

Sports Crisis Communication Scorecard

SMA 210
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What is a Sports Crisis?

A crisis is anything that threatens an organization's reputation.

Crises are unique to sport in several ways:

- Fan identification leads to strong reactions and extreme perceptions
- Sponsors determine financial damage
- The crisis can occur at various levels (athlete, team, league)

Coombs & Harker, 2021, Brown et al., 2019, Harker, 2019

What is Crisis Communication?

Analysis: Giving Deshaun Watson \$230 million guaranteed has become a disaster for the Browns

Updated Nov. 15, 2023 7:00 P News Article

Associated Press

Mike Vrabel, Dianna Russini Had Discreet Getaway During Her Pregnancy: Report

NBA bans Jontay Porter after gambling probe shows he shared information, bet on games

SPORTS

Tiger Woods is facing an uncertain future off the golf course after his DUI arrest in Florida

House committee report says Commanders owner created a 'toxic work culture'

Luis Rubiales quits in wake of World Cup kiss scandal

Spanish football boss forcibly kissed Jenni Hermoso after the final and had previously refused to step down

The Problem

- No widely used/accepted standard evaluation model for crisis communication
- No evaluation models exist that are made for the unique context of sports
- No easy way to compare crisis handling between uniquely different crisis situations in sports
- Team level crises have been one of the least researched types of sports crises over the past 30 years

Harker, 2023

The Solution

- A sports crisis communication scorecard (SCCS) designed specifically for sports, made for team/league level
- Designed to be scored by an independent third party (league, player's association)
- Provides possibility of disciplinary action/punishment based on a poor score
- Evaluation questions fall into three categories and are part of a weighted scoring system with simple formulas

Communication Quality

- Speed of response *Determ, 2024*
- Transparency (providing specific, verifiable information) *Broadsight, 2024*
- Clarity (readability and structure) *Coombs & Harker, 2021*
- Consistency in messaging over time *Institute for Public Relations, 2007*
- Appropriate level of responsibility taken *Coombs, 2007*
- Level of media engagement *Broadsight, 2024*

Communication Quality

Appropriate level of responsibility taken

- 1 – The organization's communication is completely misaligned with the crisis type
- 2 – The organization's communication was somewhat misaligned with the crisis type, either minimizing or overstating responsibility
- 3 – The organization's communication was mostly aligned with the crisis type and used appropriate strategies effectively with small deviations
- 4 – The organization's communication was fully aligned with the crisis type and used appropriate strategies effectively

Communication Quality

- **Victim crises** imply little to no fault (natural disasters, workplace violence)
- **Accidental crises** imply limited responsibility (stakeholder complaints, technical error)
- **Preventable crises** place full responsibility on the organization (misdeed, moral or legal violation)

*Institute for Public Relations, 2007,
Anderson Executive Development Centre, n.d.*

Table 3: SCCT crisis response strategy guidelines

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

Coombs, 2007

Organization/Team Context

- League policy compliance
- Response represents the team's identity and values
- Response addressed negative impacts on team (distractions, suspension, etc.)

Coombs & Harker, 2021

Fan Impact

- Fan trust/perceptions (survey)
- Fan sentiment (social media sentiment content analysis)

Determ, 2024, Broadsight, 2024, Coombs & Harker, 2021

Scoring

Category	Raw Points Possible	Weight
Communication Quality	24	40%
Organization/Team Context	12	30%
Fan Impact (Survey)	40	20%
Fan Impact (Sentiment Analysis)	10	10%

- Sentiment analysis converted to 10-point scale; survey results averaged
- Category scoring: ([category raw score/total points possible] * category weight)
- Final scorecard result: add all weighted category totals together (out of 100)

Limitations

- In the pre-crisis, crisis response, and post-crisis framework, this scorecard falls under post-crisis evaluation and cannot assist in pre-crisis planning *Coombs & Harker, 2021*
- Does not consider previous crisis history of the organization, which also plays a factor in overall reputational threat *Frederick et al., 2023*
- Crises that occur over an extended period of time may be harder to score

Thank You!

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References

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Appendix

Communication Quality

Speed of response

- 1 – response was extremely slow, initial statement given 6+ days after incident
- 2 – response was somewhat slow, initial statement given 2-5 days after incident
- 3 – response was somewhat fast, initial statement given between 12-48 hours after incident
- 4 – response was extremely fast, initial statement given in under 12 hours after incident

Transparency (providing specific, verifiable information)

- 1 – statements included no specific details and vague or evasive language
- 2 – statements included minimal details and key facts missing
- 3 – statements included limited specific details and partial explanations
- 4 – statements included detailed facts (who/what, next steps, etc.)

Clarity (readability and structure)

- 1 – statements were extremely confusing, disorganized, and used overly vague language that could not be understood
- 2 – statements were somewhat unclear and hard to understand, with ambiguous wording
- 3 – statements were mostly clear, concise, and easy to understand
- 4 – statements were extremely clear, concise, and easy to understand

Appendix

Communication Quality cont.

Consistency in messaging over time

- 1 – messaging had major contradictions in facts and details across communications
- 2 – messaging noticeably changed in tone or explanation across communications
- 3 – messaging had minor inconsistencies across communications, but the overall message was stable
- 4 – messaging was extremely consistent across communications

Appropriate level of responsibility taken (Response Strategy Alignment)

This is based on an analysis of Coombs' victim, accidental, and preventable categories – determine which one the organization falls under, and then rate them on the scale based on whether they responded appropriately based on the crisis type.

- 1 – The organization's communication is completely misaligned with the crisis type
- 2 – The organization's communication was somewhat misaligned with the crisis type, either minimizing or overstating responsibility
- 3 – The organization's communication was mostly aligned with the crisis type and used appropriate strategies effectively with small deviations
- 4 – The organization's communication was fully aligned with the crisis type and used appropriate strategies effectively

Appendix

Communication Quality cont.

Level of media engagement

- 1 – The organization demonstrated no engagement with the media beyond an initial statement
- 2 – The organization demonstrated limited engagement with the media (single follow-up or minimal response/availability)
- 3 – The organization demonstrated moderate engagement with the media (multiple interactions, press availability)
- 4 – The organization demonstrated high engagement with the media (press conferences, ongoing updates, willingness to take questions, etc.)

Organization/Team Context

The organization followed league policy compliance

- 1 – The organization violated or ignored league regulations and protocols
- 2 – The organization partially followed league regulations and protocols with some major gaps and omissions
- 3 – The organization mostly followed the league regulations and protocols with minor gaps
- 4 – The organization fully followed all league regulations and protocols

Appendix

Organization/Team Context cont.

The crisis response represents the team's identity and values

- 1 – responses did not include any reference to the team's identity and values
- 2 – responses included implicit or vague references to the team's identity and values
- 3 – responses included a clear reference to the team's identity and values at least once
- 4 – responses included frequent, explicit references to the team's identity and values

Response addresses the negative impacts on the team (distraction, suspensions, etc.)?

- 1 – responses did not address negative impacts on the team
- 2 – responses mentioned negative impacts on the team in vague language without detail
- 3 – responses addressed some negative impacts on the team with limited explanation
- 4 – responses clearly addressed any negative impacts on the team and implications

Appendix

Fan Impact

Fan trust (survey)

All are 4-point scales from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Administered in a randomized way to individuals who identify themselves as fans of the organization. Demographics will be collected at the beginning of the survey.

- The organization handled the situation appropriately
- The organization responded to the situation in a timely manner
- The organization took an appropriate level of responsibility for the situation
- The organization provided clear, sufficient information about the situation
- The organization's communication was easy to understand
- The organization addressed how the situation would impact the team
- The organization's response felt sincere
- My view of the organization remains unchanged after this situation
- I will continue to support the organization
- I trust the organization's communication

Appendix

Fan Impact cont.

Fan reaction/sentiment (social media sentiment content analysis)

Instructions: On X, use the advanced search options to enter the organization's name and keywords related to the crisis event (a player's name, a location, the crisis' nickname, etc.) and set a timeframe of (1) the first two days after the event (2) the next the next five days following (3) and the next week. Using a sampling interval of every third post, collect 50 posts from each timeframe and analyze results by categorizing each by positive, negative, or neutral valence. To provide the organization with further insight, identify the subject of each post (whom or what the positivity or negativity is aimed at).

Appendix

Scoring

To calculate the total score, each section is converted into a percentage of its possible points and multiplied by its designated weight. Then, each section's resulting score is added together for a final scorecard result out of 100.

Category scoring: $([\text{category raw score} / \text{total points possible}] * \text{category weight})$

Final crisis communication score: communication quality score + organization/team context score + fan impact (survey) score + fan impact (sentiment analysis) score

Fan Impact Scoring

Survey: Each response is added up (worth up to 40 points each) and then all responses are averaged for a final score.

Sentiment analysis: To convert the sentiment analysis results to a 10-point scale, calculate the net sentiment: $([\text{positive posts} - \text{negative}] / \text{total posts})$, then convert the score to a 10-point scale: $([(\text{Net sentiment} + 1) / 2] * 10)$. Now, each score is out of 10 and can be weighted easily.