008). Prior to the contract negotiations, Owens had already been consistently portrayed negatively by the media due to his self-centered personality and disrespectful demeanors towards the coaching staff and his teammates from different teams in the League. Owen's public relations strategy followed a theme of portraying himself as the victim. Thus, he and his agent placed blames on the Philadelphia Eagles for turning its back on Owens and the media for consistent baseless negative portrayal of Owens (Brazeal, 2008). Coombs (1999) views attack the accuser as a defensive strategy that goes beyond denial. King III (2006) asserts that if an outside person and/or group are threatening the interest of an organization by making false allegations and igniting a public crisis, then crisis managers must utilize a strategy to strike back to defend the organization they represent.

Scapegoat, also called shift the blame, is a strategy in which crisis managers place the blame for a crisis on some person or group outside of the organization (Coombs, 2007). Framing also plays a role in the strategy because by shifting the blame, the guilt attached to a crisis is then passed on to another party, thus creating an opportunity to influence the public's perception of an issue (Fortunato, 2008). After the Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion in the Gulf of Mexico, BP used scapegoat as one of its initial response strategies. In an interview with CNN, BP's CEO Tony

Hayward reacted to the explosion by saying, “The responsibility for safety on the drilling rig is Transocean. It is their rig, their equipment, their people, their systems, their safety process.” (CNN Wire Staff, 2010). BP’s initial response, in addition to CEO Tony Hayward’s interview, consisted of six press releases in which all made mentions of Transocean; yet, none of them portrayed BP as having any responsibilities for the oil rig explosion in the first place. BP’s initial response efforts proved to be overall ineffective. The company subsequently employed other strategies and took corrective measures to mend its mistakes (Harlow et al, 2011).

Diversionsary strategies

If an organization believes it may have some responsibility for the crisis, diversionsary strategies may be employed. Diversionsary strategies are a set of strategies that can be used on their own or combined as an attempt to minimize an organization’s role in the crisis and to reduce the offensiveness caused by the crisis (Maresh & Williams, 2007). Additionally, the strategies also act as agents of distraction to briefly take the public’s focus away from the negative aspects of a crisis and refocus the public’s attention towards something else (Bruce & Tini, 2008). Diversionsary strategies consist of excuse, justification, and bolstering.

Coombs asserts that when exercising excuse strategies, crisis managers are trying to diminish “organizational responsibility by denying intent to do harm and/or claiming inability to control the events that triggered the crisis” (Coombs, 2007, p. 170). Organizations can achieve this by framing the crisis event as an accident, maintaining defeasibility, stating good intentions, or declaring provocations (Fortunato, 2008). An organization is implying a crisis is the result of unintentional actions by claiming accident. Howell and Miller (2010) conducted a study about the crisis response strategies employed by Maple Leaf Foods Inc. during a large-scale product recall in 2008 after its products were linked to a listeria outbreak causing twelve deaths. The first

response from crisis managers of the food manufacturer was to identify the recall as the result of a technical breakdown, also an accident (Howell & Miller, 2010). Maple Leaf felt it was imperative for the public to understand that the company lacked control over the events that led up to the sale of potentially dangerous food products and subsequently the recall (Howell & Miller, 2010).

The defeasibility approach means an organization claims to lack control or information over the actions that caused the crisis (Len-Rios, 2010). Fortunato (2008) conducted an analysis of Duke University's communication responses during its rape scandal in 2006 involving several university lacrosse team members. The analysis indicated that the university officials used defeasibility to divert potential negative effects brought on by the crisis. The president of Duke University issued press releases and held press conferences to publicize that the prestigious learning institution was still in the process of gathering facts surrounding the incident and there were multiple versions of the event from various sources; furthermore, he called upon those with knowledge of the incident to come forth and fully cooperate with the investigation (Fortunato, 2008). Meanwhile, he advocated for the student athletes involved and maintained that they were innocent until proven guilty; hence the public should not rush to judgment until all information and evidence have been collected (Fortunato, 2008).

When a drug test of Floyd Landis revealed abnormal levels of testosterone, Landis quickly claimed lack of knowledge for the chemical irregularity and insisted that he did not know the source of the extra testosterone in his system nor did he have control over the test results (Glantz, 2010). Research by Glantz (2010) also states that even as Landis appeared on *Larry King Live* later, he tried to evade responsibility by claiming that alcohol consumption from the night before Tour de France was the cause for the chemical abnormality. It is a widely known fact that Landis suffers from arthritis and severe hip problems. He used the defeasibility approach by taking

advantage of his injuries claiming his unusual testosterone levels were the result of his various medications. Glantz concluded that Landis's defeasibility approach came to a screeching halt when the media reported the testosterone was synthetic which means it could not have been influenced by alcohol or medication.

Terrell Owens and his agent used good intentions as one of the approaches to save his tainted public image. Owens refused to apologize after having openly disrespected the Eagles head coach and participated in numerous interviews publicly denouncing the Eagles quarterback (Brazeal, 2008). Owen's agent then tried to rectify the damage by stating good intentions, claiming Owens "agreed with a statement. He did not come out and try and offend anyone. Nothing was intentional ever, he was trying to be a good interview subject" (Brazeal, 2008, p. 148).

Brown and Williams used provocation strategy after Wigand violated the terms of the restraining order obtained by the tobacco company, barring him from speaking to any authorities, Brown and Williams sought to hold him in contempt (King III, 2006). Provocation strategy is similar to shifting the blame in which an organization proclaims that a certain crisis is the response to someone else's offensive actions (King III, 2006). Coombs (2007) states that justification is a strategy crisis managers use to lessen the perceived damage of a crisis by offering justifications to a crisis. The world recently watched provocation and justification strategies at work during the crisis faced by Ryan Lochte during the 2016 Olympic games in Brazil. Lochte and three of his teammates vandalized a gas station in Rio de Janeiro while intoxicated. CBS News reported that instead of being truthful about the situation, Lochte recounted an attempted gunpoint robbery. He justified their irrational behavior in Brazil as the response reaction to another act (CBS News, 2016).

Bolstering strategies help to minimize damages by creating more favorable public opinions for an organization. Coombs (2007) asserts that the goal with bolstering strategies can be attained by reminding the public of the good things an organization has done in the past and that in some situations the organization is also the victim. By placing more emphasis on past good deeds, crisis managers move the public's attention from current damage to an organization's reputation and/or image to more positive aspects (Brown et al., 2012). Coombs (2007) also places importance for organizations to praise its stakeholders for their support during a crisis as means of improving relationship with the public and gaining sympathy from the public.

Following the Phillips Petroleum explosion, the company's crisis managers employed bolstering strategy and stated "Phillips takes great pride in its safety record. We thought we were at the point where we could avoid these incidents. We're still working on it. We're going to continue. We'd like to have it at zero" (Maresh & Williams, 2007, p. 8). This statement suggests to the public that despite the unfortunate explosion, Phillips Petroleum maintains a positive overall safety record with only a few accidents (Maresh & Williams, 2007).

Research conducted by Glantz (2010) concluded that one of Landis' reactions to the accusations against him is considered bolstering. Landis, during press conferences, repeatedly tried to bolster his reputation in the public eye by highlighting his determination, dedication, and hard work. Brazeal (2008) assessed that the agent for Terrell Owens openly praised the athlete's character by relying heavily on terms such as "sincere" and "genuine" and highlighting that it is Owen's goal to win the Super Bowl with Philadelphia Eagles. Owens himself attempted to boost his public image by stressing the strengths of his character (Brazeal, 2008). Bolstering also appeared frequently throughout the response strategies Duke University used in handling the lacrosse team rape scandal. Duke's own President Brodhead repeatedly emphasized the school's

continuous commitment to diversity and inclusion at all levels of learning as an attempt to portray the school and its students in a positive light (Len-Rios, 2010).

Corrective strategies

Crisis managers will choose to employ corrective strategies in circumstances where organizations accept responsibility for the crisis and want to correct the harm inflicted (Maresh & Williams, 2007). Literatures seem to indicate that two of the most commonly adapted corrective strategies are apology and compensation (Maresh & Williams, 2007; Coombs, 2007; Howell & Miller, 2010). After a crisis occurs, public opinion is shaped by the degree in which an organization seems to own up to its mistakes (Howell & Miller, 2010). Apology strategy happens when an organization issues official statements of apology intended to seek forgiveness from stakeholders for its role in a crisis (Coombs, 1995; Coombs 2007). It signifies that the organization recognizes the problem and plans to take corrective actions in hopes to bounce back from a bad situation (Howell & Miller, 2010).

Based on the analysis by Maresh and Williams (2007), compensation was the primary response strategy in the Phillips Petroleum's public crisis. A spokesperson for the company reassured victims and their families that injured employees were to receive full paychecks and benefits during their recovery; in addition, Phillips Petroleum would also pay for any expenses related to post-crisis counseling, lodging so that family members could stay near one another, travel, and mobile phone usage (Maresh & Williams, 2007).

The CEO of Maple Leaf Foods quickly accepted full blame and offered a heartfelt apology in the wake of the product recall crisis. Howell and Miller (2010) found that although the cause of the crisis was not intentional, the potential for reputational damage was extremely high. The negative publicity would create tons of backlash from the public and media. Howell and Miller

(2010) concluded that Maple Leaf Foods used apology as the dominant response strategy supported by compensation for those affected. By apologizing during the initial phase of the crisis and subsequently offering compensation to victims and their families, Maple Leaf Foods demonstrated genuine and real concern for the stakeholders, which resulted in minimal reputational damage (Howell & Miller, 2010).

Methodology

I intend to use the qualitative research methods of textual analysis and case study for my research. Textual analysis is a research technique in which data are gathered to help researchers understand how other “human beings make sense of the world” (Mckee, 2003, p. 1). Contemporary textual analysis has been used in a variety of ways by drawing from diverse interpretive strategies (Fursich, 2009). This approach focuses on the “underlying ideological and cultural assumptions of the text” (Fursich, 2009, p. 240) and allows the researcher to discover and understand the meaning behind the text in a broader cultural context. Mckee (2001) asserts that context is imperative to textual analysis because it determines how texts will be interpreted.

Mckee (2009) states that there are three levels of context one should consider when analyzing elements of a text: the rest of the text, the genre of the text, and the wider public context in which a text is circulated. The rest of the text means that researchers should ask what the element means in the context of a text (Mckee, 2009). The genre of the text looks at the meaning of the element in a genre and how it will influence the audience’s overall understanding of the text (Mckee, 2009). And finally, Mckee (2009) asserts that it is easy to misunderstand a text if one does not examine the general context in which it circulates and its influence on the audience’s reading of the text. Mckee (2009) maintains that the more one understands about the context of a text, at all three levels, the more he or she will be able to make meaningful interpretations of a text.

Barrett (2005) employed textual analysis to examine the role of spokespersons and message control in the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) response to the anthrax crisis in 2001. Data for the study consisted of CDC press releases, CDC telebriefing transcripts, and regional and national newspaper coverage published from October 2001 to February 2002 (Barrett, 2005). Barrett (2005) used press releases for background information and newspaper

coverage to understand how the public received the CDC messages. Textual analysis was conducted on telebriefing transcripts and corresponding print media to “determine major communication themes, identify communication inconsistencies, and examine the role of CDC spokespersons during the crisis” (Barrett, 2005, p. 61).

Data source for the proposed textual analysis will be social media posts made on San Francisco 49ers Facebook page and official 49ers news releases at the start Keapernick’s boycott of the national anthem starting on August 26, 2016 to the end of the crisis. I plan to examine each of the Facebook posts and to identify the strategies employed by the football team based on key terms and/or phrases that reflect the characteristics of each crisis response strategy as outlined in Coombs’ Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). Once the strategies have been identified, each strategy will be assessed based on the guidelines found in SCCT to answer the second research question.

To assure the overall reliability and validity of this research, a second method, case study, will be used for data triangulation. Case study is a qualitative research method that has been cited by researchers as a method that is useful to study historical events (Baxter & Jack, 2008). According to Yin (2003), by employing case study as a research methodology, the researcher will be able to explore his or her subject(s) through complex interventions, relationships, communities, or programs. Furthermore, a case study approach allows for the “deconstruction and the subsequent reconstruction of various phenomena” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544).

So how does one decide to use the case study approach for his or her research? Yin (2003) asserts that researchers should consider the case study method when (1) the aim of the study is to answer “how” and “why” questions; (2) the behaviors of those involved in the study are independent of the researcher therefore cannot be influenced or changed; (3) the subject is being

studied because the researcher believes it to be relevant to the research topic at hand; or (4) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context. In addition, the case study method works to simplify complex issues and allows for great flexibility.

For my study, I intend to assess different cases of public relations and crisis management within the sports industry. The purpose of my study is to examine how an organization responds to crisis in the public eye. And the National Anthem crisis is one that became an organizational crisis based on the behavior of a single player. Therefore, the case study analyses will come from organizational crises of similar nature.

The first scandal will be the 2014 incident involving Ray Rice and his then-fiancée Janay Palmer. A video surfaced online showing the Baltimore Ravens running back knocking out Palmer in a hotel elevator in Atlantic City. Players around the league and fans reacted with outrage. A closer examination of the crisis response strategies used by the Baltimore Ravens will reveal what tools were used during the process, how the response strategies affected the public perceptions of the team as well as its impact on the reputation of the Ravens organization.

Next, I will look into the Michael Vick dog fighting scandal. News of Vick's arrest for his role in a dog fighting ring shocked the NFL world. Following his arrest, the NFL took instant action against Vick. The Atlanta Falcons, Vick's team at the time of his arrest, also responded immediately. This case study will be useful in identifying how the league and its executives used the appropriate strategies in handling this crisis to preserve and maintain the overall positive image of the NFL despite the disgraceful actions of a single player.

The third and final case study will be conducted on the Kobe Bryant sexual assault scandal in 2003. The scandal hurt Bryant's image tremendously and it posed as a dilemma for the Los Angeles Lakers organization because Bryant is their star player. His actions both on and off the

court have a direct impact on the Lakers. Considering the accusations against Kobe Bryant, how can the Lakers support their star player while protect the Lakers brand and maintain its favorable image in the public eye?

Conclusions will be drawn based on both methodologies upon the completion of the textual analysis and case studies. There will be drawbacks and limitations with both approaches; they will be discussed at the end of the research study.

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Possible academic journals this research would be suitable targets for publication are:

- Journal of Public Relations Research
- International Journal of Strategic Communications
- Public Relations Review
- Journal of Sports Media
- Qualitative Research Reports in Communication
- Management Communication Quarterly

Appendix B: Coding Scheme

<u>Code #</u>	<u>Strategy</u>	<u>Description (key concepts/themes)</u>
1	Attack the accuser	Crisis manager confronts the person or group claiming something is wrong with the organization.
2	Denial	Crisis manager states that there is no crisis.
3	Scapegoat	Crisis manager blames another person or group outside of the organization for the crisis.
4	Excuse	Crisis manager minimizes or downplays organizational responsibility by denying intent to do harm and/or claiming inability to control the events that triggered the crisis.
5	Justification	Crisis manager minimizes the perceived damage caused by the crisis.
6	Compensation	Crisis manager offers money or other gifts to victims.
7	Apology	Crisis manager indicates the organization takes full responsibility for the crisis and asks stakeholders for forgiveness.
8	Reminder	Crisis manager tell stakeholders about the past good works of the organization.
9	Ingratiation	Crisis manager praises stakeholders and/or reminds them of past good works by the organization.
10	Victimage	Crisis manager reminds stakeholders that the organization is a victim of the crisis too.

Appendix C: Textual Analysis Data



San Francisco 49ers

September 2 at 4:30pm · 🌐

Colin Kaepernick & Eric Reid address the decision to kneel during the national anthem Thursday night in San Diego. <http://49rs.co/IHmilZ>



Colin Kaepernick, Eric Reid Speak after Game in San Diego

Rather than sit on the bench, Colin Kaepernick took a knee during the national anthem amongst his teammates at Thursday night's preseason game against the...

WWW.49ERS.COM

Code 5, justification, diminish strategy

<http://www.49ers.com/news/article-2/Colin-Kaepernick-Eric-Reid-Speak-after-Game-in-San-Diego/8686e8c9-c23e-4c65-a4dd-3065b05df3da>

Colin Kaepernick, Eric Reid Speak after Game in San Diego

Posted Sep 2, 2016



Taylor Price
Senior Reporter
49ers.com

[@TaylorPrice](#)

Colin Kaepernick took a knee during the national anthem at Thursday night's preseason game against the San Diego Chargers. He was not alone.



It was quite the scene to say the least.

Only this time, it was different.


Rather than sit on the bench, **Colin Kaepernick** took a knee during the national anthem amongst his teammates at Thursday night's preseason game against the San Diego Chargers.

He was also joined by teammate **Eric Reid**.

"It was amazing," Kaepernick said of Reid's involvement. "Eric and I had many conversations and he approached me and said, 'I

support what you're doing.' He said, 'I support what your message is. Let's think about how we can do this together.'"

Former Green Beret and University of Texas longsnapper Nate Boyer wrote a letter to Kaepernick earlier in the week to share his feelings on Kaepernick's mission. Boyer traveled to San Diego to meet with both players on Thursday. **Kaepernick invited Boyer to be his guest** and stand by his side during the anthem on San Francisco's sideline.





Nate Boyer 
@NateBoyer37

[Follow](#)

If just listening to one man speak can change his "stance" on what the anthem might mean to him, imagine what a world can do together. One 

11:14 PM - 1 Sep 2016

  301  637

The 49ers quarterback wanted to be clear. Their choice to kneel during the national anthem was to help continue the conversation about improving social issues in America and not about disrespecting the country's armed forces. Kaepernick later applauded members of the military who were celebrated during San Diego's military appreciation night. He also stood during a performance of "God Bless America."

"I'm not anti-American," Kaepernick said. "I love America. I love people. That's why I'm doing this. I want to help make America better. I think having these conversations helps everybody have a better understanding of where everybody else is coming from. Those conversations are important to have because the better we understand each other, the better we know each other, the better we can deal and communicate with each other which ultimately puts everyone in a better position."

Both players further advanced the important dialogue on Thursday night.



Bucci Mane 
@Buccigross

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Outstanding post game news conference from Colin Kaepernick tonight. Thoughtful. Smart. Sincere. Poised.

1:09 AM - 2 Sep 2016

  60  154

"We talked about it at length and we wanted to make sure that the message we're trying to send isn't lost with the action that is coming along with it," Kaepernick said.

Reid didn't commit to kneeling for future anthems. But he didn't want his teammate to be alone in making this type of statement with the entire sports world watching.

"I just wanted to show my support for him and the cause that he is trying to bring awareness to," Reid said. "I had an in depth conversation with him before the game, and he saw a lot of backlash about him sitting down and he wanted to make it clear that his message wasn't to disrespect the military or to disrespect the national anthem in any way.

"He decided to change his position by taking a knee to be more respectful to the military and national anthem but still wanted to bring awareness to the issues that he believes are in this country, and I whole-heartedly agree that there are issues in this country.

"I think it is very brave of him to continue to stand up for what he believes in while also changing his physical position to be respectful to the military."

Kaepernick made it clear that he's not against the military.

"I realize that men and women of the military go out and sacrifice their lives and put themselves in harm's way for my freedom of speech and my freedom in this country and my freedom to take a knee," he said. "I have the utmost respect for them."

In addition to kneeling during pregame festivities, Kaepernick announced that he's taking his peaceful protests one step further. He's going to donate the first million dollars he makes this season to select organizations that support social equality.

Several players on the 49ers shared how Kaepernick's stance has brought the team closer together. It created meaningful dialogue between teammates outside the normal conversations in the hallways and locker room.

"I don't think it's a distraction at all," Kaepernick said. "Like we talked about earlier, it's really brought our team closer. We've gotten closer to each other on a personal level. We understand each other better so we go out on the field and fight for each other on the field because we know we are fighting for the same thing.

"I think we showed tonight that our team is willing to fight for each other. We're willing to go out and play hard, and it hasn't distracted us."

The 49ers won the game, 31-21.

But nobody was really discussing the final score.



Jim Trotter 
@JimTrotter_NFL



One of my takeaways from talks with players and coaches from BOTH teams last night: the support for Kaepernick's message runs plenty deep.

8:38 AM - 2 Sep 2016

  302  345

Code 5, justification, diminish strategy




San Francisco 49ers

September 7 at 9:11pm · 🌐



"I have to wait my time and work. I've been in this position before." -
Kaepernick

Read more from Kap and the coordinators before Week 1 



Notebook: Colin Kaepernick Will 'Continue to Work,' Coordinators Preview Matchup with Rams

Colin Kaepernick discussed his backup role on the San Francisco 49ers depth chart on Wednesday.

WWW.49ERS.COM

Code 8, reminder, bolstering strategy

The quote shows the 49ers are trying to remind the public the good characteristics of Kaepernick as a player during the controversies surrounding his boycott of the national anthem.

<http://www.49ers.com/news/article-2/Notebook-Colin-Kaepernick-Will-Continue-to-Work-Coordinator-Preview-Matchup-with-Rams/98e3df9b-4aa4-43fd-b3c2-9da3f677987b>

Colin Kaepernick discussed his backup role on the San Francisco 49ers depth chart on Wednesday.

"I have to wait my time and work," said Kaepernick, who will be San Francisco's No. 2 passer behind **Blaine Gabbert** in Week 1. "I've been in this position before."

Kaepernick pointed to his rise to prominence in 2012 when he began the year as Alex Smith's backup. Kaepernick led the 49ers to Super Bowl XLIV and was the team's Week 1 starter for the next three seasons.

Year No. 6 for Kaepernick has been different. A trio of offseason surgeries and shoulder fatigue midway through training camp put him behind in the competition to start Sept. 12 against the Los Angeles Rams on "Monday Night Football."

Even so, Kaepernick finished the preseason strong, completing 11-of-18 passes for 103 yards in a road victory over the San Diego Chargers.

Offensive coordinator Curtis Modkins said the performance bodes well moving into the regular season.

"Kap has a history of being really good in this league and doing some good things," the OC said. "I think in this league you need more than one good quarterback, and we're very fortunate that we do have him and Blaine."

Kaepernick, too, was complimentary of Gabbert, but the competitor in Kaepernick still wants to be on the field.

"He studies hard. He works hard," Kaepernick said of the man he'll be backing up. "That's ultimately Chip's decision. All I can do is focus on myself at this point and make sure I'm getting better."

As San Francisco's backup quarterback, practice reps will be pivotal for Kaepernick now that he's regained full strength in his right arm.

"I think I'll continue to improve and continue to get into my stride," Kaepernick said. "It's really only been about a month since I've been on the field, so there's still some progressing to do, still some strength to get back, but I'll continue to work."



Code 8, reminder, bolstering strategy

It is a deliberate move to make no mention of the national anthem crisis. The intent of this news release is to remind the public the positive characteristics of Colin Kaepernick by highlighting how he overcame hardships in the past and his leadership skills.

“Kap has a history of being really good in this league and doing some good things.”



San Francisco 49ers

September 8 at 6:08pm · 🌐

Statement from Jed York, 49ers CEO: 49ers Foundation will contribute \$1 Million to the cause of improving racial and economic inequality and fostering communication and collaboration between law enforcement and the communities they serve here in the Bay Area.



Statement from 49ers CEO Jed York

49ers Foundation to partner with Silicon Valley Community Foundation and the San Francisco Foundation.

WWW.49ERS.COM

Code 6, compensation, rebuild strategy

<http://www.49ers.com/news/article-2/Statement-from-49ers-CEO-Jed-York/e2199ba8-0bd0-48ab-8f28-8de91a1d5cb0>

Statement from 49ers CEO Jed York

Posted Sep 8, 2016

49ers Staff

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The CEO of the San Francisco 49ers announced a significant donation to help communication and collaboration between law enforcement and Bay Area communities.

"Today, I am committing that the 49ers Foundation will contribute \$1 Million to the cause of improving racial and economic inequality and fostering communication and collaboration between law enforcement and the communities they serve here in the Bay Area.

We are partnering with the Silicon Valley Community Foundation and the San Francisco Foundation in this effort. We have chosen to work with these two organizations because they have proven track records of effecting change in the face of challenging problems and have the collective reach to make the greatest impact. Silicon Valley Community Foundation is the largest community foundation in the world, managing \$7.3 billion in assets and more than 1,800 philanthropic funds globally. The San Francisco Foundation has served the people of the Bay Area since 1948, almost as long as the 49ers franchise. We are excited to work with these two renowned foundations over the coming months to develop a giving plan to help our community find unifying solutions to these pressing issues."

Code 6, compensation, rebuild strategy



San Francisco 49ers

September 9 at 11:23pm · 🌐

"Ultimately the goal is to get in the community and make change."

Eric Reid gives his perspective on the 49ers Foundation pledge of \$1 million. <http://49rs.co/4hh2HR>



Eric Reid Reacts to 49ers \$1 Million Donation

The 49ers starting safety commended the organization for taking action in a growing effort to make real change with the goal of reaching social equality in America.

WWW.49ERS.COM

<http://www.49ers.com/video/videos/Eric-Reid-React-to-49ers-1-Million-Donation/21b3657d-2509-4b6a-bdad-912b57d56262>

Code 9, ingratiation, bolstering strategy



San Francisco 49ers

2 hrs · 🌐

A huge thank you to Santa Clara PD and Santa Clara FD for opening our locker room doors tonight!



👍 Like

💬 Comment

➦ Share

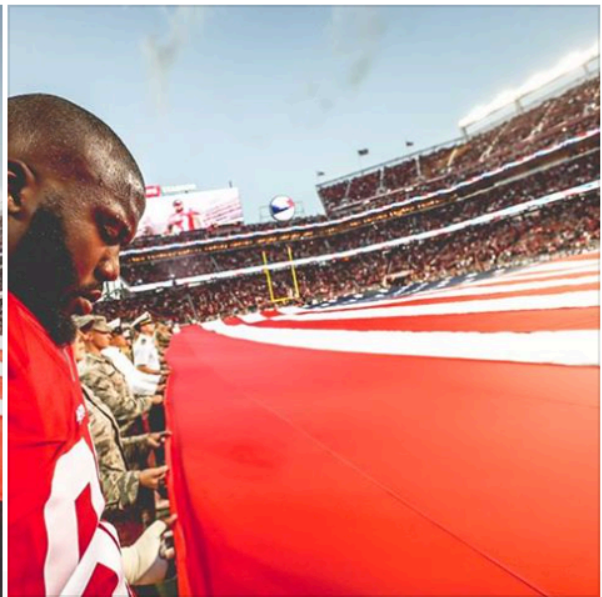
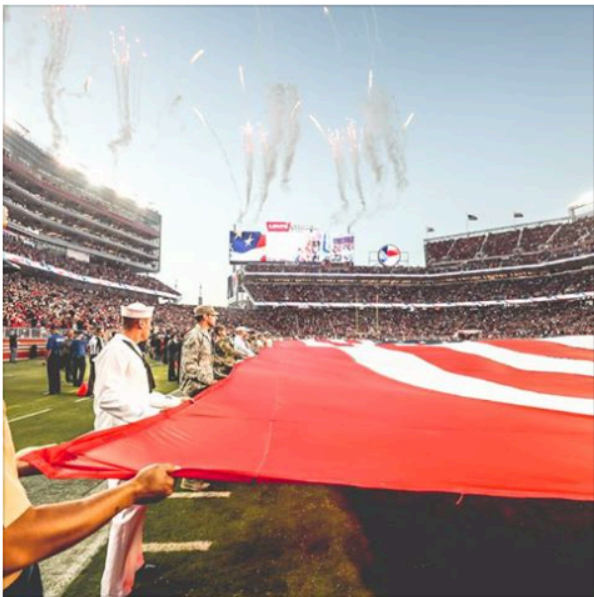
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Top Comments ▾

September 12, 2016

Code 9, ingratiation, bolstering strategy

A perfect night for football. 🙌



September 12, 2016



September 12, 2016

Code 9, ingratiation, bolstering strategy



San Francisco 49ers

22 hrs · 🌐

The Faithful were out in full force Monday night at Levi's Stadium!

See if you're in the photo gallery <http://49rs.co/CVOPVO>



49ers-Rams: Best Fan Images

View the best photos of the 49ers Faithful from the team's season opener against the Los Angeles.

WWW.49ERS.COM

September 13, 2016

Code 9, ingratiation, bolstering strategy



San Francisco 49ers

September 28 at 9:30am · 🌐

"But once again, I'm always going to be prepared, always ready to put it on the line for this team."

Niners Notebook: <http://49rs.co/iQQw41>



Notes Ahead of #DALvsSF

49ers players spoke to the media in the locker room following practice on Tuesday

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Code 8, reminder, bolstering strategy



San Francisco 49ers

October 11 at 8:45pm · 🌐



"I'm ready to step on that field. I'm ready to play. I'm itching to get out there." <http://49rs.co/xHiMCI>



49ers QB Colin Kaepernick Eager for First Start in Chip Kelly's Offense

Colin Kaepernick learned that he will start for the San Francisco 49ers on the road in Week 6 against the Buffalo Bills. "I'm excited about it," Kaepernick told...

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Code 8, reminder, bolstering strategy

<http://www.49ers.com/news/article-2/49ers-QB-Colin-Kaepernick-Eager-for-First-Start-in-Chip-Kellys-Offense/864e0915-a196-4277-aacc-7c7f610f2129>

49ers QB Colin Kaepernick Eager for First Start in Chip Kelly's Offense

Posted Oct 11, 2016



Joe Fann
Team Reporter
49ers.com
@Joe_Fann

San Francisco will have a new starting quarterback in Week 6 against the Buffalo Bills, and Kaepernick is ready to make the most of the opportunity.

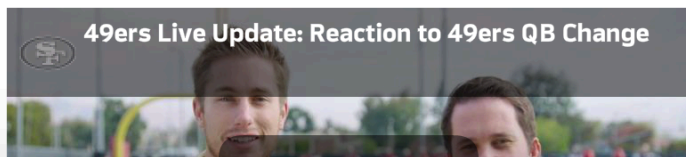


Chip Kelly kept it brief when he met with his top two quarterbacks on Tuesday morning.

Colin Kaepernick learned that he will start for the San Francisco 49ers on the road in Week 6 against the Buffalo Bills.

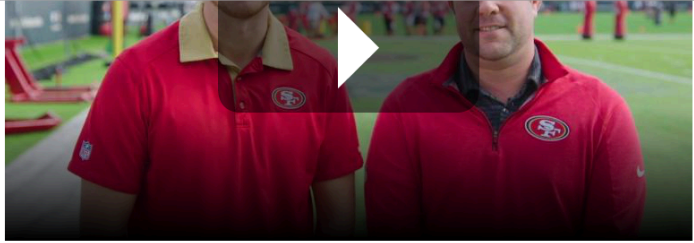
"I'm excited about it," Kaepernick told reporters after practice. "I'm ready to go, hoping I can bring more to this team and try to get us a win this Sunday."

For every promotion in the NFL, however, there is a corresponding demotion, and **Blaine Gabbert** was informed that he'd been relegated to the No. 2 spot on



the depth chart. Gabbert has totaled 890 passing yards, five touchdowns and six interceptions through five games in 2016.

"It sucks. I don't like it. I don't like not playing," Gabbert said. "I'll be very forward about that. But, at the same time, I'm still going to come into work the same way I've always come into work the three years that I've been here."



It will be Kaepernick's first regular season start since last November as the sixth-year pro hopes to be the remedy for the 49ers 1-4 start. In eight starts in 2015, the signal-caller threw for 1,615 yards, six touchdowns and five interceptions with a 2-6 record. Kaepernick was later placed on the Injured Reserve List with knee, shoulder and hand injuries.

Much has been made about the quarterback's physical condition following his three offseason surgeries, but Kaepernick assured reporters that he is 100 percent and ready for the opportunity.

"I've always been confident," Kaepernick said. "I'm ready to step on that field. I'm ready to play. I'm itching to get out there."

Kaepernick did start one exhibition contest against the San Diego Chargers in August. He played the entire first half of the preseason finale and led the offense on a pair of scoring drives. The quarterback finished 11-of-18 passing for 103 yards and another 38 yards on the ground.

That game experience in Kelly's offense could prove to be valuable on Sunday.

"It's always an advantage when you can step on the field, in the system and get those reps," Kaepernick said.

Practice snaps will also be flipped this week, with Kaepernick seeing the majority of the work with the first-team offense. The quarterback received positive reviews from **Torrey Smith** after Tuesday's session.

"He did a good job today. I think it's a good start to the week," Smith said. "I think he was sharp today. We made some big plays. He was consistent."

Smith also noted that Kaepernick's spirits seem improved in 2016. The quarterback was subsequently asked if there was validity to the receiver's claim.

"I think I've always been happy, but more than anything, I'm comfortable," Kaepernick said. "I'm at peace with myself, with my relationships and with everything that's going on in my life."



Kaepernick acknowledged that there have been ongoing discussions between his representation and the 49ers front office to restructure his contract. The quarterback added that his focus is solely on Sunday's contest against the Bills, and that he feels no pressure to reach a solution regarding his contract.

"It's a great opportunity to go out and win some games," Kaepernick said. "That's ultimately what the goal is."

Code 8, reminder, bolstering strategy



San Francisco 49ers

October 11 at 6:18pm · 🌐



"I'm excited and ready to go."

Watch as Colin Kaepernick speaks with the media for the first time after being named the 49ers starting QB vs. the Bills. <http://49rs.co/IJ0Rpm>



Colin Kaepernick: 'I'm Excited and Ready to Go'

The San Francisco 49ers quarterback met the media for the first time after being named the starter for the Week 6 game against the Buffalo Bills.

WWW.49ERS.COM

<http://www.49ers.com/video/videos/Colin-Kaepernick-Im-Excited-and-Ready-to-Go/4745aebb-4247-4acc-9022-7542bc9be367>

Code 8, reminder, bolstering strategy



San Francisco 49ers

Yesterday at 12:41am · 🌐



The amazing story of how Colin Kaepernick crossed paths with a free camp for medically challenged kids.

Watch the full episode of #TheFaithful here: <http://49rs.co/A1DXRa>



The Faithful: The Heart Warriors

Watch the newest episode of The Faithful on 49ers.com

WWW.49ERS.COM

October 16, 2016

<http://www.49ers.com/video/videos/The-Faithful-The-Heart-Warriors/c3bf0f52-a3cb-4eaa-82cd-18e8ab884927>

Code 8, reminder, bolstering strategy



San Francisco 49ers 🌟 feeling excited at 📍 University of Phoenix Stadium.

November 13 at 2:18pm · Glendale, AZ · 🌐

Kaepernick & the Faithful #SFvsAZ 🏈



Code 8, reminder, bolstering strategy