



Bridgewater State University

Virtual Commons - Bridgewater State University

Honors Program Theses and Projects

Undergraduate Honors Program

5-11-2021

The Houston Astros' cheating scandal: A case study on crisis communication in sports

Wendy Edouard

Follow this and additional works at: https://vc.bridgew.edu/honors_proj



Part of the [Business and Corporate Communications Commons](#), [Communication Technology and New Media Commons](#), [Public Relations and Advertising Commons](#), and the [Sports Management Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Edouard, Wendy. (2021). The Houston Astros' cheating scandal: A case study on crisis communication in sports. In *BSU Honors Program Theses and Projects*. Item 469. Available at: https://vc.bridgew.edu/honors_proj/469

Copyright © 2021 Wendy Edouard

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

The Houston Astros' cheating scandal:
A case study on crisis communication in sports

Wendy Edouard

Submitted in Partial Completion of the
Requirements for Commonwealth Honors in Communication Studies

Bridgewater State University

May 11, 2021

Dr. Lisa Bergson, Thesis Advisor

Dr. Jason A. Edwards, Committee Member

Dr. Thomasena Shaw, Committee Member

Abstract

In January 2020, the Houston Astros organization was accused of cheating during the 2017 and 2018 baseball seasons. In 2017, the Astros had also won the World Series, thereby offsetting a sports scandal which dominated media coverage for several months. Owner of the Houston Astros, Jim Crane and his players released a statement to the press, a month after the investigation was concluded by the Major League Baseball organization. The investigation concluded that the Astros, in fact, had been stealing pitching signs from opposing teams and using technology to communicate signs to their pitcher. Crane's response (relying primarily on shift blame, bolstering, reducing offensiveness) to the press initiated a public relations fire of anger and dissatisfaction from their fans, opposing teams, and the media. This study applies the Image Repair theory by William Benoit, qualitative research, and deductive reasoning to analyze what strategies the Houston Astros used to mitigate their cheating scandal and how effective they were in doing so.

Key words: Crisis communication, sports, Image Repair Theory

Introduction

Throughout the 2017 and 2018 Major League Baseball (MLB) seasons, the Houston Astros illegally stole the pitching signs of opposing teams to benefit their outcome throughout the baseball season. The Houston Astros sign stealing scheme was made public by Major League Baseball pitcher, Mike Fiers. Mike Fiers used to be a pitcher for the Astros during the 2017-18 season. Rumors of the Astros sign stealing surfaced in 2016, but there wasn't any proof until the MLB decided they would conduct a full investigation on the matter after Fier's accusations. "For more than a century, baseball players have been trying to decode the unspoken cues exchanged by pitchers and catchers over what pitch to throw next and the location: a practice known as sign-stealing. The biggest advantage a pitcher has over a batter is the element of surprise" (Vigdor, 2020, para. 23). The Astros used several forms of technology to steal signs such as a "camera fixated on the catcher's signs, a monitor with a live feed in the tunnel between the dugout and the clubhouse" (Axisa, 2020, para. 9), buzzers under their jerseys, and secret codes such as banging on trash cans along with benches in the dugout to call out different pitch types. During the time of illegally stealing signs, the Astros organization won a World Series title and continued to remain active in breaking the integrity of the baseball code throughout the 2019 season as well.

On January 13, 2020, the MLB finished conducting their investigation, and the league did in fact find that the Astros used "cameras fixed on the catcher's signs and banged on trash cans to relay the opposing team's signs to the hitter during the 2017 regular season and postseason and into the 2018 season" (Perry, 2020, para. 103). General manager Jeff Luhnow, team manager A. J Hinch and bench coach Alex Cora, were found as major players in the cheating scheme. Although Luhnow claimed to not have known anything about the scandal,

there was enough evidence to suggest that he was aware to some degree and instead chose to ignore the truth. All three were sentenced to a one year suspension but soon fired by the owner of the Houston Astros, Jim Crane. The Houston Astros organization was also fined \$5 million, which is the maximum an organization can be fined as stated in the MLB constitution.

The cheating scandal of the Houston Astros was and still is a major controversial topic in the world of sports. The lack of transparency and honesty to their fans and club members by players and managers is why it is among the most talked about sports crises in the media. This scandal is not the first instance of sign stealing in the MLB, but, time and time again, the use of technology is what stains baseball culture. The Philadelphia Phillies in 1898, the Cleveland Indians in 1948 and the New York Giants in 1951 were all exposed for sign stealing, which at the time was common but in each case the elaborate use of technology was proven to have given them an unfair advantage over other teams thus, violating the integrity of the game.

Along with the financial costs the organization endured, the scandal also caused a serious image and reputation problem for the Houston Astros. After the investigation, the findings demonstrated that both the players and managers agreed to conduct illegal sign stealing during the games. Their dishonesty and unemotional apology to the media and fans is responsible for the massive crisis communication problem centered around the organization. The players, coaches, managers, and other internal members of the team's clubhouse were fully aware of the actions that were taking place. The media response to the Houston Astros cheating scandal dominates sports news even today. Other MLB teams and players from other sports organizations like the NBA have even spoken out on the issue. Many players have expressed their opinion on what the MLB should do as well as how to retaliate against the organization.

Hence, the purpose of this case study is to explore the Image Repair strategies employed by the Houston Astros to mitigate their cheating scandal and repair their image and whether those strategies were effective or not. With the help of qualitative research, this study will also explore why it is common for public relations practitioners to be unprepared and late in their response times in crisis communication. It will also offer recommendations for best practices for large sports organizations who may face similar crises in the future.

Literature Review

Sports Crises

A crisis can be defined as a “specific, unexpected, and nonroutine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and simultaneously present an organization with both opportunities for and threats to its high-priority goals” (Alexander, 2016, p. 5). According to Devlin and Brown (2020), “research shows that sport crisis managers are overwhelmingly underprepared” due to lack of guidance and knowledge in crisis situations (p. 4). Sports scandals have been common since the 1950s and each of the early crises utilized denial, poor mortification, and minimization. Through his Image Repair theory (IRT), Benoit (2018) provides strategies to eliminate the use of poor communication tactics by implementing effective communication for the sole purpose of mitigating an organization or person’s reputation. Although IRT consists of general strategies to bring into effective action, it is the responsibility of the organization to know when and how a strategy should be used. Corrective action and mortification aren’t always the better options if the media and public don’t sense true remorse. In a racism scandal by Texaco executives referring to African Americans as “black jelly beans who were glued to the bottom of a jar” (Benoit, 2018, p. 15), the company used shift blame by declaring that those involved in the incident were a few of the “bad apples” and they weren't in

any way a reflection of everyone else. In this case shifting the blame helped Texaco shorten their PR scandal.

Organizations must always be prepared to respond to crises and scandals that can potentially affect their reputation and financial costs in a rapid manner. Increased revenue in sports is mainly due to fan support, corporate sponsorships, and brand endorsements. The popularity of sports culture would not exist without it. Even so, popularity creates a more consistent critical examination of team members and managers. The need to affiliate with a sports organization has not only enriched sports culture, but also increased media coverage about sports. Fox Sports, CBS Sports, and ESPN1 are examples of channels dedicated to every aspect of sports, including scandals. According to Devlin and Brown (2020), “today sports scandals continue to receive vast amounts of public scrutiny. Controversy surrounding issues of drug use, domestic violence, sexual assault, racism, sexism, gambling, bribery, concussions,” and more dominate media coverage (p. 1). This is why it is “important for organizations to provide effective communication immediately following the crisis. This can be difficult due to the inherent uncertainty of crisis events in this instant digital era and because little is often known about the cause of the crisis. However, organizations should still recognize that they have a short window to take control of the crisis and set the tone for the response and recovery efforts because the threatening nature of crises means that they must be addressed quickly” (Alexander, 2016, p. 5). In this era of instantaneous social media coverage, public relations practitioners have less time to react. A crisis communication response to a scandal focuses on the most appropriate manner to communicate and respond to allegations that affect an organization’s reputation because urgency can create an extreme threat to the situation.

Crisis is often centered on reputation and image before and after an incident. An organization's goal should be to reduce or eliminate any damage or cost to the reputation since public scrutiny commonly targets the image first because the image sets expectations, perceptions, and beliefs. "Research shows that 20%–25% of respondents including organizations that classified themselves as high risk operations, did not have a plan" (Gribas, DiSanza, Legge, Hartman, 2018) during a public relations crisis. In a sports crisis in 2007, "Atlanta Falcons quarterback Michael Vick was sentenced to 23 months in prison after being convicted of illegally operating a dog fighting ring. Nike canceled the new Vick shoe, and totally severed their business relationships with him" (Devlin & Brown, 2020, p. 9). Public support and athlete brand endorsements have changed the sports industry into a billion dollar business, for that reason athletes are key in maintaining financial success and popularity of a brand. When an image of an organization is in question because of a scandal or wrongdoing of a specific athlete or member, the organization (or brand) sustains great financial loss. In 2009, when Tiger Woods used corrective action and "admitted that he had various extramarital affairs, his sponsors experienced a 2% loss in their stock market value within two weeks" (Devlin & Brown, 2020, p.13). A case study similar to that of the Houston Astros is the Dow Corning corporation. Known for their breast implants, they were criticized by the media for the possible danger of their implants. Their first line of defense was denial, then poor use of mortification by not admitting to the dangers of their implants, and later corrective action by discontinuing the production of their breast implants. Dow Corning could have saved the company's financial and reputational costs had they used corrective action as their first line of defense by promising to discontinue their products.

Image Repair Theory

Since image repair is one of the most important goals in a crisis communication plan, this literature review examines Benoit's (2018) Image Repair Theory (IRT). Benoit's theory can also be applied to a widespread of company scandals and crisis communications, especially when an organization's reputation hangs in the balance.

William Benoit's Image Repair Theory suggests "two key conditions: "(a) Communication is a goal-oriented activity and (b) a fundamental goal of communication is maintaining a positive reputation" (Benoit, 2018, p.13). Maintaining a clear two-way communication with the media is a strategic advantage that should allow control over the situation and what message is being spread across social media platforms. Controlling the narrative before the media does, gives the advantage of emphasizing corrective action and mortification, two of Benoit's strategies in IRT. There are five general rules of image repair and 13 different strategies organizations can use to mitigate crises and protect their reputation (Benoit, 2018). The first general rule is **Denial**, which involves an organization or individual either denying any part in an act or shifting the blame to another person or entity. The second rule involves **Evading responsibility**. When using this rule, organizations or individuals avoid blame or responsibility by claiming lack of knowledge, common mishaps, or good intentions. **Reduce Offensiveness**, which is the third general rule, involves minimizing negative feedback by expressing the good traits or past actions of the company or individual, comparing the offensive act to harsher, more offensive examples, justifying the actions of the organization or individual, shifting attention, and strengthening positive ideas of the accused. Taking steps to fix the problem and preventing recurrence is the fourth rule, which is called **Corrective Action**. The last general rule, **Mortification**, involves taking responsibility and apologizing (Benoit, 2018). In some cases when companies/organizations ineffectively use corrective action and

mortification to undermine or cover up a current issue, Benoit characterizes it as “pseudo-corrective action”. See Table 1 for specific examples.

A thirty year qualitative meta-analysis of Benoit’s (2018) image repair theory and crisis communication showed that a) corrective action, corrective action paired with bolstering and reducing offensiveness, and evading responsibility to be the most successful strategies, b) denial, reducing offensiveness, shifting the blame, and corrective action to be the most common strategies, c) denial, denial paired with reducing offensiveness and evading responsibility are the least successful strategies and d) guilt or innocence, remaining silent, potential legal action, scope of the crisis, and promptness to be mitigating factors that help shape success or failure (Arendt et al., 2017).

Table 1. Benoit’s Image Repair Theory

Strategy	Definition	Example
Denial <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Simple Denial ● Shift Blame 	did not perform act; act is not harmful another committed the offense	Tylenol did not poison capsules madman poisoned capsules
Evade Responsibility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provocation ● Defeasibility ● Accident ● Good Intentions 	offensive act just a response to an earlier offense lack of information or ability mishap meant well	firm left state because of new taxes executive not informed of changed meeting time tree fell on tracks, causing train wreck company believed changes would help consumers

<p>Reduce Offensiveness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bolstering ● Minimization ● Differentiation ● Transcendence ● Attack Accuser 	<p>stress defender’s good traits or acts</p> <p>offense less serious than it appears</p> <p>act less offensive than other, similar acts</p> <p>act justified by more important values</p> <p>reduce credibility of accuser; suggest victim deserved offense; shift audience attention from act</p>	<p>Exxon claimed “swift and competent oil spill cleanup”</p> <p>few harmed by water pollution</p> <p>Sears repairs were preventative maintenance, not fraud</p> <p>research uses animals to help create drugs for people</p> <p>Pepsi owns restaurants and competes for your customers</p>
<p>Corrective Action</p>	<p>Fix problem or prevent recurrence</p>	<p>AT&T promises to spend billions to improve service</p>
<p>Mortification</p>	<p>apologize</p>	<p>AT&T apologized for service interruption</p>

Note: From “Crisis and image repair at United Airlines: Fly the unfriendly skies,” by W.L. Benoit, *Journal of International Crisis and Risk Communication Research*, 1, p. 14. Copyright 2018 by STARS, University of Central Florida.

This study explores the following two research questions:

RQ1: What Image Repair strategies did the Houston Astros use to mitigate the cheating scandal?

RQ2: How effective were the Image Repair strategies used by the Houston Astros?

Methods

The purpose of this research is to explore how Image Repair theory can be applied to crisis communication studies and provide practical guidance to PR practitioners in large sports organizations who have to engage in crisis communication to restore reputation. In order to better understand the crisis response of the Houston Astros to their cheating scandal, a case study was conducted using a qualitative research approach. “Qualitative research provides an open-ended approach that can be adapted and changed while the research is ongoing, which enhances the quality of the data and insights generated” (Talbot, 2015, para. 1). A characteristic of qualitative research is that none of the strategies explored promise a specific or rigid outcome.

Yin (2000) suggests that a single case or data point, which examines a phenomenon (i.e. Houston Astros crisis communication) in a real-life context (i.e., the cheating scandal), can be studied in case study research. Case studies allow for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Richards et al., 2017). Several public relations scholars have used case studies to study the specific phenomenon of crisis communication in sports (see Armfield et al. 2019; Benoit, 2018; Richards et al., 2017).

Data Collection

Yin (2000) suggests that a case study “depends on the use of—and ability to integrate in converging fashion—information from multiple sources of evidence. The facts and conclusions for the case study will be built around the consistency of data from these sources, and these facts and conclusions” (Yin, 1997, p. 185-186) will be expressed in qualitative terms. This study analyzed multiple data points such as team statements and news conferences, news articles and TV news shows as well as comments from opposing teams and players. On January 13, 2020, over 10 news articles and TV networks including those that also cover sports had written articles about the Astros and their response.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the aforementioned sources will be analyzed inductively and deductively to identify the image repair strategies in each individual item and across items that the Houston Astros organization used to mitigate their cheating scandal.

Findings

One month after the investigation was concluded, Jim Crane finally held a formal news conference alongside his new managers and the team. The most significant aspect of the conference was Crane’s statement about how the cheating scandal affecting the game and what

the team's perspective was on the issue. He stated, "Our opinion is this didn't impact the game, we had a good team. We won the World Series, we'll leave it there" (Draper, 2020, p. 8). This alarming statement can be described as minimization and bolstering because by merely stating that their cheating did not impact the game, is another way of minimizing their actions and by emphasizing the characteristics of the team members as "good" should not be the sole reason that their cheating did not impact the game. Minutes into the conference, when a reporter asked how they felt about the cheating scheme, Crane stated, "We're apologizing because we broke the rules," (Draper, 2020, para.10). In some cases when companies/organizations ineffectively use corrective action and mortification to undermine or cover up a current issue, Benoit characterizes it as "pseudo-corrective action". Crane's response to the reporter would be classified as a pseudo-apology because their apology is geared toward breaking the rules rather than upholding the integrity of the game. In this case, Crane's choice of words implied that his apology is based on the fact that cheating is referred to as breaking the rules, otherwise he would not have issued an apology. Another strategy used by the Houston Astros was shift blame. During a news conference, Crane would deny responsibility by blaming managers Hinch and Luhnow when he said, "the leaders enabled, condoned, and did not stop actions that happened (Draper, 2020, para.51)". He assigns no blame to the players and the roles several of them played with this statement: "I agree that our players should not be punished... This is a great group of guys who did not receive proper guidance from their leaders."(Perry, 2020, para. 45). This is also another ineffective use of bolstering and shift blame because team leaders/managers are recognized as the face of the team, hence they are perceived as the same. Regardless of the manager's lack of involvement, Crane is ultimately still the owner, therefore it is his responsibility as well to correct and police his staff and players.

The statements and apologies given by the players were also categorized as inadequate and unemotional by the media, their fans, and by other opposing MLB players. The media classified their statements as fake apologies and unremorseful. Public comments that were made by several players consisted of the same rhetoric: empty apologies. Jose Altuve, second Baseman for the Astros stated, “We feel bad, we feel remorse, like I said, the impact on the fans, the impact on the game — we feel bad.”(Draper, 2020, para.11), “It wasn’t something that was impactful during those times, and I truly believe that.” (Draper, 2020, para. 9). A statement made by their pitcher, Lance McCullers, and by Josh Reddick, right fielder: “It is what it is. We’ve got to ask for forgiveness again and just keeping saying how bad we feel” (Draper, 2020, para.15). Although the MLB punished the managers, the players were not sanctioned or punished and the Houston Astros were allowed to keep the World Series Trophy. According to a statement made by the Commissioner of the MLB, Rob Manfred, the players were granted immunity in order to cooperate with the investigation (Axisa, 2020, para.6). Opposing MLB players were not so forgiving. Angels superstar Mike Trout said, "They cheated...I don't agree with the punishment...I lost respect for some of those guys," (Perry, 2020, para. 93). Some were also concerned about losing opportunities at the hand of the Astros because of their sign stealing schemes. Cody Bellinger, whose team, the Dodgers lost to the Astros in the 2017 World Series, is even more unsparing in his remarks:

I thought the apologies were whatever. I thought Jim Crane's was weak. I thought Manfred's punishment was weak, giving them immunity. Those guys were cheating for three years. I think what people don't realize is that Altuve stole an MVP from Judge in '17. Everyone knows they stole the ring from us. But it's over. (Perry, 2020, para. 115)

A comment made by Sean Manaea, who is a pitcher for the Oakland Athletics to Susan Slusser (2020) of the San Francisco Chronicle, stated “They didn’t own up to anything, they all just sort of said the same thing. They want to move on but they haven’t even said what they’ve done,” (para. 26).

Still, today the Astros receive backlash for their cheating scandal because of their unpreparedness and poor strategies. In their case, moving on hasn’t been as easy as they hoped. In his first expansive interview since the Astros cheating scandal had been made public, Jim Crane sat with USA Today Sports in July of 2020 and expressed his deep regret for his alarming response at the news conference in February, when he stated that the Astros cheating did not impact the game. At the peak of the crisis, his statement only enraged fans and players of the game even more. Crane then states, “We didn’t come off like I wanted to, if I had to do it over again, I’d do it differently. The press conference didn’t go well at all. I didn’t handle it as well as I should have” (Nightengale, 2020, para. 10). He continued to say “If we had to re-run it, we would have tried to do a better job of apologizing and tried to be more sincere. But you’re under the gun. You try to answer the same question 18 times. It’s not a spot I ever want to be in again” (Nightengale, 2020, para.13). Crane’s attempt for a do-over came several months too late even as the scandal persisted during a global pandemic. This is why crisis response times are critical. Had the Houston Astros’ PR team been prepared to be fired at on all cylinders by the media, Crane’s then news conference could have been the one to end the scandal swiftly with less reputational damage than there is now.

Discussion

Sports organizations that have experienced reputational scares and scrutiny from the media and consumers have the opportunity to use the image repair strategies to get ahead of their

PR nightmare but this does not promise that an outcome in favor of the sports organization will occur because an apology was given or a promise was made to make a change. This simply reinforces that these image repair strategies should be essential items in a crisis communication toolbox.

One indication of this case study is that it agrees with Alexander (2016) that the response time must be instantaneous during crisis communication because without it, the media and society will fill in the gaps, creating blurred lines between facts and opinions. Fan polls and avid social media users have on their own classified the Houston Astros cheating scandal as the worst scandal since the steroids era, except everyone who participated then were ripped of their titles and social media was not as common. Major League baseball is a large organization with a vast number of fan bases and public attention which is why it is important for PR practitioners in any sports field to be swift and direct with the who, when, where, why, and hows of a crisis. Technology has changed and impacted the way an organization should respond when their reputation hangs in the balance. Social media has become the main platform for public statements which is why the Houston Astros organization received backlash from not only their fans but also from harsh bloggers, sports articles, the media, other sports organizations, and opposing players. There were too many delays and lack of transparency in regards to punishment for the players and those gaps eventually ended up being filled up by those who are consumers or spectators of the MLB.

Another indication of this study is that “statements issued by organizations during a crisis should be clear, inoffensive, and occur quickly following the onset of the crisis” (Arendt et al., 2017). Apologizing for wrongdoing while also evading responsibility is ineffectual. That is a PR stain that will cease to go away, thus preventing the Houston Astros organization from

recovering from the crisis. Jim Crane used several image repair strategies that proved to be ineffective. He enacted shift blame by accusing the managers of wrongdoing other than the players. Each time he commented on his player's good traits as a reason why they shouldn't be held accountable is an example of bolstering. By apologizing only for breaking the rules as a way to mitigate their crisis is an example of pseudo-corrective action. Rather than using shift blame, bolstering, and minimization, Jim Crane should have utilized corrective action paired with reducing offensiveness to lessen the perceived scandal following a quick apology and statement to repair the damages and rebuild their trust with their community and fans.

Unfortunately, these actions only justified the conclusions the media and fans have already come to terms with regarding how the Houston Astros organization addressed the scandal. Their focus was primarily about moving on and placing the blame elsewhere rather than where they failed as an organization to deliver an honest and respectable baseball team. In terms of best practices for sports organizations, it is important to note that Benoit's image repair strategies are most successful 57% of the time when Corrective Action is used alone or paired with other strategies like bolstering or reducing offensiveness. Evading Responsibility is also among the most successful with a 26% success rate. In terms of least successful, Denial has a 62% failure rate and it is also the most used strategy involving image restoration efforts in PR crises (Arendt et al., 2017). Therefore, this case study agrees with Arendt's (2017) qualitative meta-analysis study which proves that Crane's combination of evading responsibility and denial are certain paths to an unsuccessful approach. The delay of information and the scope of the crisis made it necessary for them to implement "a widespread crisis plan, entailing multiple apologetic discourse strategies to attempt to limit the amount of damage and retain prospective positive attitudes towards the organization" (Arendt et al., 2017, p. 8). Study shows that when organizations

promise to make a change or do something different, the media, stock markets, and consumers tend to have a better response.

Conclusion

This case study reinforces the importance of instantaneous response time in crisis communication and the proper usage of William Benoit's Image Repair strategies. Corrective action is proven to be the most effective when aiming to repair an organization's reputation although it is not required at all times, it is essential to consider it. Sports organizations should refrain from using denial, as it taints their image more. This paper also analyzed and collected data from the Houston Astros organization and used it as a basis for this case study. All other sources consisted of qualitative research and deductive reasoning to point out the most common usage of the image repair strategies and in what way they have affected media and modern society. Technology has shifted how PR practitioners approach crises. In sports organizations now, they shouldn't expect to only answer to corporate sponsors but also to their fans, opposing teams, the news outlets, social media, cancel culture, and brand endorsements.

Implications for Practice

This case study provides a broad overview of how image repair strategies can be employed by PR practitioners of large sports organizations. Based on the qualitative meta-analysis of 110 peer-reviewed articles from the past 30 years, corrective action alone, or paired with reducing offensiveness has proven to be the most successful strategies. While corrective action and reducing offensiveness may be stressed as being the best approaches, this paper is in no way urging the use of only those two strategies. This study also demonstrates how denial, one of the most unsuccessful strategies, is most commonly used despite the high rate of failure. Lastly, this case study aims to provide a guide based on what approaches PR practitioners should

avoid whilst also depending on their company's own mitigating factors that help in determining failure or success.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this case study features data from numerous peer-reviewed articles and several news articles, this research is only applicable to this specific Houston Astros crisis and its crisis response at that time. The findings of this study cannot be generalized to all sports crises. The data collected and analyzed in this specific case study are from secondary sources, therefore the findings of this case study are based on previous efforts of others and not entirely on my own. However, despite these limitations, future research could include conducting a quantitative survey research that is generalizable to PR practitioners of numerous sports organizations, and those necessarily related to sports. Rather than focusing primarily on research that was already conducted qualitatively, the future research could also use inductive reasoning and primary research methods to draw conclusions from data that has not already been examined.

References

- Alexander, (2016). *Defining Crisis Communication*, Sage Publications, 1-6.
- Arendt, C., LaFleche, M., Limperopulos, M. (2017). A qualitative meta-analysis of apologia, image repair, and crisis communication: Implications for theory and practice, *Public Relations Review*, 517-526
- Armfield, G. G., McGuire, J., Hoffman, W., Shin, Y., Eckhart, N., Acquah-Baidoo, B., Diaz, J. (2019). Deflategate: The Patriots' use of image repair. *The Sport Journal*, 1-24.
- Axisa, M. (2020). Houston Astros cheating scandal: 10 things we learned from MLB's nine-page investigative report. CBS Sports.
- Benoit, W. (2018). Crisis and Image Repair at United Airlines: Fly the Unfriendly Skies. *Journal of International Crisis and Risk Communication Research*, VOL. 1, NO 1, 11-26.
- Devlin, N., Brown, K. (2020). When Crises Change the Game: Establishing a Typology of Sports-Related Crises. *Journal of International Crisis and Risk Communication Research*, VOL. 3, NO 1, 49-70.
- DiSanza, J., Gribas, J., Hartman, K., Legge, N. (2018). *Journal of International Crisis and Risk Communication Research*, VOL. 1, NO 2, 223-252.
- Draper, K. (2020). The Houston Astros Comment on Their Cheating Scandal: We're Sorry. *The New York Times*.
- Nightengale, B. (2020). Astros owner Jim Crane opens up on sign-stealing scandal: 'It weighs on all of us every day'. *USA Today Sports*.
- Perry, D. (2020). Astros, Red Sox sign-stealing timeline: Everything we know about MLB scandals. CBS Sports.

Richards, O., Wilson, C., Boyle, K., & Mower, J. (2017). A knockout to the NFL's reputation?:

A

case study of the NFL's crisis communication strategies in response to the Ray Rice scandal. *Public Relations Review* 43(3), 615-623

Slusser, S. (2020). Twitter.

Talbot, D. (2015). The importance of qualitative research and the problem of mass data gathering. LinkedIn.

Vigdor, N. (2020). The Houston Astros' Cheating Scandal: Sign-Stealing, Buzzer Intrigue and Tainted Pennants. The New York Times.

Yin R.K. (2000) Case Study Evaluations: A Decade of Progress?. In: Stufflebeam D.L., Madaus G.F., Kellaghan T. (eds) Evaluation Models. Evaluation in Education and Human Services, vol 49. Springer, Dordrecht. https://doi.org/10.1007/0-306-47559-6_11