

A STUDY OF THE KANSAS CITY CHIEFS CRISIS COMMUNICATION DURING
THE NATIONAL ANTHEM PROTESTS

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Master of Arts

by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

A STUDY OF THE KANSAS CITY CHIEFS CRISIS COMMUNICATION DURING
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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my loving and devoted parents. I just know my purpose in life is to be your daughter and I hope I've made you proud. I am incredibly lucky to be your only child.

This is also for my grandparents, who all would have been so proud of me in this moment but are no longer with us, either physically or cognitively.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the background of crisis communication and corporate social responsibility as they relate to practices in the sport industry. By building off the literature review, the study here aims to further research done in the area where crisis communication and corporate social responsibility intersect. This study looks specifically at the Kansas City Chiefs communication practices as a result of the National Anthem Protest that impacted the National Football League during the 2016, 2017, and 2018 seasons. Qualitative research methods and Image Restoration Theory are used to answer the research questions and understand how the Chiefs used their corporate social responsibility with the military to aid their crisis communication tactics and formulate their message strategies during the National Anthem Protest. Within the data set, it was found that the Chiefs utilized the message strategy of reducing offensiveness most, and that they did not directly address or apologize for the controversy.

CRISIS COMMUNICATION AND CSR IN SPORT: HOW THE KANSAS CITY CHIEFS RESPONDED TO THE NATIONAL ANTHEM PROTESTS

The first game of the National Football League's (NFL) 2017 season began with a Thursday night game of the reigning Super Bowl Champion New England Patriots against the Kansas City Chiefs. The game started like any other, with the National Anthem, and as the camera quickly turned to Chiefs' cornerback, Marcus Peters who was down on bended knee for the duration of the song, a season of controversy returned in that instant. While Colin Kaepernick was not on any roster, the highly criticized protest he had started in the previous season to kneel during the National Anthem was back, and so was its widespread attention.

This study intends to explore the background of crisis communication and corporate social responsibility as they relate to practices in the sport industry. By looking specifically at the Kansas City Chiefs communication practices as a result of the National Anthem Protest that impacted the National Football League during the 2016, 2017, and 2018 seasons. Before an overview of the literature on crisis communication and Corporate Social Responsibility, a discussion of the significance and contribution this study provides to sports communication will be discussed next.

Significance and Contribution

The National Anthem protests began in 2016 with Colin Kaepernick, a quarterback of the San Francisco 49ers at the time. He was frustrated with the country's injustice to black men and police brutality, and therefore found it difficult to stand an honor during the anthem for his country where people of his race were treated unfairly.

During the weeks that followed the start of season more black athletes were shown kneeling during the anthem and many were later joined by some of their white teammates, coaches, and owners. Angry fan mail, tickets and parking passes to future games and threats were sent into the Chiefs front office. Some departments receiving hundreds of calls complaining about his behavior being disrespectful for the military all day long, it was clear that fans of the NFL and the Chiefs were upset by Marcus Peters and other's participation in the protests. There was a lot of work to be done to restore the public's perception of the NFL, its athletes and values. This is a study that will look at the Kansas City Chiefs communication style in support of its community outreach efforts focused on the military and law enforcement during a time of heightened sensitivity regarding the protests.

Research Goals and Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the language used before and after the height of the NFL National Anthem Protests by the Kansas City Chiefs in the promotion of their community relations efforts. Research in sport has been a topic of interest in academia because of the activity's attractiveness as entertainment and great economic power. Teams have long been trying to please fans through Corporate Social Responsibility and this study will take a closer look into just how these professional sports teams frame their community involvement as strategic, authentic, and genuine corporate responsibility during a time of crisis. The significance of this study is that less research has examined crisis communication in sport. While it does exist, the literature is limited. This research will aim to contribute to the conversation but with a combination of corporate social responsibility playing a role in crisis communication all in the field of

sport. Based on the information provided above, elements to be understood in this study include CSR, public relations, and crisis and sport communication. The literature review will provide a background of corporate social responsibility, public relations and crisis communication all specifically related to the interests and practices in professional sport organizations.

Literature Review

This literature review will provide a background on public relations, crisis communication and examples of corporate social responsibility in sport as they have been studied before. While extensive research has been conducted directly on corporate social responsibility in professional sports teams, there is less research on the public relations and crisis communication practices in the sports industry. The review aims to summarize what is understood and what has been researched on these topics in both a general and sports specific sense. It begins by providing background on both public relations and crisis communication and how the two intersect. This will be followed by the history of corporate social responsibility in sport and how these practices have been received by fans in the past. The review includes definitions of key terms, examples of concepts in practice, and what gaps are left unanswered by previous research.

Public Relations and Crisis Communication in Sport

Sport would not exist without sport communication (Hambrick, 2017). Public relations is a communication method in sport, designed to convey messages and information about the team (Șerbănică & Constantinescu, 2016). Public relations in sport has many facets, including engaging relationships with the media and fans and is used to promote sponsorship, marketing, and events (Șerbănică & Constantinescu, 2016). Public

relations tactics in sport include publications, events, sponsorship, news, speeches, public service activities and promotional items (Șerbănică & Constantinescu, 2016).

Public relations professionals in sport are no stranger to crisis communication, but less research has studied crisis communication's specific practices in sport (Manoli, 2016). For context, crises and scandals in sport have occurred more than 2000 times in the last decade (Hwang, 2017). Crisis communication occurs in the aftermath of sudden and unexpected events of either illegal or unethical implications that can cause damage to the reputation of your organization or team (W. Timothy Coombs, 2007; Hwang, 2017; Jordan & Smith, 2013; Manoli, 2016). The effect a crisis can have on the organization can also impact ticket sales and the opportunity for future revenue (Duffie, 2015). There are different suggested ways to handle a crisis, but the way a PR manager chooses to handle will vary on the situation (Manoli, 2016). Best practices for crisis communication measures taken and statements made to combat crises in sport, like CSR, are encouraged to come across to the audience as genuine and authentic (Duffie, 2015). Researchers encourage strong communication in the early stages of a crisis with key stakeholders of the organization (Jordan & Smith, 2013).

The goal of public relations in sport is to strengthen relationships with stakeholders (Șerbănică & Constantinescu, 2016), which coincides with other definitions of CSR and crisis communication. This is why public relations tactics are used to promote the CSR initiatives of teams, they have similar goals. They differ because public relations on behalf of sports teams cannot control sports news, and while many skilled professionals try, sometimes controversy takes over media coverage (Șerbănică & Constantinescu, 2016) and that is when crisis communication begins.

Theories Involved in Crisis Communication. There are a few theories involved with crisis communication that this study can use, those being Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) (W. Timothy Coombs, 2007; W. T. Coombs & Holladay, 2002) and Image Restoration Theory (Benoit, 1997). Contingency Theory of Accommodation (Cancel, Mitrook, & Cameron, 1999) is not initially relevant for this study. This theory (with contributions by University of Missouri Professor Glen Cameron) suggests a range of advocacy for the organization to accommodation of stakeholders by offering 86 factors that can influence where the organization falls on the continuum during a crisis. This theory is rather complex to apply to this study, which is immediately focused on the intersection between crisis communication and CSR, and would be better situated for a study on numerous crises for an organization. The theories of SCCT and Image Restoration propose actions taken by communicators to help themselves on behalf of an organization during a crisis and should better inform this research as it looks for clues and styles of crisis communication in action. By utilizing these theories, it should be expected to find patterns that match one of the theories as conclusions are drawn over how the Chiefs attempted to handle their newly found crisis.

Crises and the Chiefs. The Chiefs are no stranger to crisis communication, prior to Super Bowl IV, star Quarterback Len Dawson was accused of being involved in mob crimes. There was the untimely death of Mack Lee Hill in 1965 after undergoing knee surgery and the heroic and tragic death of Joe Delaney in 1983 who attempted to save two drowning children when he himself didn't know how to swim. In 2012, Jovan Belcher committed a murder-suicide (with the suicide taking place at the team's practice facility). And most recently, Kareem Hunt's release from the team after a video surfaced

showing him pushing and kicking a woman at a Cleveland hotel. While all of these were certainly crises for the team in their own ways, the National Anthem crisis was the first big social crisis the Chiefs were part of, where there were two very strong and different opinions by fans and the community. This was a racially charged crisis, whereas previous crises involved death and criminal activity. This kind of crisis required a different approach than the situations listed above, to improve fan perception, especially in the age of social media. The theories of SCCT and Image Restoration theory could provide answers on the team's decision-making strategies as they best saw fit for the National Anthem crisis.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been researched across many business formats, including that of professional sports organizations. CSR in sport was early defined by Babiak and Wolfe in their frequently cited work from 2009 which discussed internal and external factors leading to CSR decisions made with professional teams' front offices. They completed a study on CSR surrounding the Super Bowl in 2006, but their 2009 work was broader as it related to all sports. This study continues to be popular in defining CSR in its direct relation to sport as activities that increase the organization's public image without being a specific requirement of the law (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009). Researchers have examined CSR as it relates to sport, traditional sport communication, sport marketing, sport social media usage, and community relations departments. CSR is done as an attempt to minimize any negative image by doing good to create a reverse effect of a positive impact for the long term (Anagnostopoulos, Byers, & Shilbury, 2014).

These are the types of initiatives that make lasting memories for fans and are often used in conjunction with crisis communication efforts.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is known to have a number of definitions to many people in different contexts, but the varying definitions typically fall into five categories of environmental, social, economic, stakeholder, and voluntariness (Dahlsrud, 2008) and from there refer to the most optimal way to run business as it relates to the previous categories. For the purposes of this study, it will be defined as the attempt to minimize any negative image by doing good to create a reverse effect of a positive impact for the long term (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2014), which can be recognized in the NFL by their clubs' community relations departments. The ideas and actions that make up CSR are also actions used in times of crisis communication efforts. Crisis communication occurs in the aftermath of sudden and unexpected events of either illegal or unethical implications that can cause damage to the reputation of your organization or team (W. Timothy Coombs, 2007; Hwang, 2017; Jordan & Smith, 2013; Manoli, 2016).

CSR can take on many different forms, from tackling social issues through hosting events or financial contributions specific to the interests of the league or the community surrounding an individual team. Carrying out these initiatives requires a strategic approach if there are genuine motivations behind them and you want fans and stakeholders to believe it and deem them successful. Other research has conducted in-depth studies on communication tactics through teams' own media, such as content supplied on their website. Studies exist about communication methods in social media, but a few are less deeply examined.

Levels of CSR. In 2011, Filizoz and Fisne designed a pyramid to define the various levels that contribute to CSR. The four levels of the pyramid include economic responsibility, legal responsibility, ethical responsibility, and philanthropic responsibility (Filizöz & Fişne, 2011). CSR calls for meeting these expectations of fans and stakeholders and bringing people together, this should be done in an ethical manner while attempting to make an economic impact paired with efforts which will contribute to ongoing positive social impacts (DeveciOĞLu, 2017; Filizöz & Fişne, 2011). Sheth and Babiak (2010) sent surveys to franchise owners and community relations directors and discovered that most of them believed their organization participated in CSR efforts to contribute to nonprofits through financial donations and get involved in social issues, citing the ethical level as their most important level of CSR followed by legal and economic responsibilities (Sheth & Babiak, 2010). A study conducted on the Cincinnati Bengals showed that 92 percent of people expected teams in the National Football League to be socially responsible (Nichols & Gardner, 2017). These studies support Filizoz and Fisne's pyramid for understanding what motivates CSR, but just surface level, standard playbook participation in CSR is not always going to be enough for stakeholders. They're looking for that genuine and authentic approach, to know the motivations are pure.

Strategy and Tactics involved in CSR. Two sub-categories involved in CSR are Corporate Community Involvement (CCI) and Community Relations Initiatives (CRI). These are the strategic actions taken to fulfill the idea of being corporately socially responsible (L. Kihl, Babiak, & Tainsky, 2014). The idea of CCI involves partnerships with nonprofit organization they hope to tackle societal issues with (L. Kihl et al., 2014;

L. A. Kihl, Tainsky, Babiak, & Bang, 2014) and CRI are the actions and events teams use to promote their franchise and position themselves as socially responsible.

Some of the resources teams use to promote their CRI include “ticket donations; signage; facilities (stadia, arenas); events; access to media, suite holders, vendors, and sponsors; and the professional staff of the team (lawyers, trainers, accountants, and owners),” (Sheth & Babiak, 2010, p. 436). Sometimes CRI happens before a team even gets to town, when a team is granted relocation or a city gets an expansion team (Sheth & Babiak, 2010). In conjunction with those resources, examples of initiatives include league wide programs like NBA Cares and Major League Baseball’s Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities (Alonso & O’Shea, 2012; Filizöz & Fişne, 2011; L. Kihl et al., 2014; Sheth & Babiak, 2010), team trips and exclusive merchandise (Brown, 2016; Nichols & Gardner, 2017), use of players (Sheth & Babiak, 2010), and financial and in-kind contributions (Heinze, Soderstrom, & Zdroik, 2014; Inoue, Kent, & Lee, 2011; Sheth & Babiak, 2010). These examples are the familiar and recognizable elements that come together to form CSR as we know it on behalf of teams and larger organizations. Despite the use of the word corporate, the idea and goal of CSR is often carried out individually by team members.

Celebrities and CSR. Community involvement and social responsibility are not just limited to teams. Professional teams have the benefit of using celebrities (their athletes) to help their mission spread awareness of the social good the organization is doing. Many professional athletes have their own foundations, which are sometimes recognized as 501(c)(3) organizations by the IRS (Babiak, Mills, Tainsky, & Juravich, 2012). In fact, in 2009, 509 professional athletes had foundations (Babiak et al., 2012).

Players are known to be involved in philanthropy outside of team and league initiatives for a variety of reasons, including altruistic attitudes, and other motivations like tax benefits, improving personal image, improving self-esteem, or just offering a fun activity for themselves and other athletes to participate in (Babiak et al., 2012). Some of the athletes even said that because of their rough childhoods and upbringings they felt “morally and personally obligated to help others who were less fortunate,” (Babiak et al., 2012, p. 169). In addition to their personal motivations, many of them recognize the benefit of having a celebrity status, and with that comes support from donors simply because of the athlete and their affiliation to a team (Babiak et al., 2012), not necessarily solidarity with the social cause, unlike how most nonprofit organizations must rely on the social issue as the sole connector with donors. Outside of sometimes being required to participate in community relations and philanthropy (Babiak et al., 2012; Sheth & Babiak, 2010), it is also beneficial for professional athletes to do so, in order to counteract scrutiny the media puts on them. Their community involvement can improve what the fans think about them (Babiak et al., 2012). Athlete likability is important because not only are they representing themselves, they are also representing a team, a city and a league (Babiak et al., 2012). These initiatives taken in support of CSR efforts should look fairly similar to what should be seen in examples of the Chiefs communication during this research. The use of players, activities and giveaways will be clear examples of attempted CSR, whether it be successful or not in aiding crisis communication. The next part of this literature reviews assesses what has been done in CSR before and how these practices are received by stakeholders to the organization.

Misuses of CSR: Difficulties with Execution of CSR strategies. The expectation for CSR by fans and stakeholders should be taken seriously (DeveciOĞLu, 2017; Filizöz & Fişne, 2011; Lacey & Kennett-Hensel, 2016). Consumers interested in the organization's philanthropic endeavors are really looking for that genuine community involvement (Ratten, 2010), which has proved to be difficult for some organizations in the following situations. Teams have struggled with getting their endeavors to come across as authentic, especially during the Super Bowl in Detroit (Babiak & Wolfe, 2006). Community initiatives surrounding the Super Bowl are typically known for making a positive impact in the city it takes over each year, but that is not always the case. Both Jacksonville and Detroit's 2005 and 2006 Super Bowl community efforts were criticized for having an ingenuine approach to helping the homeless population. A shelter was opened for the homeless in Jacksonville but was quickly closed the day after the Super Bowl, and in Detroit groups outside of the NFL were forced to host a Super Bowl watch party where police were instructed to call these outside organizations to help persuade homeless people to attend the party and get off the streets (Babiak & Wolfe, 2006). This is not genuine CSR. As previously defined, CSR is to make a lasting, positive impact in a community (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2014). These two cities' attempt to aid the homeless was ingenuine because it was only surrounding the week of the Super Bowl in an attempt to make the city appear more desirable while thousands of Super Bowl goers visited the city. These examples of poorly received CSR will help the research as they provide an understanding to what types of ingenuine techniques and initiatives do not help improve a team's image, let alone their image following a crisis.

Successful CSR Strategies by Sports Teams. While teams have struggled with authentic and pure CSR, it is possible as demonstrated by the following accounts.

Successful CSR is accomplished through meeting those expectations consumers and stakeholders have of a business and team to act ethically and philanthropically (Filizöz & Fişne, 2011).

According to Filizoz & Fisne (2011) successful CSR is typically accomplished when:

sport related bodies use their unique position to help people based on their ethical and philanthropic responsibilities. These bodies address issues including assisting vulnerable, disadvantaged or underprivileged children, giving back to the communities where they were raised. They establish partnerships with non-profit organizations and fundraise to highlight the social impact that sport can have on issues such as peace promotion, antidiscrimination, social integration, education, housing, poverty, malnutrition, health-related causes. They also encourages [sic] people to donate to these programs through a variety of different ways and these efforts generate awareness and raise funds for important social issues, providing opportunities for a better life in communities worldwide (Filizöz & Fişne, 2011, p. 1416).

The NBA. The National Basketball Association is often mentioned as being one of the best professional sport leagues in conducting CSR well and in a genuine manner (Filizöz & Fişne, 2011; Kilgore, 2017; Lacey & Kennett-Hensel, 2016; Mondello & Gordon, 2015). These studies spoke highly of the league-wide NBA Cares initiative, which addresses “important social issues,” including physical wellness, education, living

green, military appreciation, and promoting inclusion of all backgrounds and demographics (NBA, 2018). These branches are also included in the WNBA, too (NBA, 2018). Peters once said that “sport has become a barometer of our cultural values – both good and bad,” (Peters, 2017, p. 28). This is displayed in the initiatives the leagues try to make apparent in their league-wide programs. The NBA has also been praised for its fan experience both league-wide, and specifically with the Orlando Magic (Mondello & Gordon, 2015). Some of the fan experience was tied to the workings of the community outreach team, one mother said they went to a game because her daughter begged her to go to a game after meeting the mascot at an Orlando Magic outreach event was held at her school (Mondello & Gordon, 2015). The NBA created a welcoming social environment for fans near and far through their social media tactics that allow for more video sharing than the restricting policies of the NFL (Kilgore, 2017). They use Twitter to promote the league’s star players, many of which are national celebrities. The WNBA was the first league to specifically market to their overwhelmingly LGBT fanbase through Pride nights and including lesbian couples on their in-game kiss cams (Mumcu & Lough, 2017). The importance of what the NBA has done through CSR is that it implies good practices can lead to increased attendance.

The National Football League. The NBA is not the sole organization to demonstrate that CSR is actually possible. The National Football League (NFL) has also successfully relied on many CSR strategies. Take, for example, the Cincinnati Bengals, who were praised in 2014 surrounding their efforts to support practice squad member Devon Still when his daughter was diagnosed with pediatric cancer (Nichols & Gardner, 2017). Nichols and Gardner’s study gives an extensive history of the CSR struggles the

Bengals had previously faced due to Owner Mike Brown's lack of care in making a positive name for the team in the community (2017). He is infamously known as one of the "worst" owners in the league, and did little to help himself look better or the team even slightly socially responsible (Nichols & Gardner, 2017). Supporting Still was a clear chance for the Bengals to turn their public image around and tackle more of the philanthropic approach to supporting Cincinnati and its players. The compassion the team showed for Still appeared genuine, which led to skyrocketing jersey sales well beyond what the team originally anticipated possible for an athlete who was cut from the team and barely made the practice squad (Nichols & Gardner, 2017). The Bengals let Still remain part of the team via the practice squad in order to keep his health benefits so he could pay for his daughter's medical expenses (Nichols & Gardner, 2017). This drastic change to their CSR proved beneficial for the team's image that season.

Another NFL team to successfully incorporate CSR strategies is the Detroit Lions. This team also made large changes in their approach to genuine CSR, but they already had a foundation of respected CSR traditions to build off of (Heinze et al., 2014). The Lions were the first NFL team to establish a community relations department (Heinze et al., 2014), and more recently conducted a large restructuring of the department to make their approach to CSR more strategic. Doing this after the city of Detroit filed for bankruptcy allowed for the Lions' efforts to be more focused in key areas of the city where it needed the most assistance by focusing on community health, wellness and development in what they call "Living for the City" (Heinze et al., 2014). By adopting this new model the Lions cut down the organizations they had supported by 80 percent (Heinze et al., 2014) to make larger, more impactful contributions to the organizations

that now fit best into “Living for the City.” Outside of the “Living for the City” initiative, the Lions chose to still support less than 10 “legacy organizations” that they had long-standing relationships with but did not fit into the new model of operations (Heinze et al., 2014). This new approach chosen by the Lions falls right into the definition of CSR, making a long-lasting positive impact. This can easier be achieved when a team decides to support fewer organizations for larger donations, rather than several organizations with smaller donations, which is what the Lions did. The authenticity of this restructured, strategic approach was applauded as people realized their efforts were genuine, especially as they saw integration of the new initiative in other areas of the team’s business operations with marketing plans and game day production (Heinze et al., 2014). This section on well received CSR contains many examples of times teams have succeeded in their efforts for the community and will aide this research for what has historically done well and has been well received to improve or restore the image of a team.

Promotion of Corporate Social Responsibility

Social media are another tool of sport communication, which have become increasingly popular over the last decade. There are over 2 billion users of social networks across the world (Hull & Kim, 2016). Sports franchises can communicate more now than ever before; with the creation of social media, teams can self-promote more than they could have when the leagues were created. Every professional sport team has a Twitter and has linked it to the homepage of their own website (Gibbs, O’Reilly, & Brunette, 2014). Teams have the capabilities to communicate directly with the fans that follow them on various social media accounts. Over 2,400 professional sports teams in North America alone have combined more than 140 million followers, with the Los

Angeles Lakers in the lead of followers as of 2013 (Gibbs et al., 2014). Because of the direct followers teams have on their social media accounts, they are able to have better direct communication with fans through social media promotion than just hoping the traditional news reach of papers and broadcast reaches the same demographic of people.

Social Media. With the analytics Facebook and Twitter provide, teams can get an exact idea of how many times their post was viewed and interacted with, rather than traditional media reach estimates. Social media are not just for teams to showcase what they are doing to enhance their CSR, it's also available for athletes to promote their own foundations. Some sports agencies even require that an athlete establishes a foundation before they will take them on as a client (Babiak et al., 2012), further driving home the idea of genuine CSR and the importance communicating your community involvement. Although, a lesson about social media promotion of CSR could still be learned by teams.

Social Media and Major League Baseball. In 2016, Hull and Kim conducted a study on how Major League Baseball teams were using Instagram to display their CSR efforts and analyze how followers engaged with those posts. They looked at each MLB team's most recent 50 photos, and found that less than 4 percent of posts were highlighting community efforts, and that eight teams didn't even have a post about anything related to their CSR in their most recent posts (Hull & Kim, 2016). Furthermore, they found that these posts had much less engagement than other general posts about the team and players, the two posts with the fewest comments (one of which had none) and three of the ten least liked photos of the 1500 post sample were posts about charitable initiatives (Hull & Kim, 2016). These research findings demonstrated that MLB fans likely are not interested in seeing posts about CSR on Instagram. If it is true

that both fans expect their favorite teams to be socially responsible, and fans are uninterested in seeing posts about these efforts, there must be a fault line somewhere in communication and message delivery preferences.

Despite the findings, Hull and Kim's conclusion does advocate for social media coordinators to still post about this information, as it can still bring awareness to the community and heighten fans' team perceptions simply for exposure, despite low engagement (Hull & Kim, 2016). In 2017, Hull continued his studies with other scholars on MLB and its connection to Instagram. They found then that fans did not find community initiatives to be less genuine when they were exposed to it through a team's own internal media than if they were to see it from an external, third-party source (Joon Kyoung, Ott, Hull, & Minhee, 2017). The significance of this is that "exposure to a CSR activity will increase attitudes toward the team, as well as several behavioral intentions including game attendance intention, purchase intention, intention to consume the team's media content and WOM intention," and that a team's self-promotion of CCI will not have a negative effect on the consumer finding their actions as ingenuine (Joon Kyoung et al., 2017, p. 522). While exposure of CSR initiatives can increase attitudes, another study was not so sure about the benefits of financial performance attached to it.

The Controversy: The National Anthem Protest

To recap the event, Colin Kaepernick started a protest during the National Anthem prior to football games in which he would kneel to protest social injustice in the country. The protest spread rapidly among players within the league and continued to be impactful for a few seasons.

During the first two games of 2016 preseason football, Colin Kaepernick remained seated for the National Anthem. Hardly anyone noticed until a photo was tweeted of him during the third game. The intention of the protest was to combat police brutality and racial injustice in America, but it was interpreted by audiences to be offensive to those who have served in the nation's military. After discussing the matter with a military veteran, Kaepernick and the veteran decided that kneeling would be a more appropriate way to protest while still showing respect, as kneeling has long been a sign of respect for persons in many different situations. It was when the kneeling began that his first teammate joined him in the protest. Marcus Peters, cornerback for the Chiefs first joined in by raising a fist during the anthem on September 11, 2016. The movement quickly spread across the league, gaining support from other athletes each week for the next several weeks.

The 2017 season began as 2016 had ended. Players were kneeling in the preseason as they had for all of 2016, although one was missing. The founder of the movement, Kaepernick, was not to be found on a single NFL roster all season. On the night of the NFL season opener the Chiefs were playing Thursday Night Football against the Patriots. The anthem was televised, and Marcus Peters was shown kneeling, sparking outrage from opposers of the protest. The Chiefs front office was flooded with calls the following day complaining about his behavior. A falsified letter claiming to be written by Chiefs Chairman and CEO Clark Hunt was released on social media condemning the behavior. Threats, hate mail, videos of Chiefs merchandise being burned were sent to the front office along with tickets and parking passes with letters claiming they would never watch the NFL or support the Chiefs again. The Fan Experience department received on

average 400 calls each day complaining about the protest and its disrespect to the military. Later in the season ESPN would choose to televise the coin toss and go to commercial during the anthem for games broadcast from their network. This observation led to the development of the main research question:

RQ1: To what extent will the Kansas City Chiefs public relations respond to backlash and the National Anthem protest? Specifically, will there be evidence of CSR strategies in the handling of the event?

In September of 2017, President Donald Trump responded to the protests saying, “Wouldn’t you love to see one of these NFL owners, when somebody disrespects our flag, to say, ‘Get that son of a bitch off the field right now, out, he’s fired!’” (Stites, 2018). This garnered a response from the NFL, NFL Players Association (NFLPA), and current and former players. The following Sunday saw the largest increase in player protest participation yet, with entire teams staying in the locker room for the anthem and more athletes taking a knee on the field (Stites, 2018). In October, Kaepernick filed a grievance for collusion to keep him out of the league against NFL owners (Services, 2017). Just a day later, a meeting was held by the NFL with owners, a select group of players, and the NFLPA to discuss the protests and perhaps create a new rule requiring that players stand for the anthem. While opinions differed, no rule was created or voted on at that meeting.

In May of 2018, the NFL announced that it had created a policy allowing for players to remain in the locker room for the anthem, but if they were to be on the field they must “show respect,” (Stites, 2018). Not quite two months later the NFL and

NFLPA release a joint statement saying there would be no rules enforced regarding the anthem for the upcoming season.

Days before the first regular season game of 2018, Nike released a campaign featuring Kaepernick with the copy reading “Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything.” Alluding to his initiation of the protests which presumably resulted in his unemployment. Consumers who had different beliefs took offense to it thinking it implied Kaepernick had made more a sacrifice than servicepeople. Almost immediately people were sharing their thoughts on social media, with opposers sharing footage of them destroying their Nike apparel and pledging to never purchase from the brand again.

Even with the revival of protest discussions because of the Nike campaign and there being no policy in place there was hardly a need for one as the 2018 season began quietly compared to the end of the previous season. While some players did continue to protest, participation was down from where it had been just less than a year beforehand. President Trump was not vocal about the protest at the start of this season and many players had taken to active community involvement to help make a change (Clarke, 2018). Protests in this season continued to be of dwindling interest in the media as the public conversation and player participation slowed down, but the damage was reputations and loyalties was done.

Summary of Literature

To summarize the literature and research questions, public relations and crisis communication are multifaceted, as there have been nearly countless crises in sport of the last several years there needs to be several tactics to effectively handle each situation.

Engaging with fans and the media through various tactics can keep stakeholders happy and manage the organizations reputation amid a crisis. Ways to handle crises vary among professionals and situations, but best practices advocate for telling the truth and use of genuine and empathetic language. Public relations and crisis communication efforts in sport aim to strengthen relationships with stakeholders and the image of the organization. Practices must be carefully managed, as one should always be preparing for a crisis.

While CSR and public relations in sport has been studied by many scholars, the literature does not provide much insight into how exactly teams use their public relations and crisis communication strategies to directly (and maybe even subtly) address their genuine CSR efforts through the media. There are greater case studies about CSR efforts themselves, rather than how public relations techniques are used to promote them. Many studies have been conducted over social media usage by teams, specifically including CSR promotion on Instagram and Twitter, but there is a gap in research on other forms of public relations methods. The literature has left unanswered how professional teams utilize message strategies during a crisis to effectively position themselves as being conductors of genuine CSR, this observation led to the second research question:

RQ2: What type of crisis communication message strategies do the Chiefs utilize on their website to convey CSR during a crisis?

The literature above provided a background on the definition of sport communication and CSR, how it is conducted by various teams, and how they use these activities to appear genuine but also act as a self-promotion tool through effective public relations and crisis communication practices.

Research in sport has been a topic of interest in academia because of the activity's attractiveness as entertainment and great economic power. Teams have long been trying to please fans through CSR. This study will take a closer look at how professional sports teams utilize crisis communication strategies to promote their CCI as strategic, genuine and beneficial to the communities they are part of. CSR serves as a great crisis communication opportunity to enhance their image both as an athletic team on the field and community team off the field. This literature review and previous research have led to the following questions.

- **RQ1: To what extent will the Kansas City Chiefs public relations respond to backlash and the National Anthem protest? Specifically, will there be evidence of CSR strategies in the handling of the event?**
- **RQ2: What type of crisis communication message strategies do the Chiefs utilize on their website to convey CSR during a crisis?**

Based on the literature examined above, it would be safe to assume that the teams position themselves in a genuine and favorable manner, but this study will focus specifically on how the Kansas City Chiefs language in content available on their website to promote their CSR specifically as it related to stakeholders in the National Anthem Protest crisis. Textual analysis would be the most beneficial method to conduct this study because other studies on CSR in sport are more often conducted through quantitative methods, as discovered by conducting the literature review on this topic of study. This creates a gap in knowledge due to the lack of qualitative studies and analysis in the field, as opposed to the more common methods of quantitative research on CSR in sport. A direct analysis of their articles and press releases will better provide answers, rather than

interviewing staff who created the content, creating opportunity for bias and stretched truths in their responses.

Research Design and Methodology

Understanding how professional teams use CSR efforts in conjunction with crisis communication will be beneficial for anyone interested in sport communication specifically surrounding CSR and crisis communication. The best way to accomplish the goals of this study was through a textual analysis of content directly from the Kansas City Chiefs to answer the research questions that are as follows:

- RQ1: To what extent will the Kansas City Chiefs public relations respond to backlash and the National Anthem protest? Specifically, will there be evidence of CSR strategies in the handling of the event?
- RQ2: What type of crisis communication message strategies do the Chiefs utilize on their website to convey CSR during a crisis?

Method Justification

This study was conducted through textual analysis because its goal was to understand how the Kansas City Chiefs communicated their own CSR efforts through methods of crisis communication. Fursich said that textual analysis is a favored method for those studying media content (Fursich, 2009). Using textual analysis to understand the team's communication style allowed the research to find patterns within the text that otherwise may not come to light through other methods. Phillipov (2013) said that textual analysis "can improve, rather than weaken, our understanding of popular media and culture,"

(Phillipov 2013, p. 211) and that is exactly what was needed of this study, to improve the understanding of sport crisis communication as it relates to community involvement and social responsibility. Phillipov also says that textual analysis allows for the researcher to be creative in their methods of data collection (Phillipov, 2013). The data sample in this study was content about creative community involvement. The best way to analyze that was through a creative method that would examine and critique the discourse and visual elements that attempt to support the idea of CSR in sport. Because this study is not starting with one individual theory, an inductive development method was used to categorize the data. Inductive development allows for the researcher to create codes based off their own interpretation of the text rather than use of codes based on a theory (Mayring, 2000).

Data Sample

Qualifying criteria for the media examined in this study must have been published by the Chiefs from 2016, 2017 and 2018 with a focus on military and law enforcement relations. The qualifying years included articles from prior to, during and following the league's and team's involvement in the protest. These years are of significance because 2016 was the season Colin Kaepernick began his kneeling protest and 2017 saw a rapid increase in participation by NFL players across the country, especially Chiefs players and most notably Marcus Peters. The protests were less prominent and at some point, nearly nonexistent in 2018, but the articles from this season are to provide insight into the maintenance of communications regarding the team's military and law enforcement relations in a post crisis feel. In the early stages of this study, it was discovered that all content prior to 2018 was purposely and permanently erased from the team's website.

The Chiefs were contacted regarding the missing content and were not interested in repopulating it to be provided to this study and offered to send some supplemental materials, but they never arrived. By use of an internet archiving machine, 20 articles of qualifying content were recovered to be of use to this study. Articles from the website and internet archiving system were saved and preserved as PDFs to prevent further deletion from public access. One article was included in this study without meeting all the qualifying criteria. It did not have a focus on military relations but was about voluntary community involvement done by one of the protest's key participants.

Data Collection

Articles that focused on military and law enforcement relations were the main topic for data selection. Since data had to be collected through an internet archiving website, the Chiefs website was scanned as it was preserved on many dates from the start of the 2016 season through the end of the 2018 season for articles that focus on the topic of military and law enforcement relations. With the exception of one article about Marcus Peters' voluntary community involvement, all other articles about the team's community involvement that did not directly engage or involve military or law enforcement did not qualify for this study. While textual analysis may include images, photo galleries and videos did not properly display through the internet archiver, so therefore that content was unable to be included for this study.

Data Procedure

Data procedure while examining the text was as follows. This study categorized and coded data as deemed important through close reads of the qualifying materials. Categorization includes "sorting units of data with respect to properties or features they

have in common” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). Coding serves as “the linkages between data and categories” to “label, separate, compile, and organize data” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). Codes for this study were based on data collection and the objective for analyzing it to answer the research questions above. As mentioned before, this study used an inductive approach for categorization and coding, by letting the categories and codes emerge from the text, rather than an already existing theory (Mayring, 2000). Sports and pride for one’s community go hand-in-hand and this is an opportunity to use these theories to address how the Chiefs attempted to communicate their CSR during the crisis. This study paid attention to the dates of publication to see if they fell around any key moments within the protest, frequently throughout the year, or simply around the league’s required military appreciation initiative but framed as an individual approach to military appreciation, and how any of this appears to be genuine interactions with the targeted audience or rather just initiatives to increase reputation.

The Chiefs crisis communication style, technique, and tactics were gathered by using the media made available by the team to answer the first research question through a visual and textual analysis of the team’s presentation of their military relations. While visual analysis was limited due to the deletion of content from the Chiefs’ active webpage, notes were made of any visual content that remained and was deemed significant. To accurately understand the Chiefs crisis communication style, this study examined a few years’ worth of materials to see how they communicated their military and law enforcement relations throughout the different phases of a crisis and search for any evolution in communication. Those years being 2016, 2017, and 2018 as they coincide with the beginning, rise, and fall of the National Anthem Protests. Table 1

demonstrates the categories and codes that came out of the inductive method of coding used in this study.

Military and Law Enforcement Relations	Initiatives	Personal Testimonies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Recognition • Longevity/Traditions • Authenticity/Genuinity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donations • Base Visits • Specialized Attire • Quality Time and Autographs • Gifts • Use of Prominent People 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gratitude • Deferment/Modesty • Affirmation of Claims • Respect

Table 1. *Coding scheme for this study*

Validity

While validity has been argued among researchers as relevant in qualitative methods, it is still important to be open and honest in the methods, procedures and potential biases within a study to imply “a more rigorous stance toward” qualitative studies (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 313). Researchers should ensure that their analysis is truthful, supportive of existing or emerging theories, and their findings are presented clearly (Miles et al., 2014). Geertz’s idea of providing a “thick description” will also help ensure validity as the content provided should be rich and meaningful (Geertz, 1973). Having been cited over 10,000 times, the idea of a “thick description” is widely understood as essential for presenting a valid qualitative study, allowing a reader a chance to examine the full picture and be able to process what is being presented to them.

It is important to note that the researcher acknowledges personal experience and in the industry of sport communication and was an intern for the Chiefs during the 2017 season. Her knowledge of the organization provides an advantage in understanding what the protests were like from an inside perspective but can also add bias to interpretation and understanding of the literature and the organizations intentions in communication. To address this, the steps and practices above in providing thorough descriptions to ensure validity were taken seriously as to not completely hinder the integrity of the research.

Findings

This study set out to understand how crisis communication and CSR could be used together, specifically demonstrated by the Kansas City Chiefs during the NFL's National Anthem Protest crisis. After a review of the 20 articles in the data set, identifying key themes, and grouping them into similar codes, it was found that promotion of authentic relationships was the most dominant. This chapter presents the findings in some of the same thematic presentations found within the literature review. By doing so, this helps to explain some phenomena and point out similarities that can be found between the two.

Public Relations and Crisis Communication in Sport

Recognized in the literature review are the varying practices to handle crisis communication. It is encouraged that communication is strong in the early stages of a crisis, but what was found in this study was that there was very little communication at the start of the protests. The first season only yielded two articles about military relations, and there was no mention of the crisis itself in any of the data collected. Only one true press release from the public relations department was included on the community tab of the website during the 3 years, the rest of the data were web articles published by the staff reporter.

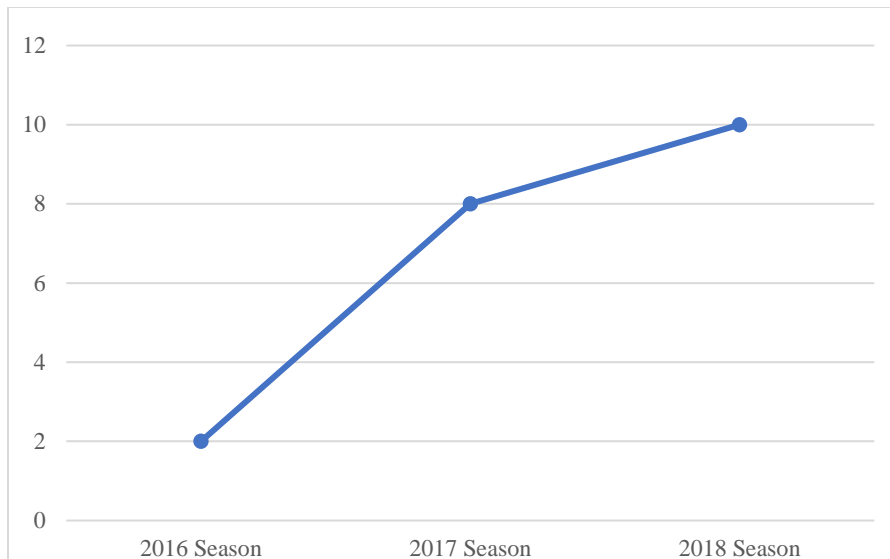


Figure 1. *Number of articles published each season*

Public relations practices in sport encourage engaging in relationships with fans and the media and strengthening such relations is really the goal. On multiple occasions, the Chiefs sought to publicly recognize members of the military and thank them for their service. Offering up quality time and gifts, along with public recognition for their service, was a very big way the Chiefs tried to encourage relationship building. “We just come out to show our support and give thanks to those guys and what they do for our country” (Sweeney, 2016). Chiefs players are always quoted as being thankful for opportunities to interact with the military, with veterans showing the same gratitude. Inclusion of positive perceptions on these experiences leads the reader to believe that these relationships only continue to be strengthened and have not been completely eradicated by the protests. Articles tend to support that idea by using clarifications like “the experience provided to be impactful for both parties involved,” (McMullen, 2016).

Through use of many testimonies, the Chiefs key communicators were able to supplement their claims and allude to the success of their public relations tactics by a

qualitative supply of affirmations. By tending to their relations with stakeholders and the public, the Chiefs were deliberate to include testimonies by various groups of stakeholders to support their actions and help further highlight them positively. In a unique situation, the Chiefs were able to promote that one of their own cheerleaders is a First Lieutenant in the US Marine Corps. Her position helps form a strong bond between the two groups. She said, “it’s just really, really special since I’m on both sides of it and I can appreciate the event as a service member . . . It’s nice to see all that positive energy,” (McMullen, 2017d). By publicly recognizing this relationship and other positive ones, the Chiefs can demonstrate that certainly not all has been damaged throughout the crisis, and there are ways to mend what has gone wrong.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Initiatives used by the Chiefs to convey social responsibility and respect for the military closely mimic what was discussed within the literature review. Donations and fundraising, base visits, specialized attire, quality time and autographs, gifts, and use of prominent people were the initiatives discussed at length within the data set. Even with the lack in communication during 2016, all these initiatives (with the exception of specialized attire) were mentioned in every season, frequency demonstrated in Figure 2.

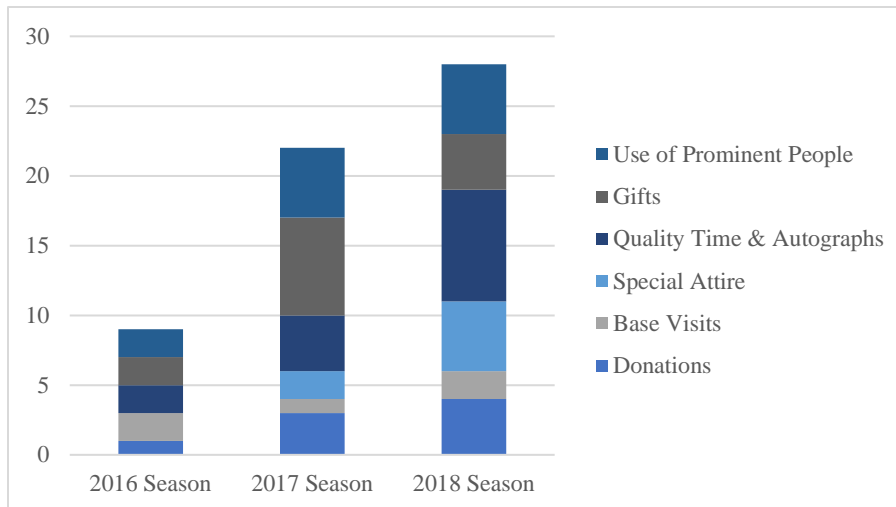


Figure 2. *Number of times initiatives were mentioned each season*

An event where Marines are invited to play video games with the players, the Toys for Tots Drive and Military Appreciation Day at training camp are all annual events hosted by the club. These initiatives in their presentation aim to provide strong support to the kind of claims made by the team about the strength and longevity of its relationships, as it is easy to see year after year how the same events and donations occur, but it also shows the introduction of new ideas, events, and incorporation of new groups and organizations. Specialized attire “was first put into action [during the 2016] season, when the Chiefs wore warmups featuring the names of Gold Star families and their fallen loved ones,” (McMullen, 2017c). Other initiatives introduced in 2018 included players hosting a holiday party for Gold Star families and the Chiefs Women’s Organization hosting a baby shower for expecting servicewomen and military spouses. The growth of initiatives and outreach creates for more opportunities to tend to additional relationships and improve public perceptions within the newer demographics.

Both quality time and autographs and the use of prominent people were a large portion of emphasized methods of involvement. While they go hand in hand, there was a distinct difference in mentioning how players interacted with servicepeople and emphasizing which position groups and players were present at any initiative. “Players took pictures, signed autographs and a few even tossed around a football with a handful of soldiers,” (McMullen, 2017a) this promotion of quality time is deemed exclusive, supported by a quote from President Mark Donovan

For us to take a second out of our day to say thank you, to give them access that nobody else gets and to create a really special experience – I mean you can see it on their faces . . . To see how excited they are to be here, it’s special,” (McMullen, 2017a).

The conversation here is an emphasis on positive traits the organization possesses and implies a sort of compensation, the servicepeople were provided this special access as a thank you for their service but in a way as an apology for the league’s protest.

The use of prominent people included players, coaches, team alumni and even Kansas City native Paul Rudd. Players with a more nationally recognized name were initially mentioned directly by name and highlighted as present, whereas players with less recognizable names were often just mentioned by position groups, such as “a handful of the Kansas City Chiefs wide receivers” (McMullen, 2018c) before potentially having their name spelled out later in the article. The simple presence of a prominent person is a benefit sports teams have during crisis communication. As the literature review mentions and the Chiefs emphasize where possible, players sometimes feel personally inclined to

participate in community initiatives because of their backgrounds. Defensive Lineman Chris Jones said

This was really important to me just because of the work the military puts in to preserve our freedom in this country [...] I have people in my family that are in the military – in the Navy and the Army – so it’s dear to my heart,”” (McMullen, 2018a).

The quote from Jones was even used as part of the article headline, acting as the method to help the club appear less offensive. This tactic of providing background into players and coach’s natural relationships with the military is used multiple times to emphasize how personal military relations could be for members of the organization.

In the one article included in this study that did not meet all the qualifying criteria, Peters hosted a coat drive on his own time using his own resources. This was promoted by the team, presumably to make the team’s notable protestor appear less villainous by actively engaging in his own foundation’s social participation. “Peters delivered, unloaded and distributed the coats himself,” (McMullen, 2017e). The literature review suggests a number of explanations for players to own and participate in their own foundations, these suggestions support plausible reasons for Peters’ activism during this time and the Chiefs motivations to publish it.

Promotion of Corporate Social Responsibility

The presentation of relationships between the Chiefs and Military and Law Enforcement became a category of its own during analysis. It’s important to note that while the protests were on police brutality, they were framed as dishonorable to the

military. Only one article published in the three-year time frame was focused on engaging with law enforcement officials, that is why most of the generalizations below are centered on military involvement. Presentation of longstanding relationships and traditions helped to prove that these initiatives were not put in place as a direct response to the protests, with clarifications like

The Kansas City Chiefs and the Hunt family have made corporate citizenship and charitable giving in the community a priority for the Chiefs. These efforts focus on many programs and organizations which improve the civic and cultural climate in our region . . . as well as preserve the legacy and history of the game of football” (Relations, 2018).

Other descriptions like this about the relationship and longevity between the Chiefs and various military organizations were common in the data set. Text that fit into this category contributed to the organization’s efforts in trying to make evident the importance of these relationships and how genuine their background as partners is, a goal described in detail within the purposes of CSR.

One article described the relationship as being so significant that “The Chiefs’ tradition of honoring our Armed Forces is as ingrained in the franchise as football itself,” (McMullen, 2017c). In instances similar to this comparison, it was apparent that they were trying to appeal to the genuine aspect of CSR, as if the whole thing was natural and should not be questioned. A code was put in place to organize language centered on longevity/traditions/commitment and was by far the largest code of the entire study. Promotion of authenticity was a reoccurring conversation under this category, with many articles emphasizing how many years an initiative had been in place, frequency of

occurrence, how much money was raised, and any other quantitative data they could supply. Those statistics were often supported by qualitative forms of testimonies given by both athletes, service people, and beneficiaries.

These articles on the Chiefs' community initiatives highlight some of the same events each year, demonstrated in Figure 3 are the Chiefs initiatives by longevity, most notably their participation in the annual Toys for Toys drive hosted by the Marine Corps. This drive and partnership was promoted each year, with the club making it incredibly clear that the Chiefs' relationship with Toys for Tots has been an annual tradition for more than 50 years, and is the longest standing relationship between any NFL franchise and the Marines (McMullen, 2016, 2017b, 2017f; Relations, 2018). Another focal point for longstanding relationships was of that between the Chiefs and local military bases. Arrowhead Stadium is within driving distance to Ft. Leavenworth, Ft. Riley and Whiteman Air Force Base, making it easy to take players there and bring servicepeople to the stadium. "For nearly a decade the Chiefs have made a series of goodwill visits at local military bases. This partnership strengthens the team's long-standing commitment to members of our armed forces," (Sweeney, 2016). In an article almost two years later, nearly identical language was used to clarify the same commitment, "the Chiefs have made a series of goodwill visits to local military bases over the last decade . . . in the franchise's long-standing commitment to honoring our Armed Forces," (McMullen, 2018b). Language like this is used repetitively throughout the timeframe, and increasingly so as each season went on, with phrases being recycled multiple times on similar topics that occur each year.

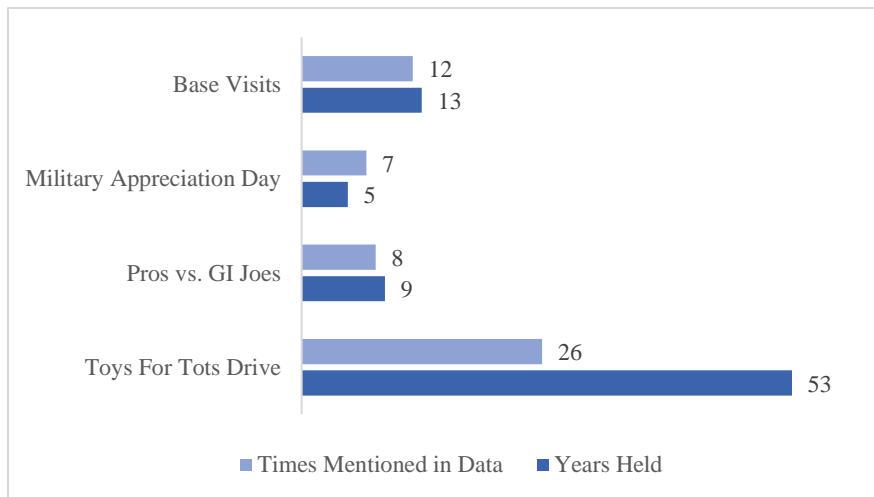


Figure 3. *Longstanding events and times mentioned*

In addition to proving hardly any of these initiatives were new arrangements by the club, public recognition was another popular route to discuss and demonstrate their commitment to the population at hand. By publicly recognizing and thanking military members for their service, it comes across as more genuine than privately thanking them, as they're willing to prove to anyone watching how much they support the military. Servicepeople were frequently recognized in front of crowds, sometimes on their own bases, but the biggest production and public recognition happened each season at the Chiefs' Salute to Service game. Each team in the league hosts a Salute to Service game, held in the month of November to coincide with Veterans' Day. Making a point to recognize each branch of the military, in 2018 specifically, the Chiefs displayed military vehicles at the gates, welcomed the U.S. Army Special Ops Command Parachute Team to descend onto the field during pregame, representatives from each branch led the flag onto the field prior to the anthem which was sang by a retired Army Staff Sargent as an

aircraft from nearby Whiteman Air Force Base flew over the stadium, and during each quarter of the game a serviceperson was recognized on the field and videos were played of deployed Chiefs fans saying hello to Arrowhead Stadium. While these could be counted as initiatives, the emphasis on public acknowledgement of service and sacrifices was more so fitting with the categories that represented the nature of relationships.

Summary of Results

Some of the key findings in this study were represented by the repetitive nature of various messaging styles. The communication of military and law enforcement relations used extremely consistent messages and language throughout the 3 years, with the frequency only increasing each season. As some quotes were found to have been used in nearly identical formats year after year, the Chiefs knew what was important for them to promote and were very intentional in the choice of words and language. The promotion of relationships was a very strong message, if not the strongest, that nearly everything else in the data could then be tied back. To convey these strategic messages, the Chiefs used a similar format in their articles by making sure to point out their longstanding commitments with quantitative measurements to act as facts, and qualitative testimonies to support these facts and claims. This was done in a way to showcase their corporate social responsibility and communicate effectively during a crisis all in one message.

Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter aims to share the significance of what was presented within the findings and how it has answered the original research questions. The discussion will analyze what was found, followed by limitations and suggestions for future research.

Findings in this study helped to improve understanding on crisis communication as it is used in sport. As was predicted by the literature review, CSR was used greatly to help combat coverage about the crisis. In this selection of data, the Chiefs never mentioned the crisis and spent ample time talking about the positive outcomes brought from their CSR. The literature review makes it clear that CSR is most successful when it makes a positive, long-term impact. It can be seen within the articles on these Chiefs initiatives that their CSR does tend to have lasting impacts and is well received by the stakeholders they interact with. As demonstrated in Figures 2 and 3, the Chiefs make large efforts to specifically mention their initiatives and remind the reader how some of these events have been around for many seasons.

By finding Image Restoration Theory as the most beneficial for this study, it was able to properly predict what was found through the research. The application of this theory helped explain message options and strategies found within the data and further support that answers to the research questions. For example, it may have originally been surprising to find that the Chiefs never mentioned or apologized for the crisis, but

strategies from within the theory explained that was an acceptable tactic and has been used in crisis situations before. That was originally unexpected when entering the research process, but after review and application of the theory, it came to make sense and explain the rest of the messages within the literature.

RQ1: To what extent will the Kansas City Chiefs public relations respond to backlash and the National Anthem protest? Specifically, will there be evidence of CSR strategies in the handling of the event?

Prior to the protests and in the early stages, the Chiefs did little to promote their community initiatives. Publishing only two articles in the first season of protests, the Chiefs promoted just two initiatives which were two of some of their most longstanding initiatives with the military, a base visit and the Toys for Tots drive. While quality time and the use of prominent people were discussed, these two articles mostly highlighted the longevity and strong commitment to these initiatives and their relationship with the organizations.

Are they doing it right or wrong?

As the protests strengthened and gained participation by the Chiefs' own players, the franchise made no mistake by presenting their relationships as exactly what is expected of fans and consumers, suggested by CSR. With a large increase in seasonal communication, strong efforts were made to present their relationships and initiatives as genuine and authentic. Creating a positive impact with long-term benefits in mind is a goal of CSR that was also clearly displayed in the Chiefs communication. An abundance of data shows that the Chiefs aimed to make their intentions clear as being genuine and

were that of tradition and longstanding commitments to keep those relationships strong. This came to their favor while the protests questioned their genuinity, they were able to point to their history of benevolent behavior on behalf of the military throughout the last several years and even decades, as seen in Figure 3. On the other hand, little was done to promote their relationship with law enforcement (another stakeholder in the event), while two police officers were generously thanked with tickets to Super Bowl LII for saving a fan's life, that was all to be found within the 3-year period to enhance the relationship with that group of stakeholders. By understanding the nature of the attack, the Chiefs deemed it more important to appropriately tailor their response to specifically promote military relations, as that was the relationship being questioned by alleged offensive behavior in this crisis.

By use of their unique advantages to be corporately responsible as a professional sports team, the Chiefs used various resources to appear philanthropic and ethical. It is suggested in the literature review that by assisting the vulnerable and giving back to the communities they come from, they can partner with local nonprofits to highlight social issues. In several articles, the Chiefs do just that. Whether it be nonprofits or governmental agencies, the Chiefs provided both monetary and in-kind donations to a variety of military focused groups, helping to make a difference with that organization and reverse damage done to the surface level image of the relationship between sports and those offended by the protests.

Overall, messages and presentation during this time show that the Chiefs were focused on highlighting their longstanding relationships and beneficial initiatives. These were the main focus of articles, flashing the spotlight on the military and how they honor

them, rather than paying any direct attention within the text to the protests. The reader can sense that the nature of these military relations can indeed be genuine.

RQ2: What type of crisis communication message strategies do the Chiefs utilize on their website to convey CSR during a crisis?

What was learned through the process of answering RQ1 was that the language used after the protests largely aligns with the ideas and message strategy suggestions based on Image Restoration Theory. This theory was of best fit to understand and explain patterns found in the Chiefs communication efforts. The theory posits a variety of message options acceptable to use when faced with a crisis, several of which could be easily identified in the data set. The Chiefs never directly mention or address the anthem protests in their articles, let alone apologize on behalf of the players participating or the organization itself, but rather simply promote what they had been doing in the community. Image Restoration Theory does not require that an organization respond to accusations of a crisis, and in that case encourages redefining the attack by attempting to refocus attention from the crisis on other matters. Community relations is used in this case to reinforce the positive characteristics and intentions of the team in the past and present, an option for reducing offensiveness. The promotion of good will on behalf of the organization is itself an entire strategy to reduce offensiveness on the situation.

What this says, or implies rather, about the Chiefs crisis communication choices is that the Chiefs recognized there was nothing to deny about the situation, but there was certainly more to promote in different contexts to help minimize the severity of their attacks. As there was nothing the team could deny about its athletes' actions, there was also no attempt to evade responsibility, both of which are message options proposed for

image restoration. Reducing Offensiveness of Event was undoubtedly the most popular message theme in the 3-year data set examined for this study. This involved emphasizing positive traits of the players, the organization and its relationships, differentiation in attempts to act less offensive, and compensation. Findings in the previous chapter acknowledge the frequency at which this message strategy occurred, supporting the importance of the discovery of this message strategy being the most frequently used.

In addition to the main message strategy of Reducing Offensiveness, hints of Corrective Action messaging could be found here and there, as visits with militaristic organizations can be seen as attempts to prevent the problem from happening again. This would be based on the idea that if the players interact with those they could be offending, they're less likely to act that way again. The last message option for image restoration is mortification, apologizing for the act. Often discussed as an important method and early step in crisis communication, an apology or direct response to accusations is not labeled as a requirement by this theory. If the organization chooses not to apologize, it is suggested that they redirect attention to other issues. While the Chiefs utilize this message strategy, it can be seen that the Chiefs chose instead to focus their messages in a way to enhance communication and attention on the positive relationships they had with the military. The Chiefs were very straightforward and consistent in their messaging during the post-crisis phase. Reminding the public about their tradition of healthy relationships and natural CSR with the military was of high priority and the main focus of their messages.

Conclusion

What this study can conclude is that the Chiefs believed the most important message to relay during the crisis was that due to their CSR, there had been a positive relationship between them and the military all along. With a variety of ways to address the situation, the Chiefs understood what they were being accused of and knew that their increase in communication needed to detail what they had already been doing for years. The organization's longstanding relationship with the military came to their advantage in the crisis as they already had a history of positive characteristics to highlight about themselves and their players. By doing so, they were able to reaffirm to the public that their CSR for the military was of an authentic and genuine nature. Through suggestions and use of tactics by Image Restoration Theory, the Chiefs were able to employ a very specific message strategy without ever addressing the protests in the data set, it was clear that the increase in communication was very purposeful.

Public relations and crisis communication in sport have several options to choose from when faced with a crisis. The team's longstanding commitment to CSR made recovery during a crisis that much more manageable, as there had been positive traits between the two parties for far longer than the early stages of a crisis. In conclusion, by choosing to avoid mention of the protests or issuing an apology, this indicates that the team believed promotion of their genuine CSR and positive attributions could prove to be far more impactful in addressing the crisis than direct acknowledgement of the offensive acts crisis.

Limitations

Limitations within this study most notably includes the content removal from the Chiefs website, making recovery unable to include any visual analysis on supplemental content such as photo galleries and videos embedded in the text.

By nature of this study being qualitative, the findings and analysis were subject to the researcher's own interpretation. As a former employee in the Chiefs, interpretations may have been influenced by the researcher's personal experiences and understanding of the organization, despite efforts to remain objective for the integrity of the study and beneficial contributions to practical and scholarly knowledge. For both of these reasons, it is possible that another researcher could come to different conclusions about the same text.

This study chose to perform a textual analysis for the research method as an opportunity to let the text speak for itself rather than receive an organizational spin by interview subjects. While the text certainly spoke for itself and provided the study with answers to the research questions, it could have been beneficial to hear firsthand from those who were part of the decision-making process in this crisis management case. While their answers may not have supported what was found in the text and their answers could be bias, making a comparison to written versus spoken word could have answered more about their decisions and messaging strategies.

Future Directions in Research

Future research on this topic is suggested to obtain more knowledge on message responses during other types of organizational crises throughout the rest of the sports

industry. What is still left to be explored are the reactions fans had to these messages and how crisis communication impacts consumer mindsets. A study on audience effects could examine reactions to the Chiefs crisis communication and if it had a positive, negative, or neutral impact on stakeholders' perceptions of the team and crisis. This would offer insight into if crisis communicators are appropriately applying and tailoring messaging strategies for their stakeholders to the organization's benefit in the wake of a crisis and if there is anything they could do differently in the future. This study focused on one team and demographic, due to this a study on more teams' communication strategies would be beneficial to learn more about messaging across the league.

In addition to that, this study only looked at articles published about community relations. Since the Chiefs never mentioned the protests in this data set, it could be of benefit for future research to expand the data set by looking at any articles from the website during the timeframe to search for varying messaging strategies across content, including but not limited to game recaps, roster changes, updates from practices, and even social media content. This would see if messaging was consistent across all means of communication, or if it was altered to tend to different audiences.

Practical Tips for Industry Professionals

The significance of these findings that can be broader applied to other situations is that a team as a brand is often held responsible for the actions of their athletes. By taking the results of this study, crisis communicators from other organizations may see the benefit in relying heavily on the Reducing Offensiveness message strategy to be the base of their crisis communication. The findings can be applied much further than a crisis on social justice. Recognizing how an athlete's actions can impact a team would be relevant

in developing a crisis management plan for any social crisis that may involve actions of an athlete as an individual who represents your organization. As this study, and many others before it imply, it is important for CSR to be genuine and longstanding. By taking this information for its value, professionals in the field should adapt their CSR plans accordingly to be of strong benefit in any potential and relevant crisis.

Summary

This study set out to understand the specific crisis communication behavior of the Kansas City Chiefs during the National Anthem Protests. Through use of textual analysis, the researcher examined a data set of articles produced by the team and made available for a short time on their website. An analysis of the data showed specific patterns of message strategies and themes that were clearly important for the team to promote. It was found that promotion of positive attributes was the most abundant message strategy, in an attempt to mend perceptions of the Chiefs and strengthen longstanding relationships between them and various military organizations. CSR and Image Restoration Theory worked together in this crisis to combat negative public perceptions and act as a strong advantage to working through the stages of crisis communication.

This study and its findings are of importance because it strengthens knowledge on crisis communication and CSR specifically as it relates to sport. By conducting this study, there is now increased knowledge on how the two topics intersect and work together both proactively and reactively during the time of crisis for an organization. Studies before have less often looked at the two topics together, and by doing so here, broader knowledge has been added to the field simply by not looking at the two topics

individually, but by recognizing the power they can have together in the field of sport communication and acknowledging how they worked together in a recent crisis.

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Appendix

Table 1.

Coding Scheme for this study

Military and Law Enforcement Relations	Initiatives	Personal Testimonies
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public Recognition• Longevity/Traditions• Authenticity/Genuinity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Donations• Base Visits• Specialized Attire• Quality Time and Autographs• Gifts• Use of Prominent People	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gratitude• Deferment/Modesty• Affirmation of Claims• Respect

Figure 1.

Number of articles published each season

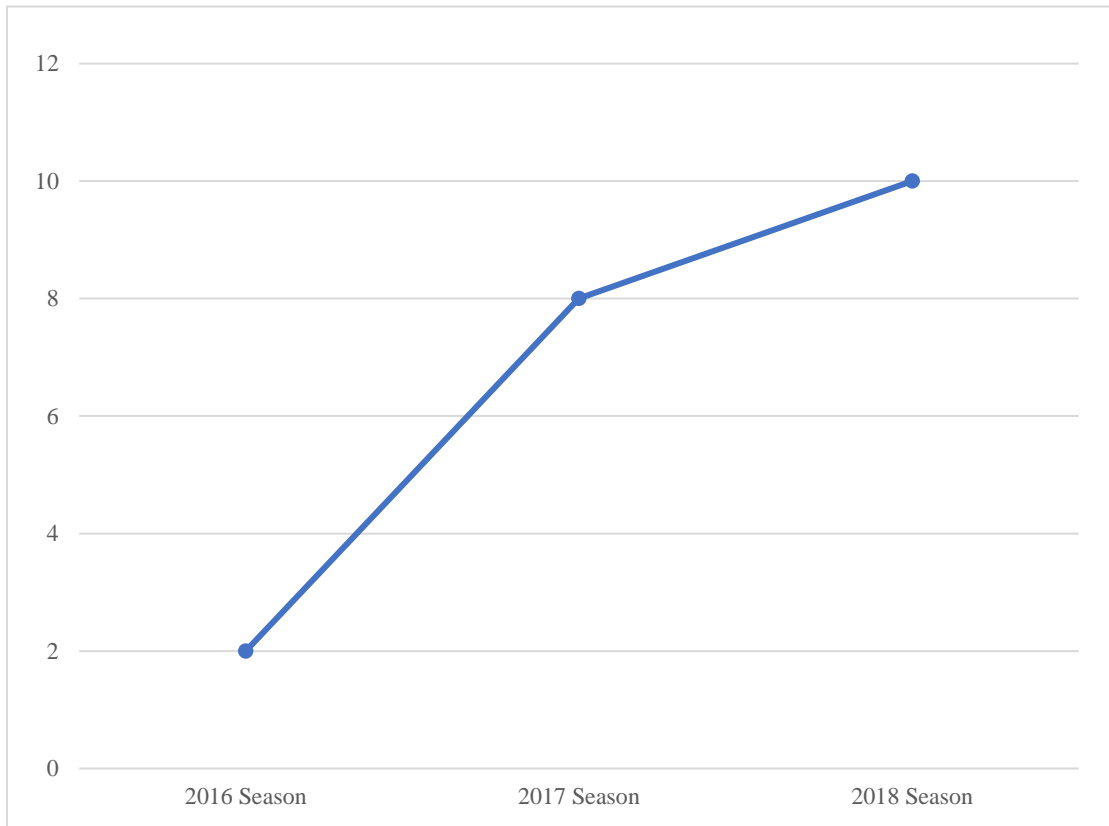


Figure 2.

Number of times initiatives were mentioned by season

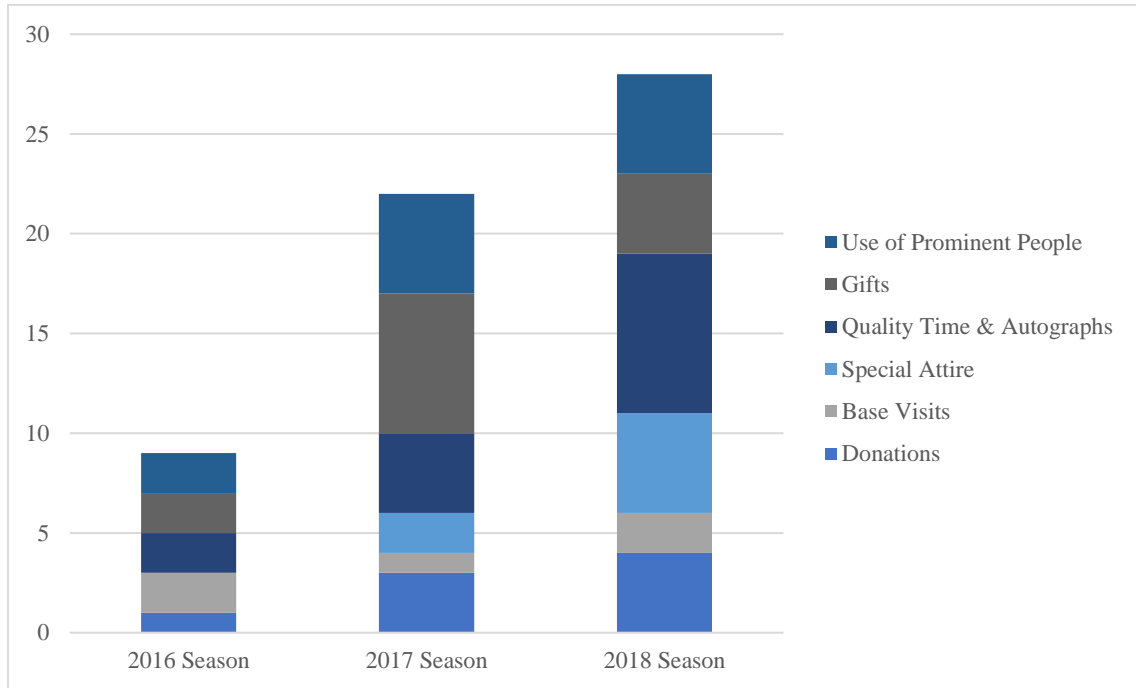


Figure 3.

Longstanding events and times mentioned

