Fall 12-2016

An Examination Into University-Based Image Repair via Social Media as Demonstrated by Penn State University's Effort During the Jerry Sandusky Scandal

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AN EXAMINATION INTO UNIVERSITY-BASED IMAGE REPAIR VIA SOCIAL MEDIA AS DEMONSTRATED BY PENN STATE UNIVERSITY'S EFFORT DURING THE JERRY SANDUSKY SCANDAL

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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December 2016

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Title: An Examination Into University-Based Image Repair via Social Media as Demonstrated by Penn State University's Effort During the Jerry Sandusky Scandal

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This study examines the effort of Pennsylvania State University's image repair strategy during the Jerry Sandusky scandal. Utilization of a content analysis allowed for exploration into three sources of message content: traditional press releases, Facebook posts, and Twitter posts. Examination of the data suggests that Penn State University utilized similar image repair strategies on Facebook and Twitter (reduction and correction) while press releases used a more diverse selection of strategies (denial, evasion, reduction, correction, and mortification). The study found that the University only moderately used image repair strategy within their message content regardless of the source. An expanded look at other message content revealed that the origin of the message (Facebook, Twitter, or press release) is directly related to content. A summary and analysis of the results, the implications thereof, and suggestions for future research conclude this study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I say that I have daydreamed for years about writing this section of my dissertation, it would not be an understatement. I have literally been driving down the road, miles of highway before me, and caught myself considering what it was that I would write when this day finally came. And here I am. I can hardly believe it. The last seven years have been ones of significant growth and change for me, and I am so proud that, while it may have taken longer than initially expected, this portion of my journey is coming to a close. I have no idea what the appropriate length for acknowledgements is in a document like this, but considering everything, I'm simply going to write until I am finished as there are many people who deserve to be noted. It's quite possible, that after all is said and done, that these words of thanks could be longer than the dissertation itself.

To the members of my committee, thank you for your guidance, your patience, and your commitment to helping me stay focused on the finish line. Dr. Zachary Stiegler and Dr. Vicky Ortiz, I can't tell you how appreciative I am to have you join the committee of a student you've never had the opportunity to teach and still guide me as if I was one of your star students. Your contribution to the completion of this dissertation does not go unnoticed.

Dr. Mary Beth Leidman, I am honored to have you as the chair of what is to be the pinnacle of my academic work. If I had to choose someone to guide me, and I could have my choice of anyone to work with, I would pick you every day of the week. You have provided me tough love, professional and academic guidance, a place to stay, and a little bit of support and therapy along the way. I am forever indebted to you. I feel

fortunate to know you and even more blessed to have had the opportunity to be taught by and learn from you. Thank you.

To my cohort 2 (and 2.5) members, thank you for embarking on this journey with me. Although our completion dates staggered across the years, I am grateful that I had the opportunity to grow and learn with you. I've often wanted to write a joke that starts "a West Virginian, a Jersey Girl, a Pennsyltucky redneck, a Jew, and a Dego walk into a grad school…" Margaret Stewart, Chris Carnahan, Dana Hackley, and Robyn Defelice…you made this whole process tolerable, and I am honored to call you friends. (For the record, the joke ends with some reference to a honey badger, some inappropriate bubble gum, and pumped up kicks).

To Mike, Sharon, and Carole, my last minute guardian angels, data support, and editors, thank you so much for your assistance in the completion of this document. In addition to my academic counterparts, there are friends along the way that have provided support in just about every way imaginable. Andy Hinkley, Don Feenerty, Brandi Waligura, Olivia Morgan, John & Denise Artimez, Corey Pietranton, Mark Frank, Robb Scott, Kindra Browning, and countless others, your involvement in my life has added immeasurable value and enrichment. You truly don't know how much your friendship has meant to me.

To my colleagues and friends at Wheelhouse Creative, I appreciate you for enduring this process with me. In the middle of this degree, we launched an advertising agency together, and I am so proud of all we have accomplished. Jamie Bordas, thank you for embracing my vision and supporting the development of Wheelhouse. I appreciate your flexibility as I finished this degree, and I look forward to adding creative

and professional value to what we offer our clients. Rob Vandine, I especially thank you for always being my Yoda and my friend. You poked the bear when necessary and reminded me of those dreadful words I needed to hear to get this done. I'm proud to be your #2.

To the girls of the best worst summer, thank you for helping me survive when I thought everything around me was falling apart. Jennifer Golden, you continually show me what it is to be strong, and I am so proud of you for all you've endured and how far you've come. You are my soul sister, and it was certainly fate that brought an Upper Mexican gal and a random West Virginia girl together (in Marietta, Ohio of all places). There is no doubt we were destined, as friends, to deal with the incredible challenges we have faced. I suppose I need to thank Yogi for bringing us together, as I couldn't have done any of this without you.

Thanks to Michele Rejonis, who knew of all the twists and turns that life would throw at us since we shared a cube at Bethany and I continually broke in your room to leave inappropriate outgoing messages on your answering machine! On the surface, we appear to be unlikely friends, you with your hair and nails and Corvette and me with, well, my chucks, Volkswagen, and crass humor. You've seen me at my best and my worst, and I'm thankful for your near 30 year friendship. Jessie Sutphin, the keeper of my Facebook should I kick the bucket early; I am so thankful that the worst of circumstances brought us together. You get my humor. We've been horrible "askholes" to each other, and we have endured more life lessons in a few short years than many get in a lifetime. I cannot imagine what my life would be like without you in it. I am honored to be considered your person. Wendy Clutter, you've been by my trusty

sidekick since I was five years old…the brunette to my blonde. The short to my tall. The more reserved to my over the top. You know every demon and every triumph and are in every way the sister I never had. There are no words to explain what your friendship means to me. To each of these incredible women, know that I am confident that your involvement in my life is not seasonal…it is a lifelong journey, and I look forward to seeing us all end up blissfully happy. I am so honored to know you, and I assure you that the next chapter of our adventure is destined to be the best one.

Speaking of new chapters…Kevin. How on earth do I begin? There is not enough time or words to share everything that I believe with regard to your purpose and your impact on my life. Twenty-six years ago a friendship was born, and twenty-six years later the clarity that comes with a lifetime of choices has led the two of us right back to where we both belong. Our story may be messy, and it took a long time to realize it, but it truly is amazing. It got us to right here, right now and I would not change it for anything. I can't wait for whatever comes next. Just like in *The Notebook*, "It's not going to be easy, it's going to be really hard…" (You know how the rest of it goes). Now, tell me I'm a bird.

To my parents, Barb and Bob Scanlon, every value I hold true, every commitment I make and fulfill, and every success I have can be directly attributed to you. Dad, you have always been my biggest fan. From custom-made high jump shoes to tireless work on the endless numbers of cars that have filtered through my (and now my children's) life, I could not do any of this without you. You show your love through doing for your family, and there is not a day that goes by that I do not know how much you love us all. I wish everyone could get to know the wonderful man that we do. Mom,

there were plenty of times growing up that I was embarrassed by the causes you championed or the active role you chose to take in our community. But, as I've gotten older, I have learned that your passion, your commitment, your lifelong service to something that you believe in is exactly what makes you the most amazing person I've ever known. I hit the jackpot when God gave me you guys as parents. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for everything you've done to help me achieve my dreams. I love you.

As for my children, I'm going to start in order. Carleigh. Carleigh, tu m'as toujours inspirée. C'est un peu bizarre, n'est-ce pas? Ne serait-il pas la mère qui inspire sa fille? J'éspère que je le fais dans une façon, mais s'il te plaît, je veux que tu saches que, pour moi, ayant le plaisir de te regarder devenir adulte et embrasser qui tu es et toi-même est simplement encroyable à regarder. Tu n'es jamais désolée à cause de ce que tu crois et tu es devenue une jeune femme vraiment encroyable. J'ai fermé les yeux pour un instant. Tu as grandi trop vite. Et maintenant, je ne peux pas attendre ce qui t'attend quand tu commences tes propres aventures. Je voudrais penser que ta curiosité est venue de moi pendant que je reste ici, si fière, en te regardant partager tes talents avec le monde. Je t'aime beaucoup. Je suis énormement fière de toi.

Sydney. There has never been a day that I have not been proud to be your mother. Whether it is in the classroom, in the pool, or biting the bullet and stepping out of your comfort zone, you simply refuse to be anything but the best. Your work ethic is only surpassed by your intelligence. And those things pale in comparison to the very soft and caring heart that you hold inside. You're a pineapple Syd (kind of rough on the

outside, but super sweet on the inside with a crown on top) and I love you for that. I jus know you're going to do great things, and I promise from here to forevermore, I will always welcome your inappropriately timed hugging.

And lastly, Quinton. My boogabooska, my best buddy. The amount of joy you provide to my life on a daily basis is beyond words. I am so proud of the young man you are becoming…so kind, so thoughtful, so incredibly gifted. There is not a day that goes by that I am not thankful that God gave me you for a son. Even with all of the fart jokes and gross little boy things, I beam with pride of who you are and undoubtedly the wonderful man you will turn out to be. I would not trade those moments for the world. I love you to the moon and back and back again to infinity.

Thank you all for enduring this process with me. I could not have done it without each and everyone of you.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my children. May it show you that with hard work anything is possible and there is great freedom (and satisfaction) in doing what others think you cannot do.

Table of Contents

Chapter Page

Chapter Page

Chapter Page

List of Tables

Table Page

CHAPTER ONE

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In early November 2011, news broke that a grand jury had indicted former Pennsylvania State University (Penn State, PSU) football coach Jerry Sandusky on 48 counts of sex crimes against young boys. This indictment followed a two-year grand jury investigation suggesting that Sandusky had inappropriate sexual contact with at least eight boys in incidents spanning nearly a 15-year period. In the days that followed, prosecutors brought charges against three school administrators for allegedly covering up the incidents. The University, the athletic department, Sandusky, the head football coach, Joe Paterno, and other high-ranking school officials would fall under intense scrutiny for mishandling the reporting of the events. This dissertation examines the message selection of the University as the incident unfolded and explores how the image repair strategy, if any, was threaded within the content. Multiple statements, press conferences, and social media posts transpired during the crisis and instruction was given to all University departments to cease posting on social media (Scott, 2012). The Office of Strategic Communications at Penn State, the primary source of outgoing information to the media and the community, was challenged to contain the escalating crisis and provide much-needed information as the charges against Sandusky and the University mounted (Boatwright, 2013).

Before the indictment, Sandusky, along with the University and the football program, maintained a positive reputation. Sandusky's more than 30 years with the program were complemented by his establishment of a philanthropic organization, The Second Mile, designed to assist with the support and character development of at-risk

youth. Throughout the incident, it was suggested that boys from The Second Mile, and others whom Sandusky befriended through his position there and at the University, were the primary targets for the incidents, some which occurred at Penn State facilities.

The accusations against Sandusky included multiple counts of involuntary deviant sexual intercourse, aggravated indecent assault, corruption of minors, unlawful contact with minors, and endangering the welfare of minors (Ganim, 2011). The administrators accused of ignoring the incidents indicated their intent was to avoid damaging Penn State University's reputation and losing crucial financial backing for the football program (Chapell, 2012).

Viera (2011) states that the grand jury report indicates that Sandusky targeted the children for sexual contact and advances for nearly two decades. The trial began in early June 2012, and Sandusky was ultimately convicted of 45 of the 48 counts. Consequentially, Sandusky was jailed and sentenced for up to 60 years in federal prison for his crimes.

The nation and the world was interested in this story. As news spread, information and the involvement of other Penn State officials surfaced and added interest and momentum to the crisis. Allegations of misconduct and a cover-up within the athletic department as well as the mishandling of the incident forced multiple resignations and resulted in a tarnished reputation for the University. Graham Spanier, then Penn State University president, resigned during the allegations. The PSU Board of Trustees, faced with mounting scrutiny, terminated longtime head football coach Joe Paterno for allegedly not communicating relevant information to proper authorities in a timely and appropriate manner. Paterno, who later died in 2012 after a long bout with

cancer, had held the head football coaching position at Penn State since 1966 (Boatwright, 2013). At the time of the scandal, Paterno was the winningest head coach in collegiate football history and was heralded as a hero, icon, and legend among the University and the State College community as well as in the national landscape of college football (Allison, 2012).

At Penn State, the university football program contributes significantly to the University culture and is an important contributor to the University's operating budget. At the time of the scandal, the University's athletic department had a net income of more than 31 million dollars (Jessop, 2012). Thus, this crisis, which enveloped the University, had the opportunity to significantly damage the reputation and the bottom line of Penn State University.

The University reputation and its finances weren't the only issues that Penn State was facing. Upon hearing of Paterno's termination, Penn State students, unhappy with the decision of the University, rioted in the streets of State College, Pennsylvania, overturning a news van and tearing down city street lights (Schweber, 2011). Additionally, the scandal expanded perjury charges were brought against Director of Athletics, Timothy Curley and Vice President Gary Shultz. When questioned, both men allegedly lied about what they new of Sandusky's involvement in the incidents.

As a result of the national and global attention, the media interest increased contributing to heightened speculation, increased scrutiny and significant negative impact to the reputation and image of Penn State. The scandal impacted University support, most notably through a decline in sponsorships (McCarthy, 2013), sale of merchandise (Loviglio, 2011), and submissions for admission (Athavaley, Bachman,

Maher, & Miller, 2012). In addition, even recent graduates faced increased scrutiny when seeking employment with Penn State degrees (Lauerman & Perlberg, 2011). Even Moody's Investor Services considered downgrading Penn State's credit rating as a direct result of the Sandusky scandal. (Associated Press, 2012).

As if the crisis was not significant enough, in2012, the Freeh Report, containing the results of an independent investigation by former Federal Bureau of Investigation Director Louis Freeh, found that Penn State senior leadership had a blatant disregard for the "safety and welfare of Sandusky's child victims" (p.14). Within the report, Freeh discovered that multiple individuals in senior leadership at Penn State knew of the misconduct by Sandusky and failed to do anything about it. As a result of the Freeh report, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) imposed significant sanctions against Penn State and its athletic program (Boatwright, 2013). The penalties included a 60 million dollar fine, the elimination of a wins of the football program between 2008 and 2011 (112), a ban on post-season play for four years, a reduction in the number of athletic scholarships, an opportunity for waivers for existing athletes to freely transfer to other programs, and a five-year probation for the athletic department (Penn State sanctions, 2012).

The scandal, coupled with the involvement of and sanctions by the NCAA, contributed to a significant crisis for the image and reputation of Penn State University. Forced to attempt to regain a positive foothold in the media and maintain what was left of Penn State's stellar reputation, University administrators attempted to provide responses that defended the institution. Throughout the investigation, Penn State released multiple statements to strategically deploy its University and public relations

strategy. Furthermore, Penn State also responded to issues through online postings to multiple social media platforms throughout the scandal.

News of the indictment spread quickly, and media outlets across the nation and the globe carried the story. Public and University relations at Penn State worked to provide information to initiate damage control and offer an appropriate crisis response as national and global interest in the story grew. The situation escalated rapidly not only because of the seriousness of the accusations but also of the number of individuals involved, the far-reaching involvement of multiple University departments and because of the potential damage to the long-standing reputation of the institution. Penn State went from public relations maintenance to full-blown crisis management in a matter of hours. Appropriate crisis management, including how to harness the cascade of information on social media, is of vital importance when potentially damaging news breaks. Image repair strategies are executed in concert with crisis management to assist the organization with reputation maintenance during and following a crisis (Coombs, 2007).

This dissertation explores Penn State University's image repair strategies in the month immediately following Sandusky's indictment. Specifically, an assessment of strategies used in traditional public relations approaches (press releases and formal statements) were examined in comparison to comments posted on the official Penn State University Facebook page and Twitter feed. This exploration considered how Penn State utilized image repair strategies within each methodology, using Benoit's (1995; 1997) image repair theory as the theoretical framework for the content analysis. This study provides the framework for the use of social media in image repair during

crisis in the University setting. It explores how the strategies were employed in both traditional and online media and provides a foundational understanding of future research on effectiveness or impact.

Need for the Study

When an organization is in crisis, practitioners work to not only manage the incident but also to facilitate reputation repair if necessary. Coombs (2007) indicated that image repair could occur while responding to the crisis as it unfolds, after the crisis has concluded, or both. Historically, this has been managed through the release of timed statements and press releases coordinated through a dedicated office or spokesperson. In the case of this study, the Penn State Office of Strategic Communications and the Office of the President served as information resources.

With the rise of social media as an avenue for information dissemination, public relations professionals are also using these more interactive channels as a way to disseminate image repair messages (Eyrich, Padman & Sweetser, 2008). According to Eyrich, Padman, and Sweetser (2008), communication technology has made the public relations job easier by expediting the circulation of the message to a much broader audience. Furthermore, social media and other electronic communication methods offer not only opportunities to reach out and engage audiences but also provide an avenue to strengthen relationships (Briones, Kuch, Liu & Jin, 2011).

Grunig (2009) emphasized the importance of relationships in public relations, indicating that the overall goal of public relations is to build or enhance a connection with the organization's key stakeholders or publics. Publics, as defined in the public relations literature, area group actively involved in the discussion of organizational

issues (Hallahan, 2000). Grunig (2009) argued that an organization suffers when publics don't support its goals or direction, providing a clear understanding of why public relations and message management is an important part of issues management and crisis communication. In the case of Penn State, the Strategic Communications office had a lot of people to consider. The media were not the only ones invested in this story, alumni, students, investors, fans, the State College community, the nation and even the world were watching, reading, and following online.

Considering its ability to reach a large amount of individuals quickly and relatively easily, social media and other online dialogue like blogs, wikis, and website updates provide the opportunity for public relations practitioners to build and strengthen relationships with their publics and ultimately make the process of communicating more global, strategic, two-way dialogical, and socially responsible (Grunig, 2009).

Grunig (1983) as part of 'Excellence Theory' describes two-way symmetrical communication between public relations organizations and their stakeholders. Within this model, the organization researches, listens and creates dialogue with its publics to develop and maintain positive relationships. Grunig expands on this theory to include digital platforms indicating that online, publics have increased control over their sources of information and thus organizations have opportunity and little choice to communicate with them providing the information they seek thus strengthening these relationships virtually anytime and anyplace (James Grunig: Excellence Theory, 2013).

The interactive, two-way model of communication that is encouraged in social media channels provides an impressive backdrop for image repair messages (Hambrick& Frederick, 2013). With social media, near instant feedback is possible, and

messages and strategies could potentially be manipulated based upon follower comments and response. Unlike traditional public relations methods in which information is pushed one-way to the end user, the use of social media bypasses traditional media outlets and gatekeepers and focuses message content directly to opt-in followers of the page or feed (Eyrich et al., 2008). These responses are timely, customizable, and concrete to the post, comment, or issue at hand (Smith, 2010).

It is the responsibility of the public relations practitioner to determine not only message content but also its distribution (Hon & Grunig, 1999). The who, what, when, why, and how, while still important, are only a portion of the public relations consideration. Now, public relations practitioners must not only provide the basic facts through traditional methods like press releases, but also continue to provide updates as they unfold online because interested individuals through social media become active and engaged. Balancing traditional media relations with dynamic social media activity makes the process of image repair much more comprehensive but also potentially much more complicated (Moody, 2008). When considering messages for reputation management or image repair, this process becomes even more strategic.

According to Benoit (1997), image repair is facilitated by five overarching strategies: denial, evasion of responsibility, reduction of offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification. This dissertation explores how Penn State utilized these tactics by using social media (specifically Facebook and Twitter) as a modality for distributing image repair messages in contrast to traditional methodologies, such as issuing press releases and statements. The exploration of social media provides the opportunity to communicate image repair messages without a gatekeeper (Moody

2011), and this study examined both Facebook and Twitter alongside the more traditional methodologies of press releases and statements.

Scholarship exists exploring internet-based communication in crisis situations (Gonzalez-Herero & Smith, 2008), and scholars have performed studies on image repair strategies (Benoit & Brinson, 1999; Harlow, Brantley & Harlow, 2011). What is lacking within the literature is research exploring the use of internet-based social media as a message modality for image repair strategies, especially within organizations in immediate crisis. Also, the literature on image repair within a higher education setting is extremely lacking, and the most significant scholarship in this area focused on the Duke University lacrosse rape scandal (Fortunato, 2008; Len Rios, 2010). This dissertation attempts to fill the gap in the literature and explore how Penn State University exercised its ability to use Facebook and Twitter in addition to press releases and statements as image repair vehicles during the Jerry Sandusky incident. In addition, examining Penn State's response in a crisis of this magnitude, this study provides opportunity for public relations professionals to examine their own communication plans and proactively consider their own management strategies when a crisis occurs.

Purpose of the Study

This study focuses on the use of social media as a potential vehicle for image repair. Specifically, the use of Facebook and Twitter were examined in the context of the Jerry Sandusky scandal at Penn State University to explore how image repair strategies were posted within the message content immediately following the crisis outbreak. This research investigates how the University utilized image repair strategies

within their social media posts in contrast to the strategies used within traditional public relations tactics (press releases, statements from news conferences).

This dissertation examines how social media is used as a tool for facilitating image repair messages. While this study does not intend to judge the effectiveness or impact of the messages and strategies utilized by Penn State, an analysis of the image repair strategies and methodologies used to share the message with the public could provide a framework for impact analysis in future research and exploration and give communication professionals opportunity to examine their own crisis communication plans.

In examining literature relating to image repair, the researcher determined that studies comprised primarily case studies examining how an individual or company handled their image repair efforts during a crisis situation (Benoit & Pang, 2007; Holtzhausen & Roberts, 2009; Liu, 2007), but were conducted after the conclusion of the crisis or after the press coverage had dramatically declined. In contrast, this study simultaneously explored the messages that unfolded during the crisis at Penn State, overlapping the situation as it happened. Its purpose is to understand how social media posts can be used to help further an image repair campaign by an organization as the crisis unfolds versus the traditional reactionary repair at the conclusion of the issue.

Research on image repair and social media has emerged only in the last several years and scholarship remains limited in this area (e.g., Liu & Kim, 2011; Moody, 2011; Muralidhara, Dillistone, & Shin, 2011; Page, 2014). That research also includes case studies examining how social media efforts played a role in the image repair strategies used after the situation had been defused. This study will look at message strategy

during the first month of the crisis, allowing exploration into the University response as the crisis was escalating.

Theoretical Context

Crisis is often the catalyst for reputation management. Maintaining one's image during turbulent times can make or break a brand (Coombs, 2007). Internet-based technologies, partnered with traditional public relations methods, are increasingly utilized in crisis communication management (Gonzalez-Herero & Smith, 2008), and considering their adaptive and instantaneous nature, social media are now being used to facilitate image repair (Moody, 2011; Page, 2014). Liu & Fraustino (2014) suggested that crisis communication management should include social media when considering image repair.

Image Repair Theory

Image repair theory (Benoit, 1995; 1997) explains how individuals and organizations attempt to correct negative public perception after a particular series of events. This theory is often cited as the basis for understanding reputation repair in response to crisis situations and is frequently used as the theoretical foundation for scholarship on this subject (Caldiero, Taylor & Ungurenu, 2009; Harlow, Brantley & Harlow, 2011; Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997). Benoit's theory was selected because it is the predominate theory in image repair scholarship. Existing research (Avery, Lariscy, Kim, & Hocke, 2010) suggested that further study is necessary for industry specific situations to analyze the success of image repair strategies. This study will attempt to do just that, examining image repair in a University setting during a crisis.

Social Media in Crisis Communication

Social media are already being used in crisis situations to transmit informational messages. Heverin and Zach (2010) explored the use of Twitter as a method to exchange information regarding the shooting of four police officers in the Seattle-Tacoma area in Washington to explain microblogging's role in information exchange. Furthermore, Heinzelman and Waters (2010) discussed the concept of crowdsourcing crisis information via text messages and social media (blogs, Facebook, and Twitter) during the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. Both studies showcase information exchange as a benefit of social media in crisis scenarios highlighting how social media allowed for real-time dialogue with end users.

Relationship management becomes of critical importance during a crisis, and internet-based social media platforms are increasingly being used to facilitate such ongoing dialogue between stakeholders. Blogs (Sweetser & Metzgar, 2007), texting (Tucker, 2011), and tweeting (Vieweg, Starbird, &Palen, 2010) have been shown to facilitate near instantaneous, credible communication among users. Due to their opt-in nature, users can seek, and the organization can nearly instantly provide valuable information.

Social media have made organizational communication personal, connecting with end users to create, build, and sustain relationships; Social media have allowed stakeholders to receive information in the event of crisis (Byrd, 2012). Before the emergence of social media and Internet-based technologies, public relations professionals worked swiftly to write press releases, coordinate press conferences, and make public statements when faced with a crisis (Byrd, 2012). Today, social media

have changed the way people obtain and share information. In fact, in times of crisis, social media use increases as users connect and share to gain credible information (Jin, Liu, & Austin, 2011). Consequently, the 24-hour news cycle has become more prominent as information can now reach audiences instantaneously (Byrd, 2012). In this particular study, the audience was assumed to be traditional media outlets targeted by public and the Strategic Communications Office at Penn State as well as the opt-in subscribers to Penn State's official Facebook and Twitter feed. Thus, the stakeholders examined in this research would be the traditional media as well as online users who have actively followed the Penn State University communication channels online.

Image Repair Message Strategy

Benoit's (1995, 1997) image repair theory provides ample opportunity for organizations or individuals to strategically and selectively execute targeted reputation management messages. Crisis and image reparation often exist in tandem (Coombs, 2007). Scholars have explored image repair strategies in response to a crisis and found that they are situational depending on the crisis, and that strategies are determined depending on how the crisis is unfolding, who is impacted, and the perceived impact of the situation. Zhang and Benoit (2004) explored the use of denial, attacking accusers, and bolstering when studying image repair messages of the Saudi Arabian government in the year following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Celebrities when restoring reputation use similar strategies. Moody (2011) explored the image repair strategies of Jon and Kate Gosselin after receiving criticism of their reality television program *Jon & Kate Plus 8*, and Benoit & Brinson (1999) studied Queen Elizabeth's messages in response to the death of Princess Diana.

Scholars also have studied image repair of organizations in crisis. Harlow, Brantley & Harlow (2011) provided analysis of British Petroleum's (BP) image repair methodology within press releases following the 2010 oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico (Muralidaran, Dillistone& Shin, 2011). In each of these instances, image repair was both proactively and reactively executed in response to the particular crisis situations. To more deeply understand the complexities of this study, several basic definitions of terminology and public relations jargon are provided.

Explanation of Terms

The following terms are defined to provide the necessary framework for evaluating the research explored within this study. Terms of image repair are defined within the context of Benoit's (1997) image restoration strategies. Terms regarding crisis management are defined within Coombs' crisis management strategies (2007).

Terms Defined

Attack. Within the context of a corporate crisis, an attack has two components: 1) the accused is held responsible for an action and 2) the act is considered offensive.

Attack the Accuser. This image restoration strategy attempts to reduce the credibility of the accuser and is a sub-strategy of Reduction (Benoit, 1997).

Accident. The act was a mishap. Accident is a sub-strategy of Evasion of Responsibility. (Benoit, 1997)

Apology. The organization takes full responsibility for the action and asks stakeholders for forgiveness.

Blame Shifting. The organization indicates that the crisis or act was the result of another's actions. Blame Shifting is a sub-strategy of Denial (Benoit, 1997).

Bolstering. The organization stresses its and its people's positive traits. It is a sub-strategy of Reduction (Benoit, 1997).

Compensation. The organization reimburses the victim or victims of an act. Victim compensation is a sub-strategy of Reduction (Benoit, 1997).

Crisis. Within the context of this study, Coombs' 2009 definition of crisis will be utilized. Crisis is then defined as "the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization's performance and generate negative outcomes" (Coombs, 2010).

Crisis Management Plan. This plan is a reference tool that provides a list of essential information in the event of a crisis.

Corrective Action. The accused plans to solve or prevent the problem again in the future (Benoit, 1997).

Denial. The accused states that the accusation is false or indicates that the act was performed by another (see simple denial and blame shifting) (Benoit, 1997).

Defeasibility. The problem was caused by lack of information or ability. Defeasibility is a sub-strategy of Reduction (Benoit, 1997).

Differentiation. The issue is less offensive than other matters that the organization could be facing. It is a sub-strategy of Reduction (Benoit, 1997).

Evasion of Responsibility. The organization deflects blame to other circumstances such as provocation, defeasibility, accident, or misplaced good intentions (Benoit, 1997).

Good Intentions. The organization meant well with its decision-making.

Image. This is the preconceived idea that an individual user holds of a brand or organization based on past experiences and knowledge.

Minimization. The organization states that the crisis or act was not that serious. Minimization is a sub-strategy of Reduction (Benoit, 1997).

Mortification. The organization issues an apology for the act or crisis. (See apology, Benoit, 1997).

Pre-Crisis. The time frame before a crisis occurs, typically when a crisis management plan is defined.

Press Conference. This is a meeting organized for the purpose of distributing information to the media and other stakeholders.

Press Release. This is a public relations announcement issued for the purpose of revealing organizational developments.

Provocation. The organization responded to the act of another. Provocation is a sub-strategy of Evasion (Benoit, 1997).

Post-Crisis. In this phase of crisis management, the organization has returned to regular business, and the crisis is no longer the primary focal point of the organization.

Publics. These are composed of active participants who are motivated and able to voice concerns regarding a public relations message or issue.

Reduction of the Offensiveness of the Event. The organization attempts to reduce the impact of the crisis through tactics like bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attacking the accuser, or compensating victims (Benoit, 1997).

Retweet. On the social network Twitter, this is the act of reposting or forwarding an existing message or tweet.

Simple Denial. The organization states that it did not perform the act. Simple Denial is a sub-strategy of Denial (Benoit, 1997).

Statement. This is a short formalized response to an issue.

Status Update. This is a written post, photo, video or image posted on the social networking service Facebook.

Transcendence. The act has happened due to more important considerations. It is a sub-strategy of Reduction (Benoit, 1997).

Tweet. This is a 140 character or less post on the social networking service Twitter.

Research Questions

The proposed study attempts to identify how Penn State University used Facebook and Twitter as communication vehicles for image repair messages in the month following the Jerry Sandusky scandal. Previous studies have used rhetorical analysis (Benoit & Brinson, 1999) and rhetorical criticism (Zhang & Benoit, 2004) to examine image repair messages and simply were aimed at determining which message strategies, if any, were being used to initiate image repair. In this study, a qualitative content analysis allowed the researcher and an independent coder to explore message content to determine how image repair messages were communicated during the Jerry Sandusky crisis. This study investigated how strategies were used, if at all, within the various platforms geared at traditional and opt-in audiences.

Within this dissertation, the following research questions guided the inquiry:

RQ1: How did Pennsylvania State University utilize image repair strategies via Facebook messages in the month following the Jerry Sandusky indictment?

RQ2: How did Pennsylvania State University utilize image repair strategies via Twitter messages in the month following the Jerry Sandusky indictment?

RQ3: How did Pennsylvania State University utilize image repair strategies via press releases and statements in the month following the Jerry Sandusky indictment?

Delimitations

The content analysis examined how Penn State utilized Facebook and Twitter as modalities for image repair messages as compared to traditional public relations vehicles such as press releases and statements. The study is not intended to establish the success of the image repair strategy or to determine the fault of the crisis; instead, a qualitative content analysis approach was selected to more succinctly examine the use of traditional methods (press releases and statements) and social media (Facebook & Twitter). There are a number of interesting research questions that could be explored but are not being pursued, such as, "Did particular image repair messages garner more follower feedback via social media?" or "How often did Penn State utilize image repair strategies via Facebook or Twitter post-verdict versus post-indictment?" These questions were not pursued in this particular study because (a) the focus of the inquiry was to specifically study a definitive snapshot of time and (b) subject participation via posting comments on social media was problematic due to lack of consent.

Limitations

There are several limitations to the scope of this study. Data collected was via the Penn State University Official Facebook page and Twitter feeds as well as official correspondence from the Office of Strategic Communications. The study was limited by the difficulty in collecting all messages surrounding this crisis that were published on behalf of the University, such as those issued by the PSU Athletic Department and Alumni organizations due to the magnitude of this crisis. It is unreasonable to believe that the messages in this study were the only ones published at this time, therefore limiting the overall scope of this analysis. Furthermore, message alteration during the study via Facebook was possible; therefore, the study was limited only to the archives that existed at the time of the study. Lastly, since the start of this research, Penn State has removed the research guide from the online library regarding the Sandusky incident. Archived and cached copies of the information were provided by the University and were used when applicable.

In Chapter 2, existing scholarship will be examined to provide a foundation for this study as well as a platform for the analysis of the research questions. Crisis communication is defined within the context of this study. Additionally, image repair scholarship and the relationship of social media as an avenue for message transmission are explored. Chapter 3 will provide an overview of the methodology selected for this study and detail the specifics surrounding the execution of the content analysis. Chapter 4 will summarize the results of the study and finally, Chapter 5 will provide opportunity to discuss the findings and suggest opportunities for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature includes an exploration of crisis communication and image repair as well as the use of social media as a method of message transmission. An organization's public relations department often handles the responsibility for crisis management. Within this responsibility, controlling the flow of information and developing message strategy are key components of managing a crisis successfully. Public relations practitioners develop key messages and talking points designed to "stay on message" when dealing with the public or the media during a crisis (Howard & Matthews, 2000; Shin & Cameron, 2005). Additional research indicates that communication is vital during a crisis (Fearn-Banks, 2001). As such, Kaufman (1988) indicated that timely release of accurate information is vital, and when information is lacking, an organization loses control over information flow and interpretation.

In fact, information flow is essential because, due to the impact of social media, the release of information can be spread exponentially to millions of people from multiple sources almost instantly, making the job of the public relations professional challenging. Technology thus challenges the professionals' job of controlling the message unlike official means like spokespersons and the traditional media (Hannah, 2009; Kurtz, 2009).

Crisis Communication

To fully appreciate the need for crisis communication strategies, especially when it comes to examining and expanding upon a complex, sensitive situation like that of Penn State, readers expect a definition of crisis. Coombs (2007) defines crisis as a

perception of an unpredictable event that threatens the expectancies of stakeholders. He indicated that crisis could generate negative outcomes and seriously impact organizational performance. Another definition of crisis describes it as "a specific, unexpected, and non-routine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and threat or perceived threat to an organization's high priority goals" (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 1998, p. 233), and according to Fearn-Banks (2002), a crisis is a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome that could affect the organization, the company, or industry as well as its public, products, services, or good name. Almost as many definitions of crisis exist as there are crisis situations, but the constant themes are a threat to the person or organization and reputation harm. For this study, Coombs'(2007) crisis definition provided the guidance for the research.

Several characteristics exist in Coombs (2007) definition. It should first be noted that a crisis, no matter how significant is defined by perception. The public makes the ultimate determination as to the scope and impact of the crisis, even if the organization elects to not recognize the situation. In other words, if the external audiences believe the crisis to exist, then the organization should believe that it exists (Seeger, 2006). As such, how the public perceives the crisis should have a direct impact on the organizational crisis response. Next, Coombs (2007) indicates that crisis is expected within organizations. While unpredictable, organizational crisis and unrest is not entirely unexpected. In fact, studies show that being prepared is of paramount importance in crisis management (Cloudman and Hallahan, 2006). Furthermore, due to the significance of a crisis, the situation often forces individuals and organizations to make complex decisions swiftly (Stanton, 2002).

The communication that takes place between the organization and its publics during a crisis event is defined as crisis communication. It takes place prior to, during, and after the incident and outlines strategies that are aimed at minimizing damage to the organization's image (Fearn-Banks, 2001). Fearn-Banks (2011) shared that crisis communication should, at a minimum, provide for a transfer of information to stakeholders and secure as little damage to the image of the organization as possible. David (2011) echoed that crisis communication should be occurring throughout the organization's life cycle requiring preparation before, and at the conclusion of the crisis. Reynolds (2006) stated that due to the chaotic and demanding nature of crisis, the ability of public relations professionals to effectively communicate to their stakeholders determines the ultimate reputation of and damage to an organization. What this means ultimately is that the public relations practitioner must be mindful of impending crises and work diligently to communicate organizational messages efficiently once a crisis erupts to avoid long-term damage to their image and any individuals within the organization, related constituencies or other vested stakeholders.

According to Barton (2001) and Coombs (2002), a mishandled crisis can threaten an organization's existence and can damage its reputation and legitimacy. In fact, the Institute of Crisis Management (2008) indicated that a crisis "is a significant business disruption that stimulates extensive news media coverage. The resulting public scrutiny can affect the organization's normal operations and could also have a political, legal, financial and governmental impact on business." This indicates that public relations professionals need to handle the disruption as seamlessly as possible while communicating with vested audiences and interested parties as to the impact and

outcome of the situation. Understanding crisis and the implications of the situation help the organization determine how best to manage communication with interested audiences.

Crisis Communication Management

Crisis communication management is a critical component of the public relations profession. As mentioned previously, it can be argued that the profession remains to create and defend positive reputations for organizations. The problem exists, however, that often individuals and organizations do not consider public relations until their image is on the brink of being damaged (Fearn-Banks, 2010).

Fink (1986) provided the first significant outline of crisis management, building on Littlejohn's (1983) six-step model that stressed the need for a crisis management team and pre-crisis preparedness, by listing four stages of a crisis that he likened to disease development in humans. The prodromal stage warns of impending issues, in which the first signs of crisis present themselves and preparation should take place. This is the stage where organizational “symptoms” are identified. The acute crisis stage is the act that makes the organization “sick”. It is the catalyst that begins the organizational harm. In this stage, the beginning consequences of the crisis are starting to be felt whether that be in reputational damage, financial consequences or other negative outcomes. The chronic stage begins when the organization initiates cleanup and damage control. When the crisis is resolved, the resolution stage begins, and organizational reflection and revision occurs.

Coombs (2007) expanded on this outline to explore the cyclical nature of crisis. He suggested that managing a crisis can be viewed as a cycle broken down into three stages: (a) *precrisis*, which is planning and preparation; (b) *crisis*, which includes the event that triggers the response and the resulting damage; and (c) *postcrisis*, which is the follow-up and ultimate learning and resolution (Coombs, 2007).

Independent of the explanation, scholars return to the conclusion that crises begin and end and that the process is ongoing and circular. Mitroff (1994) broke a crisis down into a five stage cyclical process which included (a) signal detection, which includes warnings or "red flags" that can be acted upon to prevent a crisis; (b) probing and prevention, when organizational stakeholders take action to seek out problems that could lead to crisis; (c) damage containment, when an organization attempts to limit the scope of the crisis and its consequences; (d) recovery, returning the organization to as near-normal work conditions as possible; and (e) learning, a post-crisis analysis and review of the process.

When an organization experiences crisis, certain actions are taken to respond and cope with the outcome. Fink (1986) stated that to manage a crisis means to manage decisions and provided the first suggestion for crisis audits and solution management, and Mitroff (1994) suggested that containing the issue to only the impacted areas of the organization and limiting its duration can help to diffuse a crisis. This means that not only containment but also decision making becomes crucial then as the crisis unfolds. Coombs and Holladay (2002) agreed that an organization's communication response could serve to limit and even repair the damage.

Damage containment and reduction is a constant theme. Fink (1986) stated that if an organization is unsuccessful in communicating its message during a crisis, it could have negative, even fatal, organizational outcomes.

Crisis Response

Coombs (2007) indicates that the crisis response, or the message that the organization prepares during a crisis, is of critical importance. Once a crisis is recognized, it is the role of the public relations professional and crisis management team to prevent the issue from impacting stakeholders and the community further. In fact, the way an organization chooses to communicate during crisis is critical. If the response fails, not only is the company's reputation at stake, but also its financial health and ultimately its long-term existence (Fearn-Banks, 2007).

Research surrounding the content of crisis response has explored three major categories: (1) information instruction, (2) information adjustment, and (3) reputation management (Sturges, 1994; Coombs 2007). Information instruction advises impacted by organizational crisis and provides detailed advice as to how to recover both personally and financially. It tells stakeholders how the crisis could impact operations (Barton, 2011; Coombs, 2007). Information instruction provides practical guidance whereas information adjustment offers emotional and personal reassurance.

Information adjustment allows for public relations professionals to share information that helps invested publics deal with the incident psychologically (Coombs, 2007). This information reassures the affected stakeholders that the organization is operating with good intentions and with their best interest in mind (Egelhoff & Sen, 1992). In fact, Coombs (2010) suggests that information adjustment, especially acts of

compassion and concern partnered with acts of correction, are a significant part of image repair.

The last category is reputation management. Reputation management refers to the organization's attempt to adjust, maintain, or improve upon their existing reputation. Although it is the most regularly studied component of crisis response research, information instruction and adjustment must occur before an organization can provide appropriate crisis response regarding image repair (Coombs, 2007).

Research often states that aside from the demand for information created by the crisis, strategies for response should be accommodating and less defensive than typical, day-to-day communication response(Coombs & Holladay, 1996, 2002; Coombs & Schmidt, 2000). Much research states that the apology and acceptance of responsibility lead to more positive public relations and a less damaged reputation (Bradford & Garrett, 1995). However, Coombs and Holladay (2008) challenged these ideas, exploring the notion that by focusing on victims' needs, both apology and sympathy had significant impact on an organization's reputation post-crisis. Furthermore, they suggested that information alone did not overcome crisis problems simply because stakeholders believe that gaining clarity from the organization is a necessary and expected action. In other words, organizational stakeholders expect information during a crisis and apology, and sympathy adds to this message. Coombs and Schmidt (2000) suggested that an organization that expresses sympathy with those impacted by crisis is viewed as more honorable.

Independent of which strategy organizations choose for crisis management, the addition of technology and instantaneous communication through social media vehicles

adds a thought-provoking dynamic to crisis communication messages. This study embraced Coombs' (2007) crisis communication platform and specifically focused on the reputation management phase of crisis. Because this research focuses on the use of social media and image repair during the reputation management portion of crisis communication, technology and its use in crisis is an important component to consider.

Technology, Social Media, and Crisis

Ever-increasing technological advances are transforming how crisis management professionals manage crisis and disseminate information to their stakeholders. Coombs (2007) gave several reasons that effective crisis management should be of considerable importance to organizations. First, customers, employees, and external publics are increasingly visible and vocal when their needs and expectations are not being met. This involvement is often played out online and can cause significant issues for organizations. Social media are often the platforms for such dialogue.

Second, due to the vast nature of the Internet and the connectivity it provides, there becomes a much broader definition of crisis among interested publics. No longer does the crisis simply impact those immediately involved but, due to technology, the crisis can expand far beyond traditional boundaries. For example, the scope of 9/11 was more far reaching than just those organizations impacted directly by the attacks. Instead, the nation and world were affected as well. In the scope of this study, while those assaulted were the ultimate victims of the crisis, the scope of the incident reached students, alumni, fans, and the greater Happy Valley community locally and globally. Finally, it is important to consider that organizations may face legal action for not taking appropriate steps to alleviate or eliminate risk that could ultimately cause significant

damage to all involved. This certainly was the case for Penn State during the Jerry Sandusky incident.

Clearly, technology changes the strategies and tactics executed by organizations. The connectivity of the world through Internet and social technologies provides an opportunity for expanded reach of communication messages and provides opportunity for responsible action among organizations in crisis. Palenchar (2009) suggested that the capabilities of smartphones and other mobile technologies are redefining how individuals can communicate and that these advances increase not only individuals' awareness of crisis but also their ability to respond. As such, Palen, Vieweg, Sutton, Liu, and Hughes (2007) indicated that online and on location crisis response activities are increasingly becoming simultaneous and intertwined.

Multiple studies have shown that community sharing is important in crisis response (Quarantelli, 1998; Scherp, Schwagereit, Ireson, Lanfranchi, Papado-poulos, Kritikos, Kopatsiaris, & Sims, 2009). However, social media allow for a more direct and immediate level of sharing. For example, Twitter was used to share information quickly to those impacted by the wildfires in California in 2007 and 2008. When US Airways Flight 1549 crashed in 2009 and during the 2010 earthquake in Haiti (Beaumont, 2008; Robinson, 2010, Sutton, Palen & Shklovski, 2008), social media were also at the forefront of message dissemination, sharing immediate, relevant information to those involved as well as those interested. As a consequence, it is becoming increasingly important for information sharing to be not only accurate but also immediate in the face of crisis, and audiences are expecting information shared in multiple forms and across varying platforms.

Mayfield (2006) stated that social media are at their core human communication. They possess distinct characteristics of participation, openness, conversation, connectedness, and community. Like face-to-face interaction, social media allow individuals to become information sources; their opinions and experiences are shared with other like-minded individuals (Marken, 2007). This is important when examining crisis communication and those individuals interested and affected by the event. Social media allow participation among these individuals to connect and communicate. They provide ample opportunity to share information quickly.

In the event of crisis, social media allow for information exchange and the sharing of news and events without traditional media intervening or offering a journalistic slant. Colley and Collier (2009) found that word of mouth is often viewed as more trustworthy and often more influential than the mainstream media which mirrors foundational communication findings from Katz (1973) and Lazarsfeld (1968). Given social media's ability to connect users, scholars have demanded that research include how "information technologies should be designed to engage, inform and mobilize volunteer and citizen networks" (Palen et al., 2007). Social media thus provide an interesting opportunity to offer a "face to face" like communication, without journalistic interference in mass media volumes.

Utz, Schultz, and Glocka (2013) indicated that social media could be used in crisis to disperse information quickly and to engage stakeholders in dialogue. It also serves as a direct and immediate way to connect globally (Ki & Nekmat, 2014). Utz et al. (2013) found that by using social media, stakeholders viewed the organization as willing to send swift and direct responses regarding crisis. The rapid organizational

response was viewed as making an effort on the part of the organization and viewed favorably by those invested in organizational outcomes. Ki and Nakmet (2014) addressed scholarship in which rapid information and swift response on Facebook have negated potential crises, and a lack of social media communication has intensified situations. Today, people look to social media for quick information and organizations that leave a void during crisis may be harming the organization more than the crisis itself. Ki and Nakmet (2014) found that few Fortune 500 companies use social media as a tool in crisis communication scenarios and scholarship is ongoing considering the alternate research suggesting social media as a useful tool during crisis. This research provides a foundation for communication professionals to confidently utilize social media as a vehicle to transmit messages to interested audiences and impacted stakeholders.

Veil, Buehner, and Palenchar (2011) stated that in the era of "citizen journalism," social media outlets have become crucial in the coverage of crises. Mainstream media outlets have recognized the vast nature of social media's impact on information exchange and have embraced the general public's event and news coverage, often using photos, video, and sound bites provided online. Wigley and Fontenot (2011) found that media sources were more likely to use information gathered from social media than the official organizational spokesperson during a crisis response because of its unique ability to disseminate information almost instantaneously.

Due to the rapid, almost instantaneous nature of user-generated information in a crisis, organizations no longer have significant time to strategize before details of the incident reach the public. Hannah (2009) stressed that it is the job of the organization

and the public relations practitioner to provide context and clarification about news that has likely already broken. The job, therefore, becomes immediately reactive due to the instantaneous nature of social media.

Gonzales-Herrero and Smith (2008) stated that crisis communication strategy is key because never before has so much information been available simply with the click of a button. This instantaneous nature can also be problematic for organizations and those responsible for the crisis response message. For example, a list of the Virginia Tech shooting victims was readily available hours before the University released official names and contacted families (Palen, 2008). Therefore, organizations should be prepared to not only deal with the crisis at hand but also the release of information that may be beyond their control. Social media change the way organizational public relations operates, especially when faced with crisis. Gonzales-Herrero and Smith (2008) pointed to issues like Palen addressed with the Virginia Tech shooting indicating that social media not only aid in crisis but can also cause one. Now, negative posting, hacking incidents, and internet-based problems should be included in crisis management plans.

As communication research continues to expand, public relations practitioners must incorporate social and new media into their image and reputation repair strategies. Coombs (2012) indicates that the Internet allows the online community to establish which strategy increases the pressure on organizations to communicate and manage crisis more effectively. Today, audiences are not passive; they are active seekers of information who wish to get it instantly rather than wait for the traditional media (Stephens & Malone, 2009). As these audiences receive information quickly, they are

also likely to be forming opinions about the success or failure of the organization's crisis response. Consequently, image repair strategies should also be considered when communicating crisis response messages.

Image Repair

Of considerable thought when constructing crisis communications messages is the damage that is being done to the image and reputation of the organization. Benoit and Hanczor (1994) define image as "the perception(s) of a person, group or organization held by the audience, shaped by the words and actions of that person, as well as by the discourse and behavior of other relevant actors" (p. 40). This means that the organization does not solely determine their image, but rather multiple snapshots of the organization, its spokespeople, and their various responses determine the perception from engaged audiences.

Scott and Jhen (2003) stated when organizational publics are presented with new and updated information, their original opinion about the organization is subject to reinterpretation and could ultimately change. Therefore, public relations professionals work continuously to protect the company's image and provide as much damage control as possible. Coombs (2005) argued that the word reputation*,* versus image, should be used because image had previously been thought to be more of a "publicity tactic" to cover up an organization's true identity and brand. The literature surrounding public relations view the word reputation as more positive than the word image, which Coombs (2005) and Grunig (1992) indicated are synonymous. Benoit and Pang (2007) indicated that image is subjective and an impression that people hold about the credibility and reputation of an organization or brand. Therefore, image restoration discourse seeks to

identify message types based upon targeted responses that organizations can use during and after a crisis situation to protect and repair their image (Benoit & Pang, 2007).

Benoit (1997) found that image restoration is a viable approach for organizations to develop message strategy when responding to crisis. Image repair theory is based on a crisis that serves as an attack or complaint, with two major components: the organization (the accused) is held responsible for an action, and the act is considered offensive (Benoit, 1997). A primary foundation to these two components is that Benoit believes it is unreasonable to form a poor impression of an organization unless the company is believed to be in some way responsible for the act. Responsibility results when a business can be blamed for something whether or not they performed, ordered, encouraged, facilitated, or permitted the act to occur. In other words, organizational responsibility is irrelevant. Instead, the appearance of responsibility is important.

Benoit originally called his scholarship image restoration theory but decided upon the term "repair" to "restoration". According to Benoit (1997) "image restoration" presumes that organizational image can be restored to its previous standing. More often, organizations faced with reputational threat must instead deal with "repairs" of their image. Their previous standing with stakeholders is not necessarily fully restored. Next, "image restoration" provides the assumption that the organizational image is considered "good" to begin with, and, therefore, restoration would be positive when in reality, this is not always the case (Benoit, 2006).

The basis of image repair theory (IRT) assumes two important components. First, that strategic messaging is thoughtful and goal oriented and inspired by the attitudes,

values, and beliefs of the organization or individual. Previous scholarship has suggested there are several primary purposes for communication: (1) to react and respond to an issue or problem, (2) to establish or maintain relationships, and (3) to develop and then sustain a desired organizational image (Clark &, Delia, 2006). Clark and Delia's third goal leads to the second assumption of image repair theory that developing and upholding a positive image is a primary objective of basic communication.

Fearn-Banks (2002) suggested that responding to an attack on image from a public relations perspective is relevant because it provides opportunity to establish and sustain positivity through comprehensive management of the organization or individual's reputation especially during times of scandal and crisis. As a result, the crisis may provide organizational opportunity to handle the situation appropriately and exit the conclusion of the crisis with minimal damage.

Apologia (Ware and Linkugel, 1973) provides the foundation for the creation of image repair. The basis of apologia theory is that when a person's or organization's character or reputation is attacked, that it is appropriate and normal for that act to stimulate a response. Consequently, when others witness such an attack, it is presumed that there will be varying levels of response. Ware and Linkugel (1973) described multiple strategies of response:

- Denial-disassociation from the attack by making claims the accused was not involved in the offensive incident.
- Bolstering-disassociation from the situation by deflecting attention to something that the public would find positive.

- Differentiation-disassociation from the incident by highlighting the fact it was the incident itself, and not the organization or individual, that is causing the negative response.
- Transcendence-relating the negative incident with another more acceptable, positive situation.

Furthermore, Ware and Linkugel (1973) suggested combining these four strategies, indicating that typical responses commonly combine denial or bolstering with differentiation or transcendence. What their research found was that denial and differentiation were often considered absolute whereas denial and transcendence is considered vindictive. Bolstering, partnered with differentiation provides for an explanative message while bolstering coupled with transcendence is considered justificative (Linkugel, 1973). What this means for the today's public relations professional is that they have multiple courses or a combination of action that best serve the reputation management of the organization.

Image repair discourse relies heavily on the perceptions of stakeholders during an event (Benoit, 1997) and that because image is important, individuals or organizations become encouraged to defend it. Because of perception, several considerations must be explored when determining crisis response. Benoit (1997) warns that often in crisis, perception is more important than reality. Therefore, when determining a response, it is not nearly as important whether or not an organization is found ultimately responsible as for whether the organization is thought to be responsible by stakeholders. Likewise, it matters not if the organization does not believe the act was offensive if, in fact, the public at large believes it to be. A crisis management version of

“the customer is always right” is if your publics believe you are in crisis, then, independent of involvement, the organization should consider itself in crisis. Lastly, audience identification is crucial for developing a crisis response strategy (Benoit, 1997). Image restoration focuses on message options rather than crisis types or stages as mentioned previously. It is insignificant where the crisis is in development as long as the organizational image has been threatened.

Image Repair Strategies

Rhetorical literature provided a limited examination of image repair strategies. Image repair theory was designed to provide a more comprehensive overview and expand on the study of apologia. Benoit (1995), after considering multiple studies on guilt and personal defenses, created a five-strategy theoretical framework that could be implemented after accusation. The theory suggests categorical levels of message response: denial, evasion of responsibility, reduction of the offensiveness of the act, corrective action, and mortification. This theory expands upon the concepts identified in apologia and provides multiple options when attempting to restore or repair organizational or personal image. Table 1 provides a comprehensive list of Benoit’s strategies.

The first strategy in IRT is denial. Denial provides opportunity for the accused to simply reject their role in the negative act. Denial of Responsibility is further dissected into *simple denial*, stating definitively that the act was not performed by the organization, or *blame shifting*, stating that another performed the act instead.

If the person or organization in question cannot simply deny their involvement in the negative act, they may opt to evade responsibility to reduce their role in the

consequences. Evasion of responsibility is broken down into four segments: provocation, the act was a response to another's action, sometimes referred to as scapegoating; defeasibility, the organization had a lack of ability or information to act; *accident*, the act was not planned and unintentional; and good intentions, the act was intended for good but fell short. Evasion of responsibility provides opportunity to minimize the perceived impact or consequences.

Table 1
Benoit's Image Repair Strategies

Strategy	Characteristics
Denial	
Simple Denial	Did not perform act
Blame Shifting	Act was performed by another
Evasion of Responsibility	
Provocation	Responded to the act of another
Defeasibility	Lack of information or ability
Accident	Act was a mishap
Good intentions	Act was meant well
Reducing the Offensiveness of Event	
Bolstering	Stress good traits
Minimization	Act was not serious
Differentiation	Act was less offensive than others
Transcendence	Stress more important considerations
Attack accuser	Reduce the credibility of the accuser
Compensation	Reimburse victim
Corrective Action	Plan to solve or prevent problem
Mortification	Apologize for the act

Note: Benoit's Image Repair Strategies, Adapted from Benoit, W. L. (1997). Image repair discourse and crisis communication. *Public Relations Review*, *23*(2), 177-186.

The third strategy in IRT is to reduce the offensiveness of an event; This strategy has six sub-strategies. Within this component of the theory, the individual or organization could attack the accuser to limit their credibility or could compensate the victim. Attacking the accuser offers a “he-said, she-said” approach, providing an opportunity to appear more victim-like and less responsible. Compensation of the victim, on the other hand, offers opportunity for the appearance of charitable and generous support to those wronged. The third sub-strategy is bolstering. Bolstering is used when an organization’s good points are stressed in contrast to the event, helping to offset the negative accusation. In contrast, minimization, or downplaying the crisis, involves stating that the negative act is not as serious as it appears to be. Lastly, the final subcategory of reduction is transcendence, which allows the organization to shift focus to issues that are seemingly more important than the crisis.

The last two IRT strategies have no variations. With corrective action, IRT states that messages can be constructed to include plans to solve the issue and prevent the problem from reoccurring. This could be accomplished by returning the situation to its pre-crisis state or through promises of prevention of a similar future circumstance. Lastly, mortification relies on the organization apologizing to its publics for the act (Benoit, 1997). The last two strategies are often used together whereas the accused apologizes for the event and then takes the necessary measures to prevent the act from happening again.

Moody (2011) indicated that image repair is becoming an important evaluation tool in crisis communication messaging. As such, scholarship has focused on case studies like the sexual abuse scandal at the Air Force Academy in 2002and the BP Oil

Spill (Holtzhausen& Roberts, 2009; Harlow, Brantley & Harlow, 2011; Muralidharan, Dillstone,& Shin, 2011) to determine what strategies those organizations used during their respective crises.

Liu (2007) performed a content analysis of the nine major speeches given by President Bush focusing Hurricane Katrina combined with a content analysis of 50 articles from three newspapers, two national and one local, regarding the effectiveness of the speeches. Results found that some image repair strategies partner naturally whereas other strategies are contradictory and, therefore, are ineffective in improving overall opinion.

Liu and Fraustino (2014) explored the use of social media and the potential use in crisis scenarios. They found that crisis situations continue to provide challenges for those who create social media content in organizations when strategies are replicated from traditional media (Liu & Fraustino, 2014). Instead, content should be unique to how the incident is unfolding online. Furthermore, the authors noted that in prior research, when combining image repair theory and social media no modifications were made to the theory and that despite the vast nature of social media and its impact, image repair theory may be considered linear and static; therefore, research in the future may need to focus on adaptations and expansions (Liu & Fraustino, 2014).

Social Media, Image Repair, and Higher Education

As a precursor to examining the use of social media during the Penn State incident, a brief exploration of social media and more specifically, social media in higher education is necessary. Furthermore, an overview of the literature on image repair in higher education is important. This examination is important to understand how

universities have utilized these strategies previously and provides contrast to this study of Penn State.

Social Media

Social media have been studied using a variety of different lenses and are defined broadly as any number of technological systems related to communication and collaboration (Joosten, 2012). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) suggested that a particular definition of social media be described by examples such as social networking sites, wikis, blogs, virtual worlds, and video gaming, essentially any technological platform that invites social interaction. Within a social media platform, message content is often exchanged between audiences, individuals, and organizations.

To narrow the focus of this dissertation, analysis was performed on the social networking sites (SNSs) Facebook and Twitter. Defined by Boyd and Ellison (2007), SNSs are web-based platforms that allow opt-in users to make personal profiles, create and share content, and communicate messages by connecting with other systematic users. Facebook and Twitter provide these components and also allow organizations to provide profiles as well. The organizations take on online "personalities" and are able to interact with users. As a result, interested opt-in users voluntarily follow organizational messages of businesses, groups, or organizations that are meaningful to them.

Defining social media remains challenging because they are constantly changing. SNSs evolve as users demand more interactive services and web developers attempt to meet their needs. Haase (2010) argued that an exploration of Facebook's functionality provides the most comprehensive definition of social networking due to users' ability to send messages, add friends in a defined network, update and change

profiles, create and join dedicated groups, host and share content, and learn about other users and organizations through their own individual profiles.

Developed in 2004 by Harvard undergraduate Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook is the most widely used social networking site (Duggan, 2014). According to Facebook (2015), there are over 1.49 billion active users on the site and more than 900 million organizational pages, groups, or events. The average user has 155 friends and is connected to 80 organization pages, groups, or events (Facebook, 2015). The Pew Research Report found that 70% of active individual users of Facebook visit the site daily (Duggan, 2015).

Twitter is a social networking site created for microblogging. Suh et al. (2010) define microblogging as a form of blogging that includes short phrases, quick comments, images, or links. In contrast to Facebook, Twitter limits content posts, referred to as "tweets," to less than 140 characters per submission. Java, Song, Finn & Tseng (2007) suggested that Twitter may be a faster method to transfer information due to the size restrictions on the posts. In contrast to traditional blogs that are updated every several days, Twitter users will update their information several times per day (Java et al., 2006). Twitter has more than 645 million registered users who are posting 58 million "tweets" per day and is growing at a rate of 135,000 new registrations a day (Twitter, 2015). Due to their functionality and popularity, sites like Facebook and Twitter, along with an increasing number of other platforms have become integral tools for message dissemination.

Social Media and Higher Education

The increase in the use of social media vehicles by both individuals and organizations is indisputable. In a recent study, 100% of higher education institutions were using social media tools for some purpose (Barnes & Lescault, 2011). Some institutions utilized social media for admissions and recruitment, others to communicate campus happenings, and still others to connect with alumni. Social media was universally used in higher education as a message-sharing tool.

Armstrong and Franklin (2008) suggested that the use of social media by higher education institutions is expected because students are using them in all aspects of their lives. Therefore, institutions reach their publics in a place where they know they will be interacting. Furthermore, enrollees indicated that their expectation is that coursework is conducted online and that social media is a part of the curriculum. Because of the continued upward trend of social media, higher education institutions must incorporate social media communication into their public relations strategy. In fact, Curtis et al. (2010) indicated that advances in social media allow for continued opportunity for higher education institutions to interact with their publics. The University, its students, alumni, and community look to social media for information sharing in the form of news, event updates, athletic support, as well as for providing a sense of community and memory sharing. As technology usage increases, the general public expects higher education institutions to be at the forefront, adopting the use of up-to-date tools even before others. Consequently, if observers don't witness their institutions using social media the way they expect, their respect for the institution may waver, and they may look to other sources of information to meet their needs.

Social media sites have taken the marketing and information sharing power from the institution and put it in the hands of the public. Because of this, Solis (2008) said that participating in online conversations is critical in competing for the future. For this reason, institutions of higher education need examples and guidelines for successfully incorporating social media into the public relations strategy.

In terms of higher education crisis, consideration needs to be given to the fact that, like other organizations, the stakeholders want and will insist on sharing instant information to others who are seeking answers. As mentioned, the public is playing a significantly increased role in the dissemination of information during crisis events, which has serious implications for crisis management, response, and communications (Palen, 2008). Academic institutions need to be mindful that the information gathering expectation of social media and the viral nature in which information is spread provides for significantly less control. Research has shown that in the wake of a crisis on campus, traditional media outlets were more likely to use content shared by "citizen journalists" through unofficial social media sites rather than official information or prepared statements from the institution (Wigley& Fontenot, 2010, p. 189).

Image Repair and Higher Education

Research is limited on image repair in higher education scenarios. Much scholarship surrounds crisis communication in general and is less focused on specific image repair strategies. Len Rios (2010) explored the specific image repair messages exercised by Duke University after three members of its lacrosse team were indicted on charges of first-degree rape and sexual assault. The study showed that the University utilized a variety of image repair techniques and even suggested that a new category

“expressions of disappointment” be considered for theoretical advancement. Fortunato (2008) earlier explored the Duke incident and provided an overview of the entire public relations strategy of the University and explored the incident through the lens of practical application of crisis theories.

The University of Notre Dame (Frederick, Birch, Sanderson & Hambrick, 2013) faced some scrutiny after football player Manti T’eo created a fake girlfriend and was confronted by news personality Katie Couric. While the athlete received most of the criticism, Notre Dame was not spared scrutiny. This study showcased that while an extension of the University environment can commit the infraction, the entire University reputation can suffer. For this reason, investigation into the Penn State incident provides an interesting backdrop for investigation. Sports and athletics are often targets for reputation criticism, which is why Compton and Compton (2014) explored the use of image repair strategies in college sports through open letters to the fans who supported the programs. Likewise, Brown & Billings (2013) examined how sports fans became crisis communicators and “surrogates” for image repair on social media sites during the NCAAs investigation into the University of Miami after they were accused of rules violations with athletes in their men’s football and basketball programs.

Image repair in higher education is not limited to sports. Research on James Madison University's crisis response after a sexual assault on campus explored the University's public relations approach and the need for proactivity in similar scenarios (Hirschhorn, 2015). The Jerry Sandusky scandal at Penn State has also received some attention of image repair scholars. Rossi (2012) and Cheynoweth (2013) both explored the incident under the lens of image repair but focused primarily on the print media and

reports from the local and university newspapers. Brown, Brown, and Billings (2015) examined the fan-centered response to the scandal and how it served as a crisis communication vehicle, and Sanderson & Hambrick (2012) discussed a similar phenomenon surrounding the crisis in terms of the Twitter usage of Penn State fans after the scandal broke. To date, no scholarship exists that examines the use of Facebook and Twitter in contrast with traditional public relations modalities as image repair vehicles for educational institutions in crisis.

The literature surrounding crisis communication, image repair, social media, and higher education collide in the exploration of the Jerry Sandusky scandal at Penn State. By understanding how the University utilized image repair strategies within both traditional and social media outlets, it provides a significant academic foundation for further research into image repair within organizations in crisis. Chapter 3 examines the research questions designed to fill this gap in the literature and provide the methodology for analysis of the data.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Social media are changing the way we work, learn, and live. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, because of the increasing demand for near instant information, crisis communication managers need to be critically cognizant of not only the message but also the reputation management strategies launched after a crisis ensues. The current study seeks to understand how Penn State University, in the wake of a serious crisis during the Jerry Sandusky indictments and scandal, relied on traditional public relations efforts and social media for image repair. The goal of this content analysis was to explore not if the messages were useful but rather to identify the content of the image repair strategies launched in the face of the scandal and to determine how they were used on both traditional and social media platforms. This scholarship fills a gap in the literature by exploring social media and traditional public relations methodologies as the crisis unfolded and how those messages shared image repair language geared toward reputation management for the University. Chapter 3 includes a description of the case to be explored and an overview of the methodology selected including the applicable research questions, the coders performing the analysis, intercoder reliability, and ethical considerations.

Summary of the Case

In November of 2011, Pennsylvania State University faced a significant crisis when former football coach Jerry Sandusky was indicted on 48 counts of sex crimes against young boys. Adding to the crisis were charges brought against the school administration for covering up the incidents.

Several high-ranking University officials were terminated, including heralded head football coach Joe Paterno, causing a significant public outcry from Penn State students, fans, alumni, and the community. A media frenzy fueled the story, which escalated with the publishing of the Freeh Report, a compilation of the findings of an independent investigation by former Federal Bureau of Investigation Director Louis Freeh. This report, which indicated that the University had instigated a cover-up of the incidents, prompted the NCAA to issue sanctions against Penn State and its football program.

The reputation of the University was questioned, and throughout the crisis, public relations and the Office of Strategic Communication at Penn State worked to manage the damage. This study researches how Penn State University dealt with this crisis, specifically how image repair strategies were used in public relations messages in traditional tactics and via social media.

Rationale for Content Analysis

This qualitative content analysis examines how Penn State University utilized image repair messages within their traditional methodologies (press releases and statements) and social media. Holsti (1969) stated that content analysis comprises "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages" (p. 14), and Krippendorf (2012) asserted that this analysis is foundational in the study of the social sciences and deeply rooted in communication research. Content analysis allows the scholar to examine the message, the method in which it was shared, the intended audience and other variables surrounding its creation, dissemination, and receipt by end users.

According to Krippendorf (2012), there are six questions that determine an effective content analysis. First, the scholar must determine which data are to be analyzed and then establish how the data are to be defined. Next, the researcher must identify the data population and then gauge the context relative to how the data will be studied. Lastly, the scholar must determine what are the limitations of the data and what are the targets of the inferences. (Krippendorf, 2012).Miller (1990) summarized Barnouwet. al (1995) in describing specific procedures for content analysis in communication research. Miller indicated that to successfully conduct a content analysis, a researcher must design the context of the study and determine what they wish to know. In other words, scholars create the study with the outcome in mind, designing the analysis to answer specific questions developed by the researcher. For this study, the design of the content analysis was created to explore the content of Penn State University's public relations messages through the coding of message content and explored how they used image repair strategies during the Jerry Sandusky incident.

Next, the researcher must identify the units of analysis, which, in this study, were the paragraphs of press releases and video statements, individual Facebook posts, and tweets made on Twitter. Facebook and Twitter were selected as the social media sample in this study because of their popularity and the number of opt-in users that interact with organizations such as Penn State University on a daily basis. In May of 2016, the Penn State University Facebook page had more than 379,000 opt-in followers (Facebook, 2016), and the official Twitter feed of the University had more than 130,000 individuals (Twitter, 2016). All press releases, Facebook posts, and tweets made by

official University communication during the month immediately following Jerry Sandusky's indictment were part of the sample.

Miller (1990) also mentioned the importance of coding and classifying the information into workable and understandable categories. Units of data are often placed within spreadsheets utilizing exhaustive categorical options for content placement. This allows the researcher to analyze the data succinctly and provides opportunity for data classification independent of message content. This study utilized Benoit's (1997) image repair strategies as codeable categories for message content.

After messages have been coded, the researcher must draw inferences from the data. This allows the researcher to identify relationships, frequencies, or trends within the coded data with respect to the identified research questions. This study attempts to examine image repair trends during the Jerry Sandusky incident. Finally, it is hopeful that the discovery of content within the analysis will provide for some validation of existing scholarship or at a minimum, provide an opportunity for future research. Therefore, by exploring how Penn State University utilized image repair messages through content analysis, future research may explore the impact and effectiveness of these messages moving forward.

Stacks and Michaelson (2009) reinforced the selection of a content analysis methodology by stating that it "can be critical in evaluating overall communication effectiveness and function to plan more effective public relations and media relation strategies" (p. 83). Content analysis is often the methodology of choice when exploring image repair. Walsh (2011) explored the image repair strategies of swimmer Michael Phelps after he was suspended from the sport for using marijuana. Liu (2007) also

utilized content analysis in the study of President Bush's message strategy after Hurricane Katrina. Content analysis for the exploration of image repair has also examined the messages of reality show stars (Moody, 2011), and the public affairs strategy of the post-9/11 Saudi Arabian government (Zhang & Benoit, 2004). Content analysis had also been used to explore image repair after a University crisis when Len Rios (2010) explored the Duke University rape scandal.

Because it is the expectation of this research to explore how Penn State utilized image repair messages within the context of the Jerry Sandusky incident, previous scholarship points to content analysis as a viable methodology for exploration. This is supported by Kohlbacher (2006) who indicated that qualitative content analysis is an appropriate investigation and interpretation method for case study research. Kohlbacher (2006) stated that qualitative case study using content analysis is appropriate because it offers opportunity to deal with case complexity, provides for the integration of context, allows the researcher to utilize theory-guided analysis, integrates different material or evidence, and also provides for some quantitative research offerings through frequency, triangulation, and cross-tabulation.

Through concentrated and well-defined data selection, accurate coding, reliable intercoder agreement, and thorough analysis, content analysis has proven to be an acceptable methodology to test and validate theories. Furthermore, content analysis creates opportunities for the development of expanded models and new research pathways. Considering the focus of this study, this strategy provides an opportunity for the most meaningful interpretation of data.

The methodology chosen for the current study is similar to Harlow, Brantley and Harlow's (2011) research on British Petroleum, in which a content analysis was used to explore image repair message strategy. Additionally, Muralidaran, Dillistone, and Shin (2011) utilized a similar content analysis strategy when exploring image repair messages within BP's social media messages. Similarly, the purpose of this research is to examine Penn State University's image repair strategies during the Sandusky sexual abuse scandal. The research framework is formatted similar to these two studies and provides an opportunity for qualitative analysis of the message content.

Coders

Two coders were utilized to categorize the messages Penn State University used during the month following the Jerry Sandusky scandal. Coder One was the researcher, a Ph.D. candidate from Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and the creator of the modified coding instrument that was utilized in this study as well as the trainer for the secondary coder in the study. Coder Ones a 20-year public relations practitioner working professionally in an advertising agency.

Coder Two is a Ph.D. candidate at Marshall University studying educational leadership and is an elementary school principal with 20 years in professional education. Coder Two is familiar with content analysis and was trained by coder one as to the definitions, categories, and procedures for this study. After training on definitions and placement of sample messages into applicable categories, the coders were each given identical copies of the codebook, the definitions, and the captured data for analysis.

According to Cohen (1960), there are three assumptions to consider when utilizing multiple coders for data analysis. First, the units of analysis must be independent. In this study, each researcher coded each post or paragraph independently. This was important because press releases and formal statements may have multiple messages within the document. The researchers coding each post and each paragraph as an individual unit of data allowed for a more comprehensive analysis of the message content.

Next, the categories must be exhaustive. Within this study, Benoit's (1997) image repair strategies made up the primary categories and were partnered with an "other" category to capture messages that did not fall within an image repair classification. This allowed each coder to have an exhaustive categorical list in which to place each message. This provided the researcher a clear coding guideline in which each data unit was confidently classified.

Lastly, the coders should be working independently, meaning that there should not be collaboration or consensus about where to place message content within the coding instrument. The utilization of two coders to separately obtain agreement within coding reliability allowed for the trustworthiness of the data and more meaningful analysis.

Training

Coder Two was given a description of each category listed on the coding instrument, followed by a description and example. Coder One and Coder Two worked through three examples of each image repair type to assure that each was familiar with the definition and correct placement into the content analysis categories.

Training was conducted using the following process:

Step One: Each coder received a copy of Benoit's (1997) image repair strategies in table form, which included definitions and examples of each tactic. (See Table 2)

Step Two: Coder One, the primary researcher, provided Coder Two a sample digital codebook with examples of image repair strategies supplied in the data column. Three of each strategy and sub-strategy were provided, giving the coders opportunity to pretest their knowledge and the coding procedure for the study.

Step Three: Coder One and Coder Two independently coded the sample messages and verified their selection of an image repair category for each.

Step Four: Coder One and Coder Two discussed any discrepancies and reclassified any messages that were not in agreement.

Step Five: Once accuracy of coded messages was determined from outside content, messages from Penn State were also coded. A digital copy of the codebook, an Excel document, with the message content was provided to the researchers. Every tenth message was highlighted and coded by each coder to determine intercoder agreement. Intercoder agreement was determined by using Cohen's kappa with an agreement level of $k>.80$ (Cohen, 1960), an acceptable level of agreement in communication research. This procedure was repeated indefinitely until the Kappa reliability met the study requirement.

Step Six: Upon completion of the pretest to determine intercoder reliability, discussion regarding any potential modification of the codebook was conducted. If significant changes to the codebook were necessary, the training process was repeated in its entirety.

Table 2
Benoit's Image Repair Strategies with Applicable PSU Examples

Strategy	Characteristics	Penn State Example
Denial		
Simple Denial	Did not perfect act	PSU denies that they are the involved with the cover up of information regarding Sandusky.
Blame shifting	The act was performed by another	PSU shifts blame of the incident entirely on Sandusky or someone else.
Evasion of responsibility		
Provocation	Responded to the act of another	PSU does not deny mishandling information but rather claims a lake of responsibility because the incident should be merged by Sandusky's charity organization.
Defeasibility	Lack of information or ability	PSU had lack of information about and control over important elements of situation.
Accident	Act was a mishap	PSU claims that the mishandling of information was an accident.
Good intentions	Act of meant well	PSU can say that they overlooked issues in order to protect the image of Joe Paterno and the football team.
Reducing the offensiveness of Event		
Bolstering	Stress good Straits	PSU counteracts the negative feelings the public has by focusing on their swift and competent action the termination of key employees.
Minimization	Act was not serious	PSUs incidents only impacted a small number of individuals in reality.
Differentiation	Act was less offensive than others	In the beginning PSU can compare incident to other sex abuse cases and claim theirs is way less offensive.

Transcendence	There are more important considerations	PSU claims that the mishandling of information happened during the process of more noble tasks.
Attacker accuser	Reduce the credibility of the accuser	PSU attacks their accuser
Compensations	Reimburse victim	PSU provides money and services to those impacted by the incident.
Corrective action	Plan to solve or prevent problem	PSU updates the public on how they are trying to address the problem; PSU enforces strict protocol in order to prevent future occurrences.
Mortification	Apologize for the act	PSU apologizes for the incident and asks forgiveness.

Note: Benoit's image repair strategies with applicable PSU examples, From Benoit, W. L. (1997). Image repair discourse and crisis communication. *Public Relations Review*, *23*(2), 177-186.

Population, Sample, and Data Collection

This study examines Facebook messages from the official Penn State University Facebook page, Twitter messages (tweets and retweets) from the official Penn State Twitter feed, and press releases and press conferences from the Penn State Office of Strategic Communications. The sample was archived data from November 5, 2011, through December 7, 2011, approximately one month after the initial crisis broke regarding the Sandusky case, and coincided with the month following the indictment and up through the arrest and jailing of Sandusky. Screen captures of Penn State University's Facebook and Twitter pages for the dates of the study were saved and each message archived into the codebook for analysis. Press releases and video statements were retrieved from Penn State's Office of Strategic Communications website after doing an archival search of the documents within the study timeframe.

A codebook developed by the researcher and modified from Muralidaran, Dillistone, and Shin's (2011) instrument, was used to code messages in each platform.

Permission from the author was granted through an email exchange on January 32, 2016. The instrument utilized the same structure for the image repair message categorization, allowing for each unit of data to be categorized and examined. Benoit's (1997) image repair theory will be used as the platform for coding, and placing each status update, each tweet or retweet, and each paragraph of traditional formal statements into a categorical equivalent. For live press conferences, transcriptions of the statements were collected and then coded like a traditional press release.

Procedures

This study explores the traditional public relations messages issued by Penn State University in the form of press releases, news conferences, and statements and assessed if any of Benoit's (1997) image repair strategies were used in these communications. Evaluation of image repair strategy utilization in both traditional and social media settings will provide an opportunity for expanded discussion into how organizations are using image repair during a crisis, especially as social media become a first-line choice for information exchange. Archived Facebook status updates and tweets from the official Pennsylvania State University social media accounts were examined to research how image repair strategies occurred on those platforms and if so, how they differed from traditional methods. The findings of this study could lead to future research such as message effectiveness within each strategy and if certain image repair messages have different outcomes when presented in different formats.

Press release and transcripts of news conferences were printed and broken down into paragraphs. Each paragraph was considered a unit of data and coded as such (Harlow, Brantley,& Harlow, 2011). Status updates, tweets, and retweets were

each considered one unit of codable data. This content analysis structure allowed the research to be grounded in the present based on real information collected from the institution versus a retroactive exploration after the message has passed through journalistic gatekeepers.

Selection of Image Repair Messages

This study used a qualitative content analysis to calculate how Penn State University utilized image repair messages, focusing specifically on the University's initial rather than longer-term strategies. To identify Penn State's image reparation strategies, the researcher accessed archival posts from Facebook and Twitter as well as press releases and official statements from the PSU Office of Strategic Communications. The archived posts of the official Penn State University Facebook and Twitter account were used. Press releases and "official" formal communications from the Penn State Office of Strategic Communications, are housed at a dedicated page on the Penn State Library website, and video press conferences corresponding with official statements can be found on YouTube. All messages via Facebook and Twitter from November 5 to December 7, 2011, were examined as well as all press releases and statements released at the same time. This time frame coincided with the indictment of Jerry Sandusky (Nov. 5, 2011) and arrest, and subsequent jailing (December 5, 2011). Five hundred and ninety-six individual units of data were collected and analyzed; each message was read and coded using Benoit's image repair strategy framework.

Coding

Upon successful completion of the pretest for intercoder reliability, each coder received a new digital copy of the codebook. Each coder categorized each message in

the data set. In order to maintain the integrity of the data, each researcher was instructed to save a secondary copy of the codebook after every 100 messages. Coders referred to the definitions and examples provided by the researcher during the study to ensure consistent proper classification.

Data Analysis

To increase the insight about the relationships between source, image repair strategy, and platform, analysis was performed using a chi-square analysis with an alpha level of $p<.05$. Furthermore, qualitative analysis explored how each strategy was used, if any strategic differences occurred across platforms, and provided an opportunity for thoughtful reflection as to the rationale behind the image repair strategy choices. The analysis, partnered with the statistical tests, were designed to answer the aforementioned research questions.

Each image repair strategy and its usage were explored in conjunction with the media it used to examine if there was any consistency or preference in the choices made by Penn State University during this crisis. Furthermore, each media choice was considered to determine if traditional methodologies lend themselves to different strategies than those used within Facebook and Twitter.

Usage frequencies, when partnered with Benoit's (2007) definitions and strategy intentions, will allow for further academic discussion regarding the potential goal of the message and the modality utilized to send that message to the receivers. Additional consideration will also be given to any other consistencies that are presented after the data is analyzed, such as the discussion of other issues at the University and the sharing or resharing of other messages in a social media setting.

Research Questions

Within this dissertation, the following research questions will guide the inquiry:

RQ1: How did Pennsylvania State University utilize image repair strategies via Facebook messages in the month following the Jerry Sandusky indictment?

RQ2: How did Pennsylvania State University utilize image repair strategies via Twitter messages in the month following the Jerry Sandusky indictment?

RQ3: How did Pennsylvania State University utilize image repair strategies via press releases and/or press conference statements in the month following the Jerry Sandusky indictment?

Ethics, Approval, and Informed Consent

In accordance with the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board procedures, no ethical considerations are necessary for the completion of this study. No human subjects were used, and the data is archival in nature.

Through consistent utilization of the aforementioned methodology, this dissertation attempts to fill significant vacancies in the academic literature surrounding image repair strategies within traditional and social media during a crisis. This qualitative content analysis was designed to conform to the expectations of academic rigor required of communication research. Chapter 4 explores the results of the content analysis, applicable conclusions, and suggested relationships between specific image repair strategies and the choices Penn State University made about how to communicate them.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to research how Pennsylvania State University utilized image repair strategies during the Jerry Sandusky scandal in early November 2011. This content analysis aims to determine how image repair messages, as defined by Benoit (1997), were utilized within traditional public relations methodologies such as press releases and formal statements as well as within the social media platforms Facebook and Twitter. Data was coded across the five image repair strategies discussed in Chapter 3 (denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing the offensiveness of the event, corrective action, and mortification) as well as an "other" category for content not applicable to the theoretical groups. The current chapter reports the results of a content analysis that examined all press releases, video statements, and Facebook and Twitter posts during the month immediately following the break of the scandal. To begin, a brief summary of coding categories is provided, followed by the statistical analysis for each category and each data set as it pertains to the research questions.

Samples of Coded Messages

For the purposes of coding, the researcher pre-determined qualities for each category to ensure consistent categorical placement. This allowed for higher reliability within coders' assignments and for a more successful determination of content.

Denial

For data to be considered denial, the post needed to have some qualifying element of deniability of the incident. Within Benoit's (1997) theory, denial is broken down into two sub-categories: simple denial and blame shifting. Simple denial was coded as a direct denial of involvement. The paragraph or post would state or allude

that Penn State had no involvement in the incident. Blame shifting was coded as any instance when the University specifically referenced Jerry Sandusky in the paragraph or post. By referencing the man indicted by the grand jury, Penn State shifted blame from the University to someone else.

An example of a post using a denial tactic was found in the press release titled "A Statement from President Spanier." This post was classified as simple denial because Spanier inferred that the charges against two University officials in relation to the incident were without merit. In the sample, 27, or five percent, of the data contained a denial message.

Denial: simple denial sample.

"Tim Curley and Gary Schultz operate at the highest levels of honesty, integrity, and compassion. I am confident the record will show that these charges are groundless and that they conducted themselves professionally and appropriately" ("Statement from President Spanier," 2011)

A press release on November 07, 2011 titled "Trustees Announce Two Officials to Stepdown While Case is Investigated" was coded blame shifting due to the post's mention of Jerry Sandusky and the University's "intolerance" towards such acts.

Denial: blame shifting sample.

Steve Garban, chairman, said the following:

The board, along with the entire Penn State family, is shocked and saddened by the allegations involving former assistant coach Jerry Sandusky. Under no circumstances does the University tolerate behavior that would put children at risk, and we are deeply troubled. (Trustees Announce Two Officials, 2011)

Evasion of Responsibility

To be classified as an evasion of responsibility, the post needed to skirt ownership of any involvement in the incident. Within the theory considered for this study, the evasion category has four sub-categories: provocation, defeasibility, accident, and good intentions. Only two data within the sample contained a message of evasion.

For example, in this comment from the press release issued on November 09, 2011, President Spanier expressed his sympathies and indicated that if he had known of wrongdoing, he would have promptly managed it.

Evasion: defeasibility sample.

I am heartbroken to think that any child may have been hurt and have deep convictions about the need to protect children and youth. My heartfelt sympathies go out to all those who may have been victimized. I would never hesitate to report a crime if I had any suspicion that one had been committed. (Statement from Graham Spanier, 2001)

It is important to note that Penn State did not use provocation, accident, good intentions in any capacity within the data set.

Reduction of the Offensiveness of the Event

Benoit's (1997) theory also offers reduction as an image repair strategy. Within this category, there are six sub-categories including bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, and attacking the accuser. In a Facebook post on November 12, 2011, Penn State posted about an alumni-sponsored fundraiser that would support abuse victims. Due to the timing of the fundraising effort, this is

considered victim compensation. One hundred and ten, or 19%, of the data included a reduction message.

Reduction: compensate the victim sample.

A grassroots movement of Penn Staters called #ProudPSUforRAINN has partnered with RAINN, the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization, to raise funds to help victims of abuse. In just a few days they have raised more than $200,000 with a goal of at least $557,000—one dollar for every Penn State alumnus. Check it out and help get this effort well past its goal. http//goo.gl/Ka9kj #ProudPSUforRainn [RAINN] Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network. (@PennState Facebook, November 12, 2011)

Penn State also used bolstering tactics when referencing the incident. Reflection on the reputation of the University was used to contrast with the heightened negativity surrounding the crisis. For example, within a statement from President Spanier in press release dated November 09, 2011, the University traditions and integrity were mentioned.

Reduction: bolstering sample.

The acts of no one person should define this University. Penn State is defined by the traditions, loyalty, and integrity of hundreds of thousands of students, alumni, and employees" (Statement from Graham Spanier, 2011).

In the sample that was considered, Penn State did not use minimization, transcendence or differentiation.

Corrective Action

The fourth category considered in this study is corrective action. Corrective action would include any direction taken by the University to correct policy, instigate change, or manipulate protocol as a result of the incident. In the data analyzed, 133 samples, or 23% of the data set, contained a message indicating correction.

As an example, in a Facebook post dated November 29, 2011, Penn State referenced the development of a hotline for reporting abuse. Because this action was a result of the crisis, this is considered corrective.

Corrective action sample.

"Penn State opens abuse-reporting hotline for all campuses. Details: http://goo.gl/BXxOT "Penn State Live-University launches hotline for reporting abuse." (@PennState Facebook, November 29, 2011).

Mortification

The fifth potential category in the theory is mortification. In order to be considered for this category, the message must contain an apology. Only two of 583 samples included a mortification message.

In a press release dated November 21, 2011, which discussed the appointment of former FBI Director James Freeh to conduct an independent investigation, a statement regarding remorse and apology is noted.

Mortification sample.

> *We sincerely hope that, in the future, the pain and anguish suffered by the victims will serve as the starkest of reminders to all of us---it is a clear and absolute imperative for anyone ever in a position to do so to properly report and*

put a stop to such crimes. Any caring, responsible person must take immediate and appropriate action to end the silence that so often gives safe haven to people who would do such horrific things. What occurred must never be allowed to happen again. But, for now, let me say again, and on behalf of the Board of Trustees and the entire Penn State University community, we are deeply, deeply sorry. (Former FBI Director Freeh, 2011)

Other

In order to provide an exhaustive opportunity for coding, an "other" category was created for posts and message content that did not fit within one of Benoit's (1997) five strategies. Three hundred and nine, or 53% posts contained a message classified as "other."

For example, in this Facebook post dated November 11, 2011, mention of the crisis is noted, but the message was not considered an image repair strategy. Instead, this post was classified as "other." Further discussion surrounding the "other category" will take place in Chapter 5.

Other sample.

We are disturbed and stunned by yesterday's news. Many have expressed their thoughts about this here on our wall, and as with all posts, as long as they follow page policies, they will stand. We understand the strong feelings many people wish to express, and we are listening. Right now there is much anger and speculation. The legal process is just getting under way, and there is much yet to be learned. We trust the legal process will add facts and clarity to the

shocking allegations about the former assistant coach. We will provide updates as we have them." (@PennState Facebook, November 11, 2011)

Results

During the month immediately following the indictment of Jerry Sandusky, all institutional press releases, video statements, Facebook posts, and Twitter messages were archived and subsequently coded according to Benoit's (1997) image repair strategies.

Five hundred eighty-three messages were coded from archived posts from Penn State University official communications issued from November 5, 2011, to December 7, 2011 (Table 3). Four messages were discarded due to the fact that the video statement consisted of a forum-type set-up in which the panelists were not necessarily speaking formally on behalf of the University. The rest of the data consisted of each paragraph of press releases submitted by Penn State University's Office of Strategic Communications, video statements recorded and released by the University, archived Facebook posts, and archived Twitter posts during the study time period.

Table 3
Sources of Data

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Facebook	148	25.4	25.4	25.4
	Press Release	329	56.4	56.4	81.8
	Twitter	106	18.2	18.2	100.0
	Total	583	100.0	100.0	

Note: Archived data, Adapted from Penn State University official communications issued from November 5, 2011, to December 7, 2011.

Frequency of Coded Message by Strategy

In order to fully appreciate the scope of Penn State University's image repair utilization in respect to the three aforementioned research questions, a higher-level

examination of each strategy is warranted. This frequency data provides additional insight when exploring the research questions and lays a foundation for discussion in Chapter 5.

Denial.

As mentioned previously, denial is classified as content expressing deniability of the event in some form, either a direct statement of non-responsibility or through shifting the blame to another individual or organization. Of the 27 posts recorded in the denial category, 23 were classified as the subcategory blame shifting while simple denial accounted for only four posts. In contrast with the entire sample, denial accounted for five percent of the total message content (Table 4).

Table 4
Denial

Denial	Denial: Blame Shifting	Denial: Simple Denial
27	23	4
5%	4%	0%

Note: Adapted from Penn State University official communications issued from November 5, 2011, to December 7, 2011.

Evasion of Responsibility.

According to Benoit (1997), the evasion of responsibility image repair strategy could include provocation, defeasibility, accident, or good intent. Within the sample, there were only two incidents of evasion, both utilizing defeasibility as the image repair tactic (Table 5). This strategy was used so infrequently that the two coded posts still resulted in less than one percent of the total message population and are not statistically relevant.

Table 5
Evasion of Responsibility

Evasion	Evasion: Provocation	Evasion: Defeasibility	Evasion: Accident	Evasion: Good Intentions
2	0	2	0	0
0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Note: Adapted from Penn State University official communications issued from November 5, 2011, to December 7, 2011.

Reduction of Offensiveness.

There are six potential options when attempting to use reduction as an image repair strategy: bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attacking the accuser, and victim compensation. Within this data set, 110 total posts included language reducing the offensiveness of the event. Of these posts, 46 posts or eight percent of the total data set were University bolstering. Penn State did not use minimization, transcendence, or differentiation as strategies within this content. Furthermore, there were no incidents of attacking the accuser. For all four of these categories, 0 messages were classified. Sixty-four messages, or eleven percent of the total data set, were coded and classified as compensating the victims of the incident (Table 6). For the purposes of this study, any fundraising initiated by the University, its students, or alumni that was promoted formally by the University were considered "compensation."

Table 6
Reduction of the Offensiveness of the Event

Reduction	Reduction: Attack the Accuser	Reduction: Compensate the Victim	Reduction: Bolstering	Reduction: Minimization	Reduction: Transcendence	Reduction: Differentiation
110	0	64	46	0	0	0
19%	0%	11%	8%	0%	0%	0%

Note: Adapted from Penn State University official communications issued from November 5, 2011, to December 7, 2011.

Corrective Action.

Making institutional adjustments, correcting existing policy, as well as announcing the hiring and firing of personnel as a result of the incident would all be examples of corrective action. Of the data coded, 133 instances of corrective action were noted. This accounts for 23% of the entire data set and was the most utilized strategy of Penn State during this time period (Table 7).

Mortification.

Direct apology, or mortification, was not a strategy often selected by Penn State in the month following the Jerry Sandusky indictment. Only two messages, accounting for less than one percent of content, included any sort of apologetic content (Table 7).

Other.

The "other" category allowed the coders to classify content that did not fall into one of Benoit's (1997) strategies. It is possible for a post or a paragraph to include more than one thought or direction; therefore, paragraphs, posts, and tweets could potentially be classified as having a strategy notated as well as having content considered "other." Of the posts analyzed, 390 were considered to fall into the "other" category, which far exceeded any of the other options in the sample (Table 7).

Table 7
Corrective Action, Mortification, and Other

Corrective Action	Mortification	Other
133	2	390
23%	0%	67%

Note: Adapted from Penn State University official communications issued from November 5, 2011, to December 7, 2011.

In addition, posts entirely unrelated to the crisis were also classified as "other." Due to the fact that the "other" category was so popular (67%), assessing reliability with the "other" category included would have resulted in spuriously large coefficients, thus overestimating the reliability of the coders. As a result, the reliability analyses were conducted without including the "other" category. Of note, these analyses did not include the 10% of items that were previously used to assess initial coder reliability because doing so may have lead to spuriously inflated reliability estimates (i.e., the previous analysis already showed that, in the 10% of randomly selected data, the coders were highly reliable).

Reliability.

A Cohen's kappa coefficient was computed to assess the degree of agreement between the two raters at the category level (Table 8). The analysis revealed that the two raters exhibited high reliability in their ratings according to conventional academic standards, kappa=. 83 (Landis & Koch, 1977).

Table 8
Symmetric Measures Category Level

		Value	Asymptotic Standard Error	Approximate T[b]	Approximate Significance
Measure of Agreement	Kappa	.827	.038	14.624	.000
N of Valid Cases		144			

[a]Not assuming the null hypothesis.
[b]Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

A Cohen's kappa coefficient was computed to assess the degree of agreement between the two raters at the subcategory level (Table 9). The analysis revealed a kappa of .62, indicating the raters showed substantial, albeit not high, agreement in their

subcategory ratings (Landis & Koch, 1977). This means that the coders agreed to the category but were less frequently in agreement on the subcategory.

Table 9
Symmetric Measures Subcategory Level

		Value	Asymptotic Standard Error	Approximate T[b]	Approximate Significance
Measure of Agreement	Kappa	.621	.062	10.192	.000
N of Valid Cases		76			

[a]Not assuming the null hypothesis.
[b]Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

Data from coder one was used for analyses as the ratings from coder two were only used to assess the reliability of the coding scheme.

The next section of the results will examine each source within the data set and how image repair strategies were used within each.

Research Question One

Research question one seeks to determine how Penn State University utilized image repair strategies via Facebook messages during the month following the Jerry Sandusky indictment. Although the study is designed to be qualitative in nature, descriptive statistics were conducted at the source level to determine how many items received a code and the frequency of the assigned codes.

Table 10
Facebook Category Level

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Reduction	30	20.3	90.9	90.9
	Corrective	3	2.0	9.1	100.0
	Total	33	22.3	100.0	
	Other	115	77.7		
Total		148	100.0		

a. type = 1

Of the 148 Facebook messages coded, 33 messages or 22.3% used an image repair strategy within the applicable content (Table 10). Within the image repair categories, reduction of the offensiveness of the event was the most common image repair strategy utilized. Ninety-one percent of the image repair messages on Facebook were reductive in nature, and nine percent were considered corrective.

When exploring the image repair subcategories within the reduction image repair category, compensating the victim occurred in 83.3% of the reduction cases, whereas University bolstering accounted for 16.7% of the message content (Table 11).

Table 11
Facebook Subcategory Level

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Compensation	25	16.9	83.3	83.3
	Bolstering	5	3.4	16.7	100.0
	Total	30	20.3	100.0	
	Other	118	79.7		
Total		148	100.0		

a. type = 1

Over the month of messages in the sample, Penn State used Facebook to communicate with students, parents, and alumni about the incident as well as other happenings at their multiple campuses. Analysis of the content shared on Facebook that did not fall into an image repair category during the month following the Sandusky incident was classified as “other” is further discussed in Chapter 5.

Research Question Two

The second research question postulated within this dissertation asked how Penn State used image repair strategies on the social media platform Twitter in the month following the Jerry Sandusky indictment. Twitter, known for its streamlined messaging, provided 106 messages in the sample and 18.2% of the total messages

coded. Within Twitter, and similar to Facebook, reduction of the offensiveness of the event was the most common image repair strategy used by the University (92.9%). Corrective action accounted for 7.1% of Twitter content (Table 12).

At the subcategory level, victim compensation was the most frequently coded reduction category on Twitter (92.9%), followed by bolstering (7.1%) (Table 13). Like research question one, an expansion of the content non-classified as an image repair will be considered in the final discussion.

Table 12
Twitter Category Level

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Reduction	13	12.3	92.9	92.9
	Corrective	1	.9	7.1	100.0
	Total	14	13.2	100.0	
	Other	92	86.8		
Total		106	100.0		

a. type = 3

Table 13
Twitter Subcategory Level

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Compensation	13	12.3	92.9	92.9
	Bolstering	1	.9	7.1	100.0
	Total	14	13.2	100.0	
	Other	91	85.8		
	System	1	.9		
	Total	92	86.8		
Total		106	100.0		

a. type = 3

Research Question Three

The final research question asked how Penn State used image repair strategies via traditional methodologies during the study. Press releases were coded in a similar method to prior research (Harlow, Brantley & Harlow, 2011), 338 pieces of coded data

were included. Of this data, 97 or 29% included an image repair strategy. Within traditional media, corrective action (63.9%) was the most frequently categorized image repair strategy found within the message content. Reduction (19.6%) and denial (14.4%) were also commonly found in press release content. Evasion and mortification each received a code within the press release content but accounted for less than one percent of the total strategies used (Table 14).

Table 14
Press Releases Category Level

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Denial	14	4.1	14.4	14.4
	Evasion	1	.3	1.0	15.5
	Reduction	19	5.6	19.6	35.1
	Corrective	62	18.3	63.9	99.0
	Mortification	1	.3	1.0	100.0
	Total	97	28.7	100.0	
	Other	241	71.3		
Total		338	100.0		

a. type = 2

At the subcategory level, bolstering made up 50% of the reduction category, followed by blame shifting (41.2%). Defeasibility (2.9%) and victim compensation (5.9%) were also discovered in the subcategories within press release content (Table 15).

Table 15
Press Release Subcategory Level

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Blame Shifting	14	4.1	41.2	41.2
	Defeasibility	1	.3	2.9	44.1
	Compensation	2	.6	5.9	50.0
	Bolstering	17	5.0	50.0	100.0
	Total	34	10.1	100.0	
	Other	245	72.5		
	System	59	17.5		
	Total	304	89.9		
Total		338	100.0		

a. type = 2

Additional Analysis

Although there were no hypotheses involved in this content analysis specific to the research questions, chi-square analyses were performed to identify any potential differences between strategy and source. All chi-squares were corrected for continuity via Yate's correction because the degree of freedom in each analysis is one. The first examination looked to see if there was a significant difference in the number of overall image repair strategies used on Facebook versus the number used on Twitter (Table 16).

Table 16
Facebook and Twitter

	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	Expected Proportion	Percent Deviation	Standardized Results
Facebook	33	22.26	.58	+21.06	+1.1
Twitter	14	19.74	.42	-29.08	-1.29
Sums	47	47	1.0		

Note. For df=1, the calculated value of Chi-Square is 2.4 corrected for continuity for p=0.1213 and corrected value of Chi-Square is 4.1 where p is non-directional.

Within this examination, the difference between Facebook and Twitter on the overall number of image repair strategies is not significant. Chi-square (1) = 2.40, p+.121, Facebook = 33, and Twitter = 14. This means that Facebook and Twitter used image repair similarly.

The next examination explored whether or not there was a significant difference in the expected overall use of image repair strategies between Facebook and press releases (Table 17).

Table 17
Facebook and Press Releases

	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	Expected Proportion	Percent Deviation	Standardized Results
Facebook	33	40.3	.31	-18.11	-1.15
Press Releases	97	89.7	.69	+8.14	+0.77
Sums	130	130	1.0		

Note. For df=1, the calculated value of Chi-Square is 1.67 corrected for continuity for p=0.1963 and corrected value of Chi-Square is 1.92 where p is non-directional.

Within the data, the difference between Facebook image repair strategy and press release image repair strategy is not significant: Chi-square (1) + 1.67, p = .196, Facebook = 33, and press releases =97. These results indicate that Facebook and Press Releases used image repair strategies similarly.

The data was also examined to determine if there would be a significant difference in the number of expected image repair strategies utilized within Twitter versus expected image repair strategies utilized in press releases (Table 18).

Table 18
Twitter and Press Releases

	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	Expected Proportion	Percent Deviation	Standardized Results
Twitter	14	26.64	.24	-47.45	-2.45
Press Releases	97	84.36	.76	+14.98	+1.38
Sums	111	111	1.0		

Note. For df=1, the calculated value of Chi-Square is 7.28 corrected for continuity for p=0.007 and corrected value of Chi-Square is 7.89 where p is non-directional.

When investigating as to if there would be a significant difference in the number of expected image repair strategies utilized within Twitter and press releases, the difference is significant: Chi-square (1) = 7.28, p = .007, Twitter =14, and press releases = 97. These results mean that Twitter posts and Press Releases used image repair strategies differently. These findings will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Denial

Because neither Facebook nor Twitter received any codes for denial, no analysis was performed comparing the two social media platforms.

An examination of Facebook in contrast to press releases was performed to determine if there was a difference in expected denial strategy usage in each (Table 19).

Table 19
Denial: Facebook and Press Releases

	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	Expected Proportion	Percent Deviation	Standardized Results
Facebook	0	4.34	.31	-100	-2.08
Press Releases	14	9.66	.69	+44.93	+1.4
Sums	14	14	1.0		

Note. For df=1, the calculated value of Chi-Square is 4.93 corrected for continuity for p=0.0264 and corrected value of Chi-Square is 6.29 where p is non-directional.

When examining the expected use of denial strategies within Facebook and press releases, the difference is significant: Chi-square (1) = 4.93, p =.026, Facebook = 0, and press releases =14. These results indicate that denial strategies were utilized differently on Facebook versus within press releases.

Consideration was also given to the relationship of denial messages within Twitter and press releases (Table 20).

Table 20
Denial: Twitter and Press Releases

	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	Expected Proportion	Percent Deviation	Standardized Results
Twitter	0	3.36	.24	-100	-1.83
Press Releases	14	10.64	.76	+31.58	+1.03
Sums	14	14	1.0		

Note. For df=1, the calculated value of Chi-Square is 3.2 corrected for continuity for p=0.0536 and corrected value of Chi-Square is 4.42 where p is non-directional.

When examining the use of denial strategies within Twitter and press releases, the difference is significant: Chi-square (1) = 4.42, p =.053 Twitter = 0, press releases =14. These findings indicate that denial strategies were executed differently on Twitter than within Press Releases.

Evasion of Responsibility

When examining evasion as an image repair strategy in this study, it is important to note that both Facebook and Twitter received no evasion codes. When considering Facebook versus press releases, press releases only received one evasion code; therefore the difference is not significant in either scenario. Chi-square (1) =0, p = 1.0.

Reduction of the Offensiveness of the Event

Study of expected use of reduction strategies was performed on Facebook and Twitter (Table 21).

Table 21
Reduction: Facebook and Twitter

	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	Expected Proportion	Percent Deviation	Standardized Results
Facebook	30	24.94	.58	+20.29	+1.01
Twitter	13	18.06	.42	-28.02	-1.19
Sums	43	43	1.0		

Note. For df=1, the calculated value of Chi-Square is 1.98 corrected for continuity for p=0.1594 and corrected value of Chi-Square is 2.44 where p is non-directional.

In the case of Facebook and Twitter, the analysis revealed that the difference in expected reduction strategies utilized was not significant: Chi-square (1) = 1.98, p= .159: Facebook = 30and Twitter =13. This means that reduction strategies were used similarly on Facebook and Twitter.

Analysis was also performed on Facebook and press releases exploring the expected usage of reduction strategies (Table 22).

Table 22
Reduction: Facebook and Press Releases

	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	Expected Proportion	Percent Deviation	Standardized Results
Facebook	30	15.19	.31	+97.5	+3.8
Press Releases	19	33.81	.69	-43.8	-2.55
Sums	49	49	1.0		

Note. For df=1, the calculated value of Chi-Square is 19.54 corrected for continuity for p<0.0001 and corrected value of Chi-Square is 20.93 where p is non-directional.

The data reveal that there is a significant difference in the expected number of reduction strategies used within Facebook and press releases: Chi-square (1) = 19.54, p<.001. Facebook = 30and press releases = 19. This means that reduction strategies were used differently on Facebook than within press releases.

Twitter and press releases were also examined to determine if there is a difference between expected image repair reduction strategies between the two modalities (Table 23).

Table 23
Reduction: Twitter and Press Releases

	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	Expected Proportion	Percent Deviation	Standardized Results
Twitter	13	7.68	.24	+69.27	+1.92
Press Releases	19	24.32	.76	-21.87	-1.08
Sums	32	32	1.0		

Note. For df=1, the calculated value of Chi-Square is 3.99 corrected for continuity for p=0.0458 and corrected value of Chi-Square is 4.85 where p is non-directional.

The data reveal that there is a significant difference in the expected number of reduction strategies used within Twitter and press releases: Chi-square (1) = 3.99, p<.04. Twitter = 13 and press releases = 19. This means that reduction strategies were used differently on Twitter than within press releases.

Corrective Action

Chi-square analysis was also performed on each modality to determine if any differences between the expected corrective strategies within each were present. Analysis between Facebook and Twitter explore if there is a difference between expected coded corrective image repair strategies between the two social media platforms (Table 24).

Table 24
Corrective: Facebook and Twitter

	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	Expected Proportion	Percent Deviation	Standardized Results
Twitter	3	2.32	.58	+29.31	+0.45
Press Releases	1	1.68	.42	-40.48	-0.52
Sums	4	4	1.0		

Note. For df=1, the calculated value of Chi-Square is 0.03 corrected for continuity for p=0.8625 and corrected value of Chi-Square is 0.47 where p is non-directional.

The analysis of Facebook and Twitter in relation to corrective action image repair strategies is not significant: Chi-square (1) = .03, p = .863. Facebook = 3, and Twitter = 1. This means that corrective action was used similarly on Facebook and Twitter.

Facebook and press releases were also explored to determine if there was a difference in the expected amount of corrective strategies utilized (Table 25).

Table 25
Corrective: Facebook and Press Releases

	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	Expected Proportion	Percent Deviation	Standardized Results
Facebook	3	20.15	.31	-85.11	-3.82
Press Releases	62	44.85	.69	+38.24	+2.56
Sums	65	65	1.0		

Note. For df=1, the calculated value of Chi-Square is 19.94 corrected for continuity for p<0.0001 and corrected value of Chi-Square is 21.15 where p is non-directional.

The exploration of corrective messages on Facebook and within press releases indicated that the difference was significant: Chi-square (1) =19.94, p<.001. Facebook = 3, and press releases = 62. These results indicate that corrective action was used differently on Facebook than within press releases.

Additionally, data was analyzed on Twitter and press releases with regard to expected differences in corrective image repair strategies (Table 26).

Table 26
Corrective: Twitter and Press Releases

	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	Expected Proportion	Percent Deviation	Standardized Results
Twitter	1	15.52	.24	-93.39	-3.63
Press Releases	62	47.88	.76	+29.49	+2.04
Sums	63	63	1.0		

Note. For df=1, the calculated value of Chi-Square is 16.14 corrected for continuity for p<0.0001 and corrected value of Chi-Square is 17.35 where p is non-directional.

The exploration of corrective messages on Twitter and within press releases indicated that the difference was significant: Chi-square (1) =16.14, p<.0001. Twitter = 1, and press releases = 62. These results indicate that corrective action was used differently on Twitter than within press releases.

Mortification

When examining mortification as an image repair strategy in this study, it is important to note that neither Facebook nor Twitter received codes for mortification. When examining Facebook versus press releases, the latter only received one evasion code; therefore the difference is not significant in either scenario. Chi-square (1) =0, p = 1.0.

Chapter five summarizes this study and provides academic conclusions based upon these findings. Limitations of the study will be discussed as well as implications of this research on future inquiries.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Over the last twenty years, the field of public relations has shifted from one-way dialogue pushed out through press releases and formal statements to a two-way interactive exchange between the organization and its interested publics (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Emerging technologies like social media have largely facilitated this shift in information dissemination. This two-way methodology now allows PR practitioners to communicate directly and synchronously with their stakeholders. Particularly in times of crisis, the organization now has a more direct line to those who have a personal interest in the outcome, bypassing traditional methods and gatekeepers.

Crisis and other unexpected events can cause significant disruption to organizations (Coombs, 1999). In early November 2011, Pennsylvania State University was faced with increased scrutiny and criticism following the indictment of a former staff member and coach. In addition to the issues raised by Jerry Sandusky's involvement, the crisis escalated when charges were also filed against Penn State administrative officials for mishandling the incident. Coupled with the sex scandal itself, the termination of head football coach Joe Paterno caused significant response from the University students, fans, alumni, and the greater "Happy Valley" community. As the crisis unfolded, employees in public relations at Penn State University worked to contain the response, minimize damage, and provide information to the multiple outlets that were immediately requesting clarification.

The primary purpose of this study was to provide an initial look into how Penn State University used image repair strategies as the crisis unfolded. Through

investigation of archived press releases, prepared video statements, and social media posts, a snapshot of the initial response and strategy could be garnered. This study examined 583 individual messages captured during this time period. The data consisted of 55 press releases, broken down into 338 individual, codeable paragraphs (Harlow, Brantley & Harlow, 2011). Five video statements were transcribed and coded accordingly but due to the low frequency of use, were not included in statistical calculations. In addition, 148 individual Facebook posts and 106 Tweets were archived and coded during the study. This inquiry attempted to determine how, if at all, Penn State University utilized image repair strategies in the month following Jerry Sandusky's indictment.

Findings

Every organization responds to crisis differently. Organizational leadership, legal concerns, long-term consequences, and other factors become considerations when constructing messages during a crisis (Coombs, 1999). In the case of this study, a content analysis of official University messages showed that Penn State used image repair strategies relatively infrequently during the first month of this crisis. Only 144 (25%) messages within the sample included some element of image repair. Within all sources, corrective action (9%) and reduction of the offensiveness of the event (8%) were the most frequently utilized strategies. While the overall use of image repair strategies provides some insight into how Penn State responded to this incident, the research questions posed in this study looked to examine how such strategies were utilized in traditional public relations tactics as well as within social media. Specifically, this study allowed a look into Penn State's crisis response in the form of image repair in

dual modalities, social media and traditional methods and provided insight as to the similarities and differences of message choices made by the office of Strategic Communications on each platform.

The first research question inquired as to how Penn State used image repair messages via Facebook during the Jerry Sandusky scandal. Social media have proven to be useful during an organizational crisis because invested stakeholders are able to receive information quickly and easily (Moody, 2011). Coupled with its immediacy, social media's ability to engage in a direct dialogue with their opt-in subscribers provides an easy opportunity for the sharing of image repair messages.

Analysis of the 148 Facebook messages indicates that 33 (22%) contained an image repair message within the content. Only two strategies were identified in Facebook messages, reduction of the offensiveness of the event, and corrective action. Within the 33 messages, 90.9% were classified as reduction. Subcategory analysis reveals that within the reduction category compensation was used 83.3% of the time whereas bolstering was utilized 16.7% of the time. These findings are not surprising due to a large number of University-sponsored fundraisers supporting victims of child sexual abuse that were launched immediately following the crisis outbreak. Within the bolstering posts, references to Penn State's tradition, passionate alumni support, and the high quality of academics contrast with the outpouring of negative national coverage in mainstream and social media. Corrective action accounted for 9.1% of the image repair offered within Facebook posts and was often seen in posts announcing policy change or modification of staffing as a result of the incident. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of the data contained no image repair at all. This may be due to the perceived legality of

the crisis and an attempt by the University to not take a significant legal position on the situation.

These findings indicate that the Office of Strategic Communications at Penn State only used Facebook minimally for image repair and when they did, they limited the strategies they selected. This could mean that the University did not view social media as a credible and trustworthy method for sharing such sensitive information or, perhaps more likely, since there was a mandate for all departments to cease posting on behalf of the University, that they simply wanted to limit or streamline the crisis management to something that they were comfortable with, and that would go directly to the media who was hungry for the story. As mentioned previously, the instantaneous nature of social media can be daunting for organizations, and considering the magnitude of this crisis and the potential legal fallout, perhaps the strategy at Penn State was to provide minimalistic content on this media while the crisis, the organizational transitions, and the implications were being sorted out.

As a practitioner, these findings reveal that a stronger look should be given to social media as an opportunity to share information with those opt-in followers who, at least assumedly, are more interested. Should those who have indicated that they have a strong desire to follow communications from an organization not be provided with the same message content as the media? As crisis communicators, this segment of the stakeholders should not be ignored in terms of message content, but rather due to their noted interest, be provided an opportunity to dialogue with the organization on social media about their thoughts and concerns.

The findings on Twitter were no different giving strength to the argument that Penn State viewed social media differently in terms of an image repair vehicle during this crisis. Facebook and Twitter often mirrored content, which arguably is why the findings within Research Question Two are similar to those in question one.

Research Question Two sought to examine how Penn State utilized Twitter during this crisis. 106Twitter messages were coded, and the findings indicate that like Facebook, Twitter messages utilized only two main strategies: reduction of the offensiveness of the event and corrective action. It should be noted however, that only 14 of the 106 messages (13.2%) had image repair intentions. Like Facebook, reduction was the strategy of choice on Twitter with 92.9% of the coded image repair posts classified as such. Nine posts, or 7.1%, were corrective in nature. As mentioned previously, significant fundraising occurred during the time period of this study as Penn State alumni launched a nationwide campaign to raise funds for victims. Henceforth, it is not surprising when victim compensation accounts for the vast majority of the subcategory classification.

It is interesting to note that within the two social media platforms examined in this study that the data coded had very similar message content and strategy. Even with message restriction to 140 characters within the Twitter platform and no such guidelines for Facebook, the message content on social media was similar. Quantitative analysis via chi-square analysis mirrored these findings, indicating no significant difference in usage of image repair between Facebook and Twitter independent of strategy.

The limited prior research on social media and image repair has shown that the platforms are often used for two-way dialogue with subscribers because end users

expect immediate information and real-time updates (Moody, 2011; Austin, Fisher, & Jin, 2012; Muralidharan, Dillistone, & Shin, 2011). Social media responses tend to be viewed as more informal and focusing on human interaction, inviting online participation into discussion on the content (Solis and Breakenridge, 2009).In this instance, only 18.5% of all social media posts combined included any element of image repair, thus indicating that, at least at this point of the crisis, Penn State did not view social media as a largely viable method for sharing image repair messages.

While the effectiveness of this strategy was not examined in this research, it is interesting to consider if a more active role on social media would have had a positive impact on the crisis at Penn State. Public relations professionals should not spend time cultivating relationships and trust on social media just to abandon those publics in crisis when such important qualities are most needed.

The final research question evaluated the use of image repair strategies in more traditional methods: press releases and statements. As mentioned previously, video statements were disqualified from calculation due to the low frequency in number. It is important to note, however, that the video statement content was provided and transcribed from within the press releases; therefore, the content can still be analyzed as press release content, and the image repair strategies utilized would be calculated and attributed to this strategy.

Press releases were analyzed paragraph by paragraph as conducted in previous research (Harlow, Brantley & Harlow, 2011). Of the 338 data available in the sample, 97 contained an image repair message (28.7%). As opposed to the social media platforms discussed previously, press releases utilized five different image repair

strategies throughout. Corrective action was the most frequently chosen image repair strategy found in press release content (63.9%). Reduction and denial were used 19.6% and 14.4% respectively. Evasion and mortification, were infrequently used but noted within the messages, each made up one percent.

Of the strategies utilized in press releases, the subcategory classification of bolstering accounted for 50% of the image repair content while blame shifting was used in 41.2%. Victim compensation (5.9%) and defeasibility (2.9%) were also components of the messages. It is interesting that reduction of the offensiveness of the event and corrective action were utilized in all three platforms and that compensation, likely due to the heavy promotion of the fundraising efforts, was also used in each content source.

It is important to note that like Facebook, press releases did not have content restrictions. Therefore, a press release could expound upon information within multiple paragraphs, often utilizing multiple strategies within one release. Press releases are also the more formal, "traditional," format of sending public relations messages. It could be argued that due to comfort level and formality, more image repair was contained in traditional methodologies.

Chi-square analysis found that a significant difference between image repair usages existed between press releases and the social media platforms. This finding was similar, independent of strategy analyzed, thus giving merit to the observation that Penn State utilized image repair within the traditional media outlet differently than via social media.

Some consistencies were found throughout the sources and would shed light on the message strategy initiated by Penn State during this crisis. First, corrective action

was found across all sources as a dominant message component. Penn State was at the height of a University-wide, far-reaching crisis that required significant shifting of staff and policy. During the first month of the Sandusky crisis, Penn State shared these changes across all media platforms.

Additionally, also found within all three sources were messages of reduction. It is reasonable to conclude that during the initial phases of this crisis, Penn State was attempting to reduce the offensiveness and negative impact of the scandal. While offsetting a sexual abuse scandal may prove difficult, the efforts of the University, its alumni, and students to raise money for sex abuse victims were an element of compensation used to reduce the backlash felt by the indictment and subsequent investigation.

The results of this study and the findings discussed may all provide interesting insight into how Penn State utilized image repair during the Jerry Sandusky scandal. But, as important as what is found in the study is also what is not discovered. Not widely used was denial as a message strategy, especially simple denial. Whether it was because of the legality of the situation or a fear of the public relations backlash should the University deny any wrongdoing and then be found at fault, simple denial was not a preferred strategy within any source. Only two messages in the entire data set included an element of simple denial. Rather, Penn State took opportunity to separate itself from the scandal utilizing blame shifting whenever denial was utilized. Within these messages, the University attempted to place the blame on Sandusky, a retired employee, rather than take responsibility as a University issue.

Also not discovered in the data were any accounts of provocation or accidental involvement. While two messages included defeasibility, or claims that the incident occurred due to lack of information, Penn State generally avoided using evasion as a message strategy. This is likely due to the large volume of information that was initially available after the indictment, the significant public outcry demanding answers, and the pending investigations into the incident.

As discussed previously, reduction was an image repair strategy found in all three available sources in this study. However, when examined for the use of reduction found in the subcategories, only compensation for the victim and bolstering were utilized. It is interesting, but not surprising, to note that Penn State did not choose to attack those accusing Sandusky and the University nor did they minimize the impact of the situation or attempt to inflate the value of more important matters at the University. An attack on children already victimized or downplaying the significance of the crisis could easily be viewed as inappropriate and of little value to the University.

Apology, in any form, was only found in two messages in the data set. Other considerations may have gone into the Universities choice not to apologize. First, due to the timing of this study and coding data only found in the first month of the incident it may have been too soon for the University to accept any time of responsibility and apologize for wrongdoing. Also, at this time of the crisis, actual legal findings had not yet been determined. It is possible that legal counsel at Penn State advised the University to avoid apology prior to the court's findings.

One of the interesting findings of this study was that image repair was only coded in 144 of the 583 messages (24.6%). In each source category, "other" made up the

vast majority of the content. In an effort to provide more clarity as to the content within the "other" category, a posthoc analysis was done expanding the "other" category into 15 additional categories to gain additional insight into how Penn State University was using these three sources during this crisis.

Post-hoc Analysis of the "Other" Category

Due to the overwhelming popularity of the "other" category within the messages coded in this study, the researcher conducted a posthoc content analysis expanding the other classification into 15 additional categories. This analysis was performed after the conclusion of the originally proposed study. The volume of the "other" category suggested that additional examination was needed. The expanded categories were as follows:

Quote

A quote was classified as any direct quotation included in the press release, Facebook, or Twitter post. A quote was designated by the use of quotation marks or if the message was notated as such. As an example, in the press release dated November 09, 2011, entitled "Statement by Graham Spanier," a direct quote is used.

Quote sample.

> *"It has been my great privilege and honor to serve Penn State for more than 25 years, including the past 16 as president. I have said before that the position I occupy is the dream job in American higher education, and I am proud of what we have all done together to advance our programs, support our students, and enhance pride in our institution." (Statement from Graham Spanier, 2011)*

Link

A link included any message that provided a hyperlink to additional content. An example of link utilization can be found in the Twitter post dated November 10, 2011, referencing study body president TJ Baird's comments to the student body.

Link sample.

President @tjbard's public statement regarding the Sandusky case can be read here: pennstateupua.com (@penn_state, November 10, 2011).

Acknowledgment

Acknowledgment was coded when data made reference to the feelings (sympathy, empathy, sadness, etc.) of a person or group of persons. An example of acknowledgement can be found in the November 10, 2011, press release "A message from Rodney Erickson."

Acknowledgment sample.

This is one of the saddest weeks in the history of Penn State. It has been difficult to comprehend the horrific nature of the allegations that were revealed in the Attorney General's presentment last week. As a member of the Penn State community for 34 years, as a parent, and as a grandfather, I find the charges as they have been described to be devastating, and my heart goes out to those who have been victimized and their families. This is a terrible tragedy for everyone involved, and it will take some time to bring a measure of understanding and resolution to the community. (A message from Rodney Erickson, 2011)

Non-issue Bolstering

This classification would include boasting of general statements about greatness, history, or prestige. In a Facebook post on November 29, 2011, the University boasts about the ranking of its science program.

Non-issue bolstering sample.

Penn State science ranks among the best in the United States, according to a new study. Check out the video: http://goo.gl/DCrgE Or read the full story at http://goo.gl/C4EW9 "ScienceCast: Penn State's NRC Rankings" (@PennState Facebook, November 29, 2011).

Public Service

This category included all content that included a public service or informative message surrounding an issue or event. In a Facebook post on November 16, 2011, Penn State provided a call-in show on WPSU fielding questions regarding sexual abuse.

Public service sample.

WPSU hosts call-in show Thursday at 9 p.m. about the issues surrounding child sexual abuse. Details: http://goo.gl/o933B "Penn State Live - WPSU to air call-in program about child sexual abuse" (@PennState Facebook, November 16, 2011).

Academics

Academics is coded as any message involving institutional announcements surrounding teaching, curriculum or research. In this Twitter post on November 28, Penn State retweeted about faculty members incorporating the crisis into classroom learning.

Academics sample.

RT @pennstatelive: Penn State faculty offer teachable moments from difficult events goo.gl/EZDzM #PennState (@penn_state, November 28, 2011).

Personnel

This category included data referencing personnel decisions at Penn State. An example can be found in the November 15, 2011,tweet indicating a new executive vice president had been appointed.

Personnel sample.

Pangborn named acting executive vice president and provost goo.gl/qQBD5 #PennState (@penn_state, November 15, 2011).

Issue Related General

This category included all messages that referenced the incident but did not do so specifically. In the November 19, 2011, press release titled "WPSU to air 'This American Life and Penn State'" the content references "the events of the last two weeks," indicating the crisis but does not identify the issue outwardly.

Issue related general sample.

Satalia and a Penn State faculty-student panel will discuss the reactions and responses to the events unfolding at Penn State during the past two weeks and the steps the University will take to move forward. The WPSU program will air at 7 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 20, on public radio WPSUFM and simulcast at http://wpsu.org/live online. "This American Life" airs weekly on WPSU-FM at noon Saturdays, and again Sunday evenings at 6 p.m. (This American Life, 2011).

Safety

A safety message was coded when content referencing campus safety or safety measures was present. An example can be found in the November 23, 2011, Facebook post warning of a bomb threat on campus.

Safety sample.

UParkalert :: Bomb threat received at Beaver Stadium. Police, dogs searched, nothing found. Details: http://live.psu.edu/ (@PennState Facebook, November 23, 2011).

Policy

Policy was coded as any message that mentions a change in institutional policy. In the November 08, 2011 press release entitled "Statement by the Pennsylvania State University Board of Trustees," numerous policy announcements were provided.

Policy sample.

Whereas, the University Faculty Senate of the Pennsylvania State University expresses its deepest sympathy and support for victims of sexual abuse; Whereas, the University Faculty Senate of the Pennsylvania State University is committed to fostering an environment in which reports of abuse are regarded with full impartiality; Be it resolved that, the University Faculty Senate of the Pennsylvania State University calls for review of all applicable administrative and Senate policies on reporting procedures; Be it resolved that, the University Faculty Senate of the Pennsylvania State University requests that there be an independent special committee whose chair and the majority of whose members

have never been affiliated with Penn State; and Be it resolved that, the University Faculty Senate of the Pennsylvania State University will cooperate with the special committee, endorses the five-point statement issued by President Rodney Erickson, and commits itself to work with the President to restore public trust in the University. (Statement from Pennsylvania, 2011)

Student Services

Any message that provided resources for students including clubs, activities and other campus offerings was coded as student services. In a November 28, 2011 Facebook post, content included information regarding student counseling services.

Student services sample.

CAPS (Counseling and Psychological Services) plans sessions for students. Details: http://goo.gl/btDuj "Penn State Live - Three forums for students who wish to discuss recent events" (@PennState Facebook, November 28, 2011).

Alumni

The alumni category included all data involving alumni activity. In a November 23, 2011 Facebook post, Penn State shared a photo with comment about the Nittany Lion Shrine which was a gift from the class of 2012.

Alumni sample.

We thought you might like to see the Nittany Lion Shrine, past and present. The Shrine was sculpted from a 13-ton block of limestone in 1942 on the site where it stands today near Rec Hall on the University Park campus. The 2012 Senior Class Gift will add enhancements to the location including historical

displays, improved lighting, and ADA accessibility (@PennState Facebook, November 23, 2011).

Athletics

Athletics was coded as any message including information surrounding athletics at Penn State that may or may not have included reference to the Sandusky incident. In the November 28, 2011 Press Release entitled “Football head coach search committee formed,” the athletic director discusses strategy for Paterno’s replacement.

Athletics sample.

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. -- David Joyner, Penn State acting athletic director, today (Nov. 28) announced the members of the search committee charged with identifying candidates and appointing the 15th head football coach in the program's 125-year history (Football head coach search, 2011).

Other Organized Support

This category included all messages that provided organized support for victims, students, or the Penn State community that was not compensatory in nature (i.e. not a fundraiser). In the December 1, 2011 press release titled “Students hold fundraiser to benefit abused children,” the content discusses the formation of a “blue out” to show unified support by wearing blue clothing to draw attention to child abuse.

Other organized support sample.

A “Blue Out,” during which everyone is asked to wear blue to support the awareness and prevention of child abuse, and a candlelight walk are set for 5 p.m. on Thursday, Nov. 17, at Penn State York. Students in the Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS) Club have organized the event to show

their support for victims of child abuse in light of the recent events at Penn State. The event is open to the public (Students hold fundraiser, 2011).

Non-Classified Other

Non-Classified Other included any message that did not fall into one of the other fourteen categories. In a November 22, 2011 Facebook post, Penn State discussed food safety.

Non-classified other sample.

Some tips on food safety: http://goo.gl/CvdWk "Safe to Eat?"

Upon the development of an expanded codebook (Appendix B), the researcher coded the original 583 messages for any expanded content. Of specific interest was the use of quotes, links, and acknowledgement due to their perceived prevalence in the previous coding exercise (@PennState Facebook, November 22, 2011).

The coding of the expanded categories revealed the following data analysis. One hundred ten Facebook posts included the “other” classification. Of those posts, 75.3% included an additional link to outside information. Twenty-six percent were messages regarding academics, and 20% included content regarding alumni activity (Table 27).

Table 27
Facebook Expanded "Other"

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Link	110	74.3	75.3	75.3
	Acknowledgement	1	.7	.9	.9
	Public Service	7	4.8	6.4	7.3
	Academics	29	19.7	26.4	33.6
	Personnel	4	2.7	3.6	37.3
	Issue Related	10	6.8	9.1	46.4
	General Safety	10	6.8	9.1	55.5
	Policy	5	3.4	4.5	60.0
	Student Services	8	5.4	7.3	67.3
	Alumni	22	15.0	20.0	87.3
	Athletics	6	4.1	5.5	92.7
	Non-Classified Other	8	5.4	7.3	100.0
	Total	110	74.8	100.0	
Missing	System	37	25.2		
Total		147	100.0		

a. type = 1

For Twitter, 64 Tweets were coded for “other.” Of this data, 28.6% was considered “non-classified other.” Any tweets, including retweets from the official Penn State feed, were coded. Because Twitter also does not have a comment section, any response to a @pennstate tweet would artificially inflate the non-classified other category. Other organized support provided 22.2% of the message content while academic announcements made up 11% (Table 28).

Table 28
Twitter Expanded "Other"

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Link	5	4.7	7.9	7.9
	Non-Issue Bolstering	4	3.8	6.3	14.3
	Public Service	4	3.8	6.3	20.6
	Academics	7	6.6	11.1	31.7
	Personnel	2	1.9	3.2	34.9
	Issue Related General	3	2.8	4.8	39.7
	Student Services	1	.9	1.6	41.3
	Alumni	1	.9	1.6	42.9
	Athletics	4	3.8	6.3	49.2
	Other Organized Support	14	13.2	22.2	71.4
	Non-Classified Other	18	17.0	28.6	100.0
	Total	63	59.4	100.0	
Missing	System	43	40.6		
Total		106	100.0		

a. type = 3

For press releases, 217 “other” ratings were coded. In contrast to social media, press releases provided messages containing issue related general information 37.8% of the time. Also, acknowledgement was found in 16.1% of the release content. Non-issue bolstering was found in 7.8% of the message content while quotations were present in 7.4% (Table 29). As mentioned previously, at Penn State transcribed five video statements issued during this time period. These statements could be the reason for the inflated issue related general and acknowledgement numbers as the commentary was not formal in nature.

As mentioned in discussion surrounding the initial findings of this study, press releases seemed to incorporate more content categories than the other two sources, perhaps due to the unrestricted length of the message content.

Table 29
Press Release Expanded "Other"

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Quote	16	4.8	7.4	7.4
	Link	5	1.5	2.3	9.7
	Acknowledgement	35	10.4	16.1	25.8
	Non-Issue Bolstering	17	5.1	7.8	33.6
	Public Service	5	1.5	2.3	35.9
	Academics	8	2.4	3.7	39.6
	Personnel	6	1.8	2.8	42.4
	Issue Related General	82	24.5	37.8	80.2
	Safety	1	.3	.5	80.6
	Policy	6	1.8	2.8	83.4
	Student Services	4	1.2	1.8	85.3
	Athletics	15	4.5	6.9	92.2
	Other Organized Support	13	3.9	6.0	98.2
	Non-Classified Other	4	1.2	1.8	100.0
	Total	217	64.8	100.0	
Missing	System	118	35.2		
Total		335	100.0		

a. type = 2

In addition to investigating the expanded other category, analyses were also conducted to determine whether rating category was related to source (Facebook post vs. Twitter post vs. Press Release). In other words, the analyses assessed whether certain types of items (e.g., Facebook post) were more likely to receive certain rating codes (e.g., link, acknowledgement). Due to the fact that Facebook posts and press releases have unrestricted length of content and were longer than Twitter posts, they had a greater likelihood of receiving a second (or third) code, thereby possibly skewing the results simply due to their longer length. The analyses were thus concluded using only the first assigned code for each item.

For each, a chi-square analysis was conducted to determine whether source was related to rating category. At the category level, rating category was significantly related to item type, chi-square (8) =66.99, p<.001 (Table 31). For Facebook posts and Twitter posts, reduction was by far the most frequently used (n=30, n=13); however, for press releases, corrective action was the most frequent (n=62), followed by denial (n=14) and reduction (n=19) which were about a third as frequent as correction (Table 30).

Table 30
Category Cross Tabulation

		Denial	Evasion	Reduction	Corrective	Mortification	Total
Source	Facebook	0	0	30	3	0	33
	Twitter	0	0	13	1	0	14
	Press Release	14	1	19	62	1	97
Total		14	1	62	66	1	144

Table 31
Category Chi-Square Analysis

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	66.990	8	.000
Likelihood Ratio	75.356	8	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	.273	1	.001
N of Valid Cases	144		

a. 8 cells (53.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 10.

At the subcategory level, rating category was significantly related to source, chi-square (6) =52.70, p<.001. For Facebook posts and Twitter posts, compensation was the most frequent (n=25, n=13). For press releases, blame shifting and bolstering were the most frequent (n=14, n=17) (Table 32).

Table 32
Subcategory Cross Tabulation

		Blame shifting	Defeasibility	Compensation	Bolstering	Total
Source	Facebook	0	0	25	5	30
	Twitter	0	0	13	1	14
	Press Release	14	1	2	17	34
Total		14	1	40	23	78

Table 33
Subcategory Chi-Square Analysis

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	52.700	6	.000
Likelihood Ratio	65.374	6	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.197	1	.274
N of Valid Cases	78		

a. 5 cells (41.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 10.

At the expanded category level, rating category was significantly related to source, chi-square (28) = 457.85, p<.001 (Table 34). For Facebook posts, link was by far the most frequent (n=110).For press releases, quote was most frequent (n=135) followed by issue related general posts (n=61) and then academics (n=25) and personnel. (n=23) For Twitter posts, link was the most frequent (n=61), followed by non-classified other (n=36).

Table 34
Expanded Category Chi-Square Analysis

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	457.845	28	.000
Likelihood Ratio	550.641	28	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	21.339	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	572		

a. 25 cells (55.6%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 37.

What these analyses have shown is that there is a significant relationship between source and the assigned category. In other words, Penn State utilized different modalities to communicate different content to its end users. Specifically, what this means to public relations professionals is that, at least in this crisis, there were clearly very specific decisions to communicate certain messages on certain media. Press releases, historically the most traditional method of communicating during crisis, were the primary method of image repair message for Penn State.

Even when examining expanded categories, the source (social media or press releases) was directly related to the message content. At least in this case, Penn State University was far more generous with content diversity in traditional press releases versus social media. What this means for public relations professionals is that consideration should be given to which messages are being shared on what media and an effort given to provide the information desired by the respective publics in the format in which they are asking for it. In other words, if a large amount of stakeholders are inquiring online, the same effort should be placed on digital message strategy as the dissemination of press releases to news outlets.

Research Conclusions

Given these research findings, there are a number of conclusions regarding how Penn State utilized Facebook, Twitter, and traditional media to communicate image repair strategies. Furthermore, through the posthoc exploration, even greater clarity is provided as to the message content that did not fit into one of Benoit's (1997) strategies.

The first of these conclusions is that during this crisis, Penn State used traditional press releases to provide greater opportunity to communicate not just multiple

messages but multiple image repair strategies within one source. Whether it was simply opportunistic of Penn State to take advantage of the unrestricted length and content of a traditional press release or something more thoughtful, clearly this methodology allowed for a greater number of image repair strategies than its social media counterparts. Furthermore, it is interesting that the greater frequency of image repair strategies was found in the one-way, more traditional methodology providing less opportunity for dialogue and opinion from stakeholders on such strategies initially. This is finding is interesting considering the hundreds of thousands of opt-in subscribers to social media platforms concerning Penn State. While it is understandable that providing the media with timely and relevant updates would have been of utmost importance, it could be argued that Penn State saw the social media publics as less needy and potentially less important than their traditional media counterparts.

It is further concluded that even though social media were emerging media in 2011, Penn State utilized Facebook and Twitter similarly. Both social media provided the University opportunity to share information quickly and directly to their opt-in subscribers, but for unknown reasons, Penn State elected to use only two image repair strategies on social media platforms rather than leveraging the capabilities of social media to create an image repair dialogue with their followers.

Social media have become very important components of crisis communication management largely in part due to its immediacy and reactivity as the crisis unfolds. Unfortunately in this case, it appears that Penn State utilized image repair on social media primarily to discuss significant fundraising for victims and to provide information regarding changing policy. Perhaps because social media is sometimes viewed as less

formal than traditional media, Penn State refrained from providing more formal messages on these media.

Likely due to their unrestricted length and ability to provide multiple messages within one document, press releases gave Penn State not only the ability to provide similar information as was prevalent on social media but also gave a platform for denial in the form of blame shifting and evasion. Press releases were the only source that contributed apology (mortification) in the message content.

The post hoc analysis allowed for additional conclusions. First, links are, not surprisingly, more common on social media. Furthermore, messages not including image repair, but relevant to the incident, were common within all sources. The expanded view of the data also provides insight into the cumulative posts that were not image repair oriented at all, thus questioning Penn State's overall intent when providing this message to its publics. Considering the magnitude of the mainstream coverage of the crisis, Penn State's communication was relatively commonplace. These conclusions provide ample opportunity to expand this research and continue to provide additional discovery in the area of crisis communication and image repair.

Limitations

Although significant effort has been taken to assure the academic relevance and applicability of this study, all research faces potential limitations. The first and most evident limitation to this study is that this content analysis is one snapshot of time and only provides insight into that time period. Furthermore, because a content analysis relies on a coder's own speculation and judgment about the data, this presents challenges with regard to context and evaluation (Krippendorff, 2012). While the

structure of this research allows it to be replicated, no speculation regarding the relevance of this data can be applied to other organizations.

The choice of Penn State as the subject for this study provides a second limitation. While interesting and a relevant organizational crisis in recent history, Penn State's behavior during this crisis only truly describes their own unique public relations behavior during that time. Due to changes in administration, the emergence of social media as a more significant media choice, and other organizational changes, replication of this study, even with the same subject, would be difficult.

The content selected in this study posed the third challenge. Penn State often posted similar content repeatedly; therefore, there is the potential for data in certain categories to be inflated. An additional limitation to any study of this type is data integrity. Social media has the ability to be altered and deleted. For this reason, unless constant monitoring is available, data integrity may be compromised.

No qualitative data from Penn State University officials was provided into this study. Archival in nature, this content analysis explored only what existed at the time of data capture and no additional analyses as to "why" Penn State communicated the way that they did was explored. The qualitative responses from those creating the content could add justification and clarity to the data.

Yet another limitation of this study is that the research only included initial social media posts. No examination was conducted on responses to comments or direct messages where image repair messages may have been more appropriate. Furthermore, this study only included posts from the Office of Strategic Communications at Penn State. Multiple departments, alumni groups, and affiliated parties were also

communicating messages at this time. For example, former head Coach Joe Paterno held a press conference during this time period, but it was not included in the press release archives or on social media and thus not included in the study.

A final limitation of this study is that comparative data exists for a more quantitative exploration into whether or not there was any change in message content due to the crisis itself. Archiving the time period before or after the crisis would provide additional insight into the actual crisis response and provide greater understanding, what, if any, change took placed during the incident.

Implications

The implications of this study are predominantly foundational in nature. Research has only very recently begun to examine the use of social media in crisis (Schultz, Utz, & Goritz, 2011). Existing scholarship has typically examined how organizations use social media versus how the same organization uses social media in crisis (Eyrich, Padman & Sweetser, 2008). Prior research has explored retroactively how organizations utilized image repair during their crisis communication messages (Harlow, Brantley & Harlow, 2012; Muralidharan, Dillstone& Shin, 2011), whereas this study investigated Penn State's response as the crisis unfolded in an effort to get a more accurate exploration of the subject. This study design is relevant because by looking at press release content and social media posts collectively, as the crisis unfolds, the findings become a more accurate portrayal of the organizational choices made during crisis. Evaluating press releases or social media singularly would not provide a cohesive crisis communication examination. Furthermore, study on stories

found in the media limit the scope due to the interpretation of the content by journalistic gatekeepers.

Also important, this study may provide foundational research to examine image repair theory under a lens of social media, perhaps giving researchers opportunity to expand the theoretical foundation to better include emerging communication trends. Social media as a crisis communication source has become a viable and resourceful tool in crisis communication management and should be considered in organizational policies and plans. Direct and instantaneous messaging to stakeholders has changed the communication landscape and has changed the way the public gets informed. Many communication theories, like Benoit's (1997) image repair theory, were based upon traditional communication and have not been updated based on new media capabilities.

Social media have not been thoroughly investigated by image repair researchers. Some have found that the usage of social media during crisis escalates new issues (Moody, 2011), and others have determined that social media may be less effective than traditional methods if the strategies are duplicated across multiple sources (Chewning, 2015).

This study may have implications for future image repair research. Although image repair theory is the cornerstone for image repair scholarship, it may be discovered to be too linear for social media exploration. The theory, in order to most accurately examine image repair usage in new media, must be adapted and expanded. This theory should be reexamined to provide expanded research opportunities and make use of the dialogue between organization and stakeholders that social media provides.

While this study by no means gauges the success or failure of Penn State's efforts during this crisis, this study could provide opportunity for institutions of higher education to examine their own crisis communication strategy and utilization of image repair messages within multiple media.

Suggestions for Future Research

This content analysis sought to provide insight into how Penn State University utilized image repair strategies within traditional methods and on social media. It examined image repair usage on Facebook and Twitter as well as within traditional sources like press releases.

Whereas this was one of the first studies to examine how image repair strategies were used in both social media and traditional sources, exploring an organization before, during, and after crisis could strengthen the study. While no one can predict when an organizational crisis will strike, collecting and analyzing data outside of the crisis timeline would give opportunity to examine any change in message strategy that might occur.

Image repair theory has potential for expansion and revision. Future scholarship should examine the foundational body of image repair research and explore opportunities to broaden the scope of the theory to more accurately represent emerging new media. Replicating previous studies while adding the social media component could provide valuable insight as to how image repair is being utilized in an organizational crisis.

Additional studies should also consider the examination of image repair effectiveness, especially in a social media setting. Because social media provide

opportunity for organizational dialogues with stakeholders, when an image repair strategy is used, it would be interesting to determine if the strategy was successful in protecting the existing reputation. Future research should examine social media engagement on image repair posts to more accurately understand the public's response to the message. This could be accomplished through examination of message tone or word choice, "likes" or "shares," calculating the number of comments on a particular message or actually surveying opt-in subscribers.

As new media continue to evolve, additional opportunities for scholarship will undoubtedly be created. When Benoit began investigating image repair discourse in the mid-80s, no one had considered the notion of a hashtag or thought of the multiple modalities for sharing messages that exist today. An expansive opportunity exists for image repair scholars to examine message content on multiple platforms beyond Facebook and Twitter. Insight into the use of photographs, short video clips, memes, and others yet to be conceptualized social media vehicles will provide ongoing opportunity for scholarship.

Lastly, Penn State University's seeming lack of use of image repair in general lends itself to an entirely new direction for image repair scholars. Future research should examine the concept of message distraction as an image repair strategy. Penn State touted its rich history and longstanding tradition of academic excellence and seemed to rely heavily on this content when faced with significant crisis. To date, a brief search between crisis and image repair scholarship provides no real exploration into message deflection as a strategy for reputation maintenance.

Conclusion

Previous research has shown that image repair strategies are used during crisis to defend reputation and protect the organization from negative consequences stemming from the crisis involvement. This content analysis attempted to examine how Pennsylvania State University utilized image repair strategies within traditional public relations tactics and via Facebook and Twitter, in the wake of the Jerry Sandusky scandal in 2011,. Specifically, it sought to investigate message content collected during the outbreak of this organizational crisis and examines the image repair strategies selected by the University to communicate with its stakeholders.

Social media, with their ability to provide real-time updates without a gatekeeper, would seem to be the catalyst for a paradigm shift in the area of image repair and crisis communication. Public relations has responded by adding two-way dialogue to their communication toolbox when communicating with stakeholders (Kent & Taylor, 2002). This shift toward increasing dialogue is a direct response to the increasing popularity and use of social media. Now organizations, opt-in subscribers, and the community at large can be actively involved with each other, as the ability to communicate important messages is now direct and synchronous. The result is multiple messages, with potentially multiples of authors and responders being actively involved in organizational discussion.

Understanding that social media are changing the way organizations communicate during crisis, this study was designed to examine how Penn State used image repair strategy within multiple sources. Existing research has shown that choice of media has the ability to “alter social interactions” (Meyrowitz, 1997). Today, social

media are even altering the relationship between themself and its stakeholders by bypassing the traditional media and potentially communicating directly with opt-in subscribers. Social media allows an organization to tell its version of a particular story without modification by gatekeepers. Furthermore, when an organization is in crisis, communication should be transparent, frequent and two-way. Sellnow and Seeger (2013) indicate that crisis communication messages can be used to create a unified, shared meaning and provide opportunity to understanding and action even within the uncertainty of a crisis.

This study revealed that Penn State University only moderately embraced image repair strategies during the Jerry Sandusky crisis. They relied heavily on more traditional methodologies to communicate these strategies versus the more dialogue-centric social media platforms. While the results of this study show only a lackluster support by Penn State to utilize image repair independent of source, it showcases the need for additional scholarship to be executed on image repair in crisis in other capacities. Perhaps most importantly, it is the hope of this scholar that this study serves as the beginning of a conversation regarding the modification of image repair theory to accommodate emerging media. If this study allows even one piece of scholarship to be published that expands the use of social media and image repair in the crisis communication dialogue, then independent of Penn State's results, this study will have been successful.

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Appendix A

Modified Coding Instrument

Modified Coding Instrument Based Upon Sidhrth Muralidharan & Jae-Hwa Shin's instrument used in "The Gulf Coast Oil Spill: Extending the Theory of Image Restoration Discourse to the Realm of Social Media and Beyond Petroleum. "Fuel & Energy Abstracts. September 2011.

CODEBOOK

Definitions: Image restoration strategies: In order to decide which dominant image restoration strategy was used by Penn State, the strategies put forth by Benoit (1995) will be implemented. Below, the strategies with hypothetical scenarios related to Penn State are provided.

1. ***Denial***

   - *Simple denial:* PSU denies that they are the involved with the cover up of information regarding Sandusky.

   - *Shifting the blame:* PSU shifts blame of the incident entirely on Sandusky.

2. ***Evasion of responsibility***

   - *Provocation:* PSU does not deny mishandling information but rather claims a lack of responsibility because the incidents should be managed by Sandusky's charity organization.

   - *Defeasibility:* PSU had lack of information about or control over important elements of the situation.

   - *Accident:* PSU claims that the mishandling of information was an accident.

- *Good intentions:* PSU can say that they overlooked issues in order to protect the image of Joe Paterno and the football team.

3. ***Reducing offensiveness of the event***

   - *Bolstering:* PSU counteracts the negative feelings the public has by focusing on their swift and competent action the termination of key employees.

   - *Minimization:* PSUs incident only impacted a small number of individuals in reality.

   - *Differentiation:* In the beginning PSU can compare incident to other sex abuse cases and claim theirs is much less offensive.

   - *Transcendence:* PSU claims that the mishandling of information happened during the process of more noble tasks.

   - *Attack accuser:* PSU attacks their accusers

   - *Compensation:* PSU provides money and services to those impacted by the incident.

4. ***Corrective action:***

PSU updates the public on how they are trying to address the problem; PSU enforces strict protocols in order to prevent future occurrences.

5. ***Mortification:*** PSU apologizes for the incident and asks forgiveness.