Sports, Culture, and Financial Crisis: A cross-cultural comparison of the social media responses of struggling sports associations in the United States and the United Kingdom

Audra Diers-Lawson, Ph.D.
School of Public Relations & Journalism
Leeds Beckett University, United Kingdom
audra.lawson@leedsbeckett.ac.uk

Stephen M. Croucher, Ph.D.
University of Jyväskylä, Finland
stephen.m.croucher@jyu.fi

Author Details

Audra Diers-Lawson is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Public Relations and Journalism at Leeds Beckett University. Stephen M. Croucher is a Professor of Intercultural Communication and the University of Jyväskylä.

Abstract

The present study provides a case comparison of crisis response strategies employed by sports organizations in the United States and the United Kingdom. In both crisis response and the broader body of corporate communications, cross-cultural comparisons of communication strategies are uncommon. Our findings have four significant implications: (1) they identify a statistically significant basis for the argument that communication strategy must be considered within a national culture context; (2) establish a comparative analysis of American and British approaches to economic crisis response; (3) provide a means to evaluate and identify other culturally-bound approaches to communications strategy; and (4) demonstrate the benefits of examining culture and crises using sports organizations.

Practice in corporate communications – especially public relations – has been changed because of social media's emergence, its centrality to strategy, and the corresponding power of social media users to engage with organizations (Diers, 2012; Freberg, 2012; Smith, 2010; Waters, Tindall, & Morton, 2010; Winchell, 2010). However, researchers and practitioners must better understand the changing global media landscape because it affects a modern understanding of communication. Interactions between organizations and their stakeholders in social media are redefining approaches to public relations (Winchell, 2010). Across contexts (see, e.g., Hartmann, 2012; Hayden, 2011; Hyun, 2012; Luck & Buchanan, 2008; Metzgar & Maruggi, 2009; Murphy & White, 2007; Rollason, 2011; Rowe & Gilmour, 2009; Weber, Erickson, & Stone, 2011; Wilson, 2011), the findings are all very clear – examining crisis response within the social media landscape is essential if we are to build, test, and apply theory in crisis communication.

This is particularly true in today's uncertain economic environments. However, critics of public relations practice and research argue scholars have too long ignored the influence of economics on organizational communication despite the reality that economic problems are often more characteristic of communication problems rather than technical problems (Jameson, 2009). While the global financial crisis has renewed some interest in the influence of economics on public relations, Lawniczak (2009) argues the economic context is often ignored.

In addition, despite arguments and analysis indicating that, in an increasingly global world, conflicts and crises within a nation can have transnational implications, very little crisis response research has addressed the role national culture might have on the crisis response messages created and disseminated (Molleda, Connolly-Ahern, & Quinn, 2005; Moore, 2004). This need to develop cultural knowledge in crisis response is only amplified by the use of the Internet (Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009).

Taking these factors together, one of the most logical contexts to analyze modern crisis response is in the sports industry because it is one of the world's largest industries, with revenues of more than $100 billion dollars worldwide (Anonymous, 2005; Espinoza, 2010) and because it is inextricably linked with culture, cultural domination, and cultural diffusion (Hartmann, 2012; Murphy & White, 2007; O'Callaghan, 2011; Rollason, 2011; Rossol, 2010; Rowe & Gilmour, 2009). Unfortunately, sport also remains one of the least studied organizational contexts in communication. For example, as Helland (2007) also points out, analyses of sport and media are often neglected. However, the Internet and social media have both introduced more powerful means by which sports organizations can communicate with their fans and have also changed the ways many fans can consume sports (Crolley, 2008). For these reasons, the present study concentrates on social media response to crises as we also explore the concepts of cross-cultural crisis response in one of the world's dominant industries – the sports industry.

Literature Review

Researchers and practitioners must better understand the changing global media landscape because it affects a modern understanding of crisis response. Interactions between organizations and their stakeholders in social media are redefining approaches to public relations (Winchell, 2010).

Crisis Communication

Though crisis communication scholarship has addressed crisis type as an important variable for consideration (Coombs & Holladay, 1996, 2004), research analyzing organizational events – a category that includes economic downturns – show mixed findings regarding the types of responses that organizations are likely to employ. For example, some research suggests organizations facing these situations would likely use strategies that explained or worked to get ahead of the crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). Other research focusing more directly on economic downturns (Diers & Tomaino, 2010), found organizations focused on present-oriented strategies that essentially focused on a 'business as usual' approach to responding to managing crises resulting from economic downturns. Still other research emphasizes the importance of communicating competency, honesty, concern for employees, and the organization's stability (Anonymous, 2008; Quirke, 2009) but there remains little research evaluating how organizations managing economic crises respond.

While a perfect list of strategies may not exist (Coombs, 2007), Coombs and Holladay (1996) offer the most comprehensive set of predictions about an organisation's strategic choices in responding to crises. For example, the authors argue that in events where the onus of responsibility is ambiguous – such as with many organisational events – organisations should frame the crisis and its severity emphasising the denial of responsibility. However, depending on theoretical perspective, analyses of crisis response strategies range from considering a handful (Benoit, 1997, 2004; Coombs, 2006) of tactics to including more than 40 distinctive response tactics (Diers, 2009; Mohamed, Gardner, & Paolillo, 1999). However, in the social media context where organizations are directly engaging public stakeholders, less is known about the effectiveness of crisis response (Coombs, 2012; Freberg, 2012). Thus, for the most open assessment of crisis response considering 40 individual tactics categorized into eight broad tactic groupings (see Diers & Tomaino, 2010) including the following: self-enhancement; routine communication; responses that frame the crisis; responses that frame the organization; responses that are defensive or anti-social; responses that are accommodative; excellence or renewal responses; and responses focusing on organizational relationships (see Appendix A). These tactic groupings offer academics and practitioners a complete set of tactics on which to base analyses, identify strategies, and compare the emergence of those strategies across crises, industries, and time. By beginning with a more inclusive list of tactics and categories, we argue we can more effectively build theory with regard to financial crises. Therefore, we pose the following research question:

RQ1: How do organizations facing financial crises respond via social media to those crises?

Appendix A
Taxonomy of Crisis Response Tactics Potentially Used By Organizations

Strategy Category	Strategy	Strategy Description
Self-Enhancement	Marketing	Emphasizing product quality, prices, safety, promotions
	Image Advertising	Providing information to make the organization look positive. Framing an issue for the stakeholders
Routine Communication	Communication of Mission/ Vision	Communication emphasizing organizational goals/ mentioning mission/ vision
	Annual Reports	Report monetary assets, liabilities, future liabilities, interest in cooperation to increase market value
	Newsletters	Report monetary gains, attention to stakeholder concerns
Framing the Crisis	Accounts	Development of dominant narrative, use of narrative to explain the problem
	Information Dissemination	Delivering information regarding the issue to educate, often with the goal of increasing stakeholder sense of empowerment
	Issue Salience	Communicating importance, often uses risk or fright factors and/or scientific discourse
	Preconditioning	Influencing stakeholders to the organization's position on a crisis and their opinions about the organization by: downplaying damage, putting act in a more favorable context, or attacking accusers
Framing the Organization	Ingratiation	Efforts to create positive image by reminding stakeholders of past good works or qualities
	Organizational Promotion	Presenting the organization as being highly competent, effective, successful
	Issue Management	Issue diagnosis, advocacy advertising
	Supplication	Portraying the organization as dependent on others in effort to solicit assistance
	Organizational Handicapping	Making task success appear unlikely in order to have ready-made case for failure
	Bolstering	An effort to separate the organization from the crisis by emphasizing past accomplishments, stress good traits
Anti-social or Defensive	Noncompliance	The organization cannot/ does not choose to act
	Disclaimers	Explanations given prior to an action that might be embarrassing to ward off negative implications to image
	Defensive Compliance	Indicating that actions are driven by compliance or requirements
	Evasion of Responsibility	De-emphasizing role in blame by: emphasizing lack of control over events; emphasizing accident; or emphasizing good intentions
	Shifting the Blame	The most defensive strategy—shifting or minimizing responsibility for fault
	Simple Denial	The organization did not perform the act
	Strategic Ambiguity	Not releasing many details, able to keep stories consistent
	Intimidation	Representing the organization as powerful or dangerous, willing and able to adversely affect those who oppose its efforts
	Minimization	Emphasizing act or event not serious
	Transcendence	Emphasizing more important considerations
Accommodative	Corrective Action/ Compensation	Effort to 'correct' actions adversely affecting others. Can include announcements of recall or offers of compensation
	Apologia	Communication of contrition, admission of blame including remorse and requests for pardon, mortification
	Compassion	Communication of concern over well-being/ safety of public; helping people psychologically cope with crisis
	Offering Reassurances	'This will never happen again...' Assertions that problems are corrected
	Eliciting Sympathy	Asking stakeholders to feel sorry for the organization because of what happened
	Transparency	Emphasizing complete compliance, openness to inquiry, requesting information seeking
	Volunteering	Seeking stakeholder involvement with the organization as a means of resolving the crisis
Excellence/ Renewal	Dialogic	Emphasizing openness and willingness to engage about the issue
	Exemplification	Portraying the organization as having integrity, social responsibility, moral worthiness
	Pro-social Behavior	Engaging in actions to atone for transgression, persuade stakeholders of positive identity
Interorganizational Relationships	Blaring Others	Identifying negative link to undesirable other

Blasting	Exaggerating negative features of an undesirable other
Burying	Obscuring or disclaiming a positive link to an undesirable other
Blurring	Obscuring or disclaiming a negative link to a favorable other
Belittling	Minimizing traits or accomplishments of a negatively linked other, attacking accuser's credibility
Boosting	Minimizing undesirable features of a positively linked other
Boasting	Proclaiming a positive link to a desirable other
Burnishing	Enhancing desirable features of a positively linked other
Collaboration	Emphasizing desire to change and work with another organization to resolve the crisis

National Culture

In recent years, there has been an increased recognition that national identity matters in crisis response (see, e.g., Chen, 2009; Molleda et al., 2005; Rovisco, 2010). This suggests we must look beyond case analyses in individual nations to better understand crisis response in a global communication environment because culture and crisis communication are likely linked at all levels from the decisions about what to communicate to the content of the messages communicated (Marra, 1998). In one of very few cross-cultural comparisons of crisis response, Haruta and Hallahan (2003), found meaningful differences in the use of apology, media strategies, and litigation concerns between the two countries. This suggests we should expect differences; however, because of the dearth of comparisons, we still do not have a sufficient understanding of the finer influence of culture on crisis response.

Certainly, we should expect differences in crisis response when cultures are vastly different; however, a better evaluation of the influence of culture would be to compare similar cultures – like those of the United States (US) and United Kingdom (UK) – because it may effectively demonstrate the relative strength or weakness that culture has on crisis response. In one of few direct comparisons of these cultures' influences on communication style, Croucher et al. (2010) found national identity was a significant predictor of argumentativeness citing differences between the US and the UK, despite focusing on differences based on religion.

Because research has found differences in crisis response exist and because there are demonstrated differences between American and British communication styles, we posit the following hypothesis:

H1: There are differences between American and British crisis response strategies in social media.

However, because there are few indications as to what those differences might be, we propose the following research question:

RQ2: How do organizations representing different national cultures respond to financial crises in social media?

Sporting Organizations and National Culture

One issue that makes it challenging to identify the 'national' character of crisis response is the industry to which an organization belongs. Industry has long been posited as a factor that would likely influence an organization's reaction to crises (Arpan, 2002; de Brooks & Waymer, 2009; Glynn, 2000; Millar, 2004). As such, identifying a 'national' identity in crisis response seems challenging. However, Rowe and Gilmour (2009) argue that in Western cultures, professional sport is an important form of popular culture "shaped by

constantly mutating interactions between the media and sport industries and established and evolving fan cohorts on which they depend" (p. 172).

Today sport is widely regarded as a "cultural subsystem of modern society…" (Hopwood, 2005, p. 175). As such, there are important communicative implications since to keep fans loyal, sports clubs must engage in relationship-building and maintaining activities (Hopwood, 2005). Hopwood argues managing two-way symmetric communication, like social media engagement provides, is essential for both dominant and secondary sports because it builds fan engagement. Luck and Buchanan (2008) found that open communication is vital to the success of sporting organizations, particularly in the face of economic downturns, because it meets their expectations for information and organizational engagement. In this way, the sports industry serves two masters – the corporate interests running them and the community that supports them (Boyd & Stahey, 2008). Thus, while sports teams may represent sites for practicing ritualized local identity, we do not have a clear understanding regarding the degree to which sports organizations use broader cultural memes to communicate with their stakeholders. Therefore, we pose the following research question:

RQ3: Do social media-based crisis responses from sports organizations reflect elements of 'national identity'?

Methods

Beginning in January, 2010 a research team of 14 identified organizational crises viable for this study based on the following criteria: (a) each crisis had to be judged as substantial enough to receive news coverage and organizational attention for the following eight weeks of data collection; (b) each had to be relevant at the time of data collection so that new media information would be readily available; and (c) at least two organizations from the same industry but different nations had to be identified. The team's goal was to identify an exhaustive group of unique statements from official organizational representatives across new and traditional media sources. The result was 10 crises in five different industries from the US and the UK with 419 unique messages to analyze. Included in the analysis were: misdeeds with injuries including accusations against The Who's Peter Townshend for child pornography ($n = 20$) emerging before their 2010 Super Bowl performance; economic downturns including the study's focus – professional sports teams' financial struggles with Portsmouth Football Club's (FC) debt crisis ($n = 63$) and the Women's National Basketball Association's (WNBA) financial struggles ($n = 150$), Morris Publishing's financial struggles ($n = 37$), and the automobile manufacturing industry's financial struggles with General Motors ($n = 42$); finally, the team also identified events outside of the organization's control including the devastating Haiti earthquake focusing on the American and British Red Cross's responses to the crisis ($n = 107$). For our two struggling sports teams, we exclusively evaluated social media engagement in order to focus on direct efforts at fan engagement about the organizations' financial crises.

Coding Scheme

Single messages (i.e., press release, Twitter post, unique Facebook post, etc.) were coded because previous studies of crisis response messages (Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997; Elsbach, 1994; Greer & Moreland, 2003; Henderson, 2003; Kauffman, 2001) emphasize that when studying crisis communication, examining the interplay of tactics employed affords researchers more information about an organization's strategy (see Appendix A).

Seven team members coded the entirety of one organization's crisis response messages. Following procedures to establish intercoder reliability used by Molleda, et al. (2005), 10 percent of the sample was randomly selected and independently coded by another member of the research team. An overall intercoder reliability analysis was conducted finding the coding scheme to be reliable ($\alpha = .87$) with individual analyses also reliable (The Who $\alpha = .83$; Portsmouth $\alpha = .91$; WNBA $\alpha = .87$; Morris Publishing $\alpha = .85$; General Motors $\alpha = .89$; British Red Cross $\alpha = .84$; and American Red Cross $\alpha = .88$). The coding scheme is based on manifest content, for each variable (see Diers & Tomaino, 2010). Evidence of the presence of each crisis response tactic was coded as binary data with its presence or not noted.

Results

These data suggest there are significant differences between American and British sports responses to financial crises. However, more importantly, these data suggest a strong cultural effect for crisis response.

Social Media Response to Financial Crises by Sports Teams

RQ's 1 and *2* focused on the structure of crisis response by the sports teams in social media. The five dominant tactics used by the WNBA were self-enhancement, routine communication, excellence/ renewal, image-oriented, and defensive information (see Tables 1 and 2). Emergent image-oriented strategy (self-enhancement and framing the organization) ($n = 34$) 16% of the time when WNBA was communicating. Self-enhancement alone was used 33% of the time. Defensive information management (routine communication, frame the organization, and defensive) was used three times (1% of the time) – all three times that the anti-social/defensive strategy was used. Routine communication was used a remaining 16% of the time. Excellence or renewal was used 9% of the time. These were often used in combination. Taken together, the dominant strategies were used 75% of the time by the WNBA. The remaining 25% represents a combination of messages not appearing enough to be significantly correlated or being used more often than expected. As such, these represent the dominant talking points.

Table 1

Correlations Between Social Media Tactics Used in the U.S. by the WNBA

Variables Correlated[1]	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Self-Enhancement	-							
2. Routine Communication	-.42**	-						
3. Frame the Crisis	N/A	N/A	-					
4. Frame the Organization	.21**	.19**	N/A	-				
5. Defensive/ Anti-Social	-.08	.18*	N/A	.25**	-			
6. Accommodative	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	-		
7. Excellence/ Renewal	-.16*	-.15*	N/A	-.01	-.06	N/A	-	
8. Emphasizing Interorganizational Relationships	-.10	-.17*	N/A	-.08	-.05	N/A	-.09	-

[1]N = 213, N/A indicates there were no cases of the tactic being used by the WNBA
* = $p< .05$, ** = $p< .01$ (two-tailed)

Table 2

Frequency of Social Media Tactics & Strategies Used in the U.S. by the WNBA

Tactic	Observed N	Expected N	X^2 Value	Single-Tactic Strategy	Multiple-Tactic Strategy
Self-Enhancement	136	106.5	71.60**	70	66
Routine Communication	67	54	18.30**	35	32
Frame the Crisis	0	43.2	237.53**	N/A	N/A
Frame the Organization)	40	47.1	5.98*	3	37
Defensive/ Anti-Social	3	12.3	32.74**	0	3
Accommodative	0	15.4	72.90**	N/A	N/A
Excellence/ Renewal	45	38.6	5.70**	19	26
Emphasizing IOR's	27	37	14.44**	9	18
Image-Oriented	34	24.6	16.92***	-	-
Defensive Information Management	3	2.4	.81	-	-

N = 213, N/A indicates there were no cases of the tactic being used by the WNBA, df for all = 1
* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

The Portsmouth strategy was a nuanced approach to responding to the crisis with both dominant strategies as well as different themes communicated (see Tables 3 and 4). There are four dominant response strategies. Framing the crisis was used on its own 25% of the time. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) was used 6% of the time. An explanative strategy (framing the crisis and framing the organization) was used 33% of the time. Finally, an effort to situate the organization (IOR's, framing the organization) was used 17% of the time. Taken together, this represents 71% of the messages from Portsmouth. However, there were additional themes emerging across all of Portsmith's messaging. For example, appeals to interorganizational relationships were typically used in combination with other tactics/strategies 16% of the time; however, the specific strategies and tactics were not predictable. Even more importantly, accommodation – an effort to demonstrate goodwill and corporate social responsibility was used in 25% of Portsmouth's messaging, but did not significantly correlate with any particular tactic or strategy aside from the CSR strategy itself. Finally, the most dominant response theme was the team's effort to frame the crisis – used significantly within the explanative strategy and on its own; however, also used in an additional 30% of the time, an effort to control the public's understanding of the situation was the single dominant message communicated by Portsmouth.

Table 3

Correlations Between Social Media Tactics Used in the U.K. by Portsmouth FC

Variables Correlated[1]	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Self-Enhancement	-							
2. Routine Communication	-.04	-						
3. Frame the Crisis	.06	.08	-					
4. Frame the Organization	-.13	.00	.25*	-				
5. Defensive/ Anti-Social	-.09	.07	-.19	.14	-			
6. Accommodative	-.12	.17	-.19	-.05	-.18	-		
7. Excellence/ Renewal	-.05	-.06	-.27*	-.21	-.15	.30*	-	
8. Emphasizing Interorganizational Relationships	.06	.16	.04	.29*	.06	.17	.04	-

[1]N = 63, N/A indicates there were no cases of the tactic being used by Portsmouth FC
* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$ (two-tailed)

Table 4

Frequency of Social Media Tactics Used in the U.K. by Portsmouth

Tactic	Observed N	Expected N	X^2 Value	Single-Tactic Strategy	Multiple-Tactic Strategy
Self-Enhancement (M = 1.03)	2	31.5	71.60**	0	2
Routine Communication (M = 1.05)	3	16	18.30**	0	3
Frame the Crisis (M = 1.89)	56	12.8	237.53**	16	40
Frame the Organization (M = 1.33)	21	13.9	5.98*	0	21
Defensive/ Anti-Social (M = 1.21)	13	3.7	32.74**	2	11
Accommodative (M = 1.32)	20	4.6	72.90**	1	19
Excellence/ Renewal (M = 1.08)	5	11.4	5.70**	0	5
Emphasizing IOR's (M = 1.33)	21	11.0	14.44**	1	20
Corporate Social Responsibility (M = 1.09)	4	.9	14.89**	-	-
Explanative (M = 1.75)	21	2.9	144.89**	-	-
Situating the Organization (M = 1.26)	11	3.1	28.03**	-	-

N = 63
* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

RQ2 asked about the structure of response between the US and UK sports teams. By focusing on the dominant strategies, we identified the central talking points the teams communicated based on a combination of significant correlations combined with a Chi-square analysis of the occurrences of strategies combined. These data reveal (see Table 5) the WNBA focused almost exclusively on an image-based approach to talking about the organization – essentially ignoring the financial struggles and facing on self-promotion. In fact, even in their routine communication strategy, image advertising, organizational promotion, bolstering, and transcendence were all image-based talking points within the strategy that the organization used to talk about its day-to-day events. Further, the distinctive lack of defensive responses coupled with the overall promotional messaging seems to build the argument that the organization simply needs to be better promoted in order to solve its financial struggles.

Table 5

Construction of Talking Points in the WNBA's Social Media Response

Strategy	Message	Correlation	Observed	Expected	$\mathrm{X^2}$
Self-Enhancement	S.E. Marketing	.46***	61	39.6	45.20***
	S.E. Image Advertising	.59***	83	53.6	73.44***
	R.C. Newsletters	- .44***	17	37.0	41.19***
	F.O. Organizational Promotion	.24***	36	26.2	12.62***
	I.O.R. Burnishing	- .18**	2	5.7	7.06**
Routine Communication	S.E. Image Advertising	- .30***	12	26.4	18.96***
	R.C. Communication of Mission/Vision	.42***	16	5.0	37.70***
	R.C. Newsletters	.90***	58	18.2	173.68***
	F.O. Ingratiation	.21**	8	3.5	9.16**
	F. O. Organizational Promotion	.16*	19	12.9	5.22*
	F.O. Bolstering	.14*	2	.6	4.40*
	D Transcendence	.18**	3	.9	6.63**
	E.R. Dialogic	- .16*	2	6.8	5.43*
	I.O.R. Burnishing	- .14*	12	26.4	18.96***
Excellence & Renewal	S.E. Marketing	- .26***	3	13.1	13.92***
	R.C. Newsletters	- .19**	5	12.3	7.48**
	E.R. Dialogic	.62***	21	4.7	80.44***
	E.R. Exemplification	.67***	23	4.9	96.26***
Image-Oriented	S.E. Marketing	.60***	17	5.8	38.22***
	S.E. Image Advertising	.80***	26	8.7	67.81***
	R.C. Communication of Mission/Vision	.39***	11	4.5	15.74***
	F.O. Ingratiation	.44***	9	2.9	20.56***
	F.O. Organizational Promotion	1.00**	34	11	105.00***
	F.O. Bolstering	.20*	2	.6	4.26*

Notes.
* = *p*< .05, ** = *p*< .01, *** = *p*< .001

Conversely, the Portsmouth FC (see Table 6) response focused on directly addressing the crisis, addressing concerns, and addressing the club's relationships with other organizations. While there were elements of promotion within most of the major talking points, these were not overly emphasized. In fact, while we see an emphasis on moving on, making amends, explaining the situation, and defending the organization we do not see the overly promotional approach to dealing with the financial crisis.

Table 6

Construction of Talking Points in Portsmouth's Social Media Response

Strategy	Message	Correlation	Observed	Expected	X²
Framing the Crisis	F.C. Information Dissemination	1.00***	56	49.8	63.00***
	D Transcendence	- .36**	0	.9	8.13**
	E.R. Exemplification	- .51***	0	1.8	16.53***
Explanative	F.C. Information Dissemination	1.00***	21	15.8	28.00***
	F.O. Ingratiation	.58***	14	10.5	9.33**
	E.R. Exemplification	- .48**	0	1.5	6.46*
Situate the Organization	F.O. Ingratiation	.82***	8	2.0	28.59***
	F.O. Organizational Promotion	.38*	2	.5	6.10*
	F.O. Supplication	.38*	2	.5	6.10*
	D Shifting the Blame	.36*	3	1.0	5.66*
	I.O.R. Blaring	.45**	4	1.3	8.80**
	I.O.R. Collaboration	.55***	4	1.0	12.83***
Accommodative	F.C. Preconditioning	.33**	3	1.0	6.77**
	A Corrective Action	.52***	7	2.2	16.93***
	A Compassion	.33**	3	1.0	6.77**
	A Eliciting Sympathy	.64***	10	3.2	25.56***
	E.R. Exemplification	.27*	2	.6	4.44*
Interorganizational Relationships	F.O. Ingratiation	.27*	8	4.7	4.59*
	F.O. Supplication	.26*	2	.7	4.13*
	I.O.R. Blaring Others	.39***	6	2.3	9.72**
	I.O.R. Blasting	.37**	4	1.3	8.54**
	I.O.R. Boasting	.37**	4	1.3	8.54**
	I.O.R. Collaboration	.54***	8	2.7	18.33***

Notes.
* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$

Significant Differences between US and UK Financial Crisis Responses

These data indicate that on all major talking points used by the WNBA and Portsmouth FC (see Table 7), except defensive information management, there were significant differences between the social media strategies used by the two organizations. We see substantially different approaches to communicating with each organization's stakeholders – even opposite central driving messaging. Therefore, *H1* is confirmed.

Table 7

Comparisons (*t* Test) for Social Media Strategies Used by U.S. & U.K. Sports Teams

	US		UK		
Variable	**M**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**	***t***
Self-Enhancement	1.64	.48	1.03	.18	15.24***
Routine Communication	1.31	.47	1.05	.22	6.38***
Frame the Crisis	1.00	.00	1.89	.32	-22.27***
Accommodative	1.00	.00	1.32	.47	-5.37***
Excellence/ Renewal	1.21	.41	1.08	.27	2.98**
Interorganizational Relationships	1.13	.41	1.33	.48	-3.22**
Image-Oriented	1.32	.47	1.00	.00	7.06***
Defensive Information Management	1.02	.15	1.00	.00	1.75
Corporate Social Responsibility	1.00	.00	1.09	.28	-2.07*
Explanative	1.00	.00	1.75	.44	-9.00**
Situating the Organization	1.02	.14	1.26	.44	-3.46***

Notes. U.S. *n* = 213, U.K. *n* = 63. Equal variances not assumed
* = *p*< .05, ** = *p*< .01, *** = *p*< .001

Can We Build a National Character of Crisis Response Based on these Findings?

These data (see Table 8) suggest the findings comparing the US and the UK responses to financial crises to be characteristic of American versus British responses to crises in general. Once the data were controlled for industry, channel, and crisis type – all of which were significant – these data demonstrate American crisis response focuses much more strongly on self-enhancement, routine messaging, excellence and renewal, and image orientation. Whereas, British crisis response focuses much more strongly on framing the crisis, explaining the situation, situating the organization within a larger context, being accommodative, and invoking interorganizational relationships.

Table 8

Significant Between-Subjects Tests For The Influence of Nation on Crisis Response

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Est. Marginal Means	df	F	p	Partial η^2
Self-Enhancement	U.S.	1.55	1, 507	97.11	.00[1,2]	.16
	U.K.	1.08				
Routine Communication	U.S.	1.33	1, 507	12.62	.00[3]	.02
	U.K.	1.16				
Excellence & Renewal	U.S.	1.25	1, 507	15.48	.00[1,3]	.03
	U.K.	1.09				
Image-Oriented	U.S.	1.36	1, 288	66.25	.00[1,3]	.19
	U.K.	.95				
Framing the Crisis	U.S.	1.24	1, 507	37.60	.00[3]	.07
	U.K.	1.53				
Explanative	U.S.	1.18	1, 341	4.85	.03[1,3]	.01
	U.K.	1.29				
Situate the Organization	U.S.	1.01	1, 343	26.15	.00	.07
	U.K.	1.17				
Accommodative	U.S.	1.07	1, 507	36.87	.00[1,2,3]	.07
	U.K.	1.28				
Interorganizational Relationships	U.S.	1.08	1, 507	23.69	.00[1,2,3]	.05
	U.K.	1.24	1, 507			

Notes. [1]Industry significant, [2]Channel significant, [3]Crisis type significant

Discussion and Conclusions

Based on these data, there are two instrumental findings for researchers and practitioners. First, in the case of American and British sports organizations, we found significant differences in the nature of response. The WNBA focused on an image-oriented approach to crisis recovery whereas Portsmouth FC focused on an engagement-oriented approach to crisis recovery. Second, comparing these findings to organizations in different industries and facing different types of crises, these findings were indicative of "typical" American and British responses to organizational crises. These findings are significant because by comparing the responses of organizations in two countries that are very similar on Hofstede's (2001) dimensions of culture, but focusing on the communicative forms where culture is communicated – their language and narratives (Trice & Beyer, 1993) – we have identified important cultural norms in crisis response. Additionally, the findings identifying that the cultural norms in crisis response within sports are consistent with crisis response across industries, channels, and types of crises provide direct support for previous researchers' arguments (e.g., Rowe & Gilmour, 2009) that sports represents popular culture. These data support previous research suggesting that organizations must reach out using different media (Freberg, 2012); in particular, ensuring engagement in social media using a synchronized or coordinated response is likely to not only be a useful crisis response approach (Diers & Donohue, 2013), but a culturally grounded one as well.

British Excellence in Crisis Response

For British crisis response, it reveals cultural norms of tackling crises directly – working to help stakeholders understand the crisis, explaining the situation, placing the organization's actions within the context of the situation and other actors, and trying to accommodate criticisms to show that the organization is meaningfully working to address the problem. This is a well-grounded and strongly recommended approach to managing crises for three reasons. First, focusing on restoring the organization's legitimacy is a core component to crisis recovery (Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Boyd, 2000; Elsbach, Sutton, & Principe, 1998). Second, the messaging is stakeholder centered demonstrating a commitment to engagement and renewal (Alpaslan & Mitroff, 2009; Seeger & Ulmer, 2002; Sung-Un et al., 2010). Third, the content of the messaging reflects a 'genuine' effort towards image repair (Benoit, 1997; Elsbach, 1994; Taylor, Ungureanu, & Caldiero, 2006) and accepting responsibility as necessary (Carroll, 2009; Pace, Fediuk, & Botero, 2009), but not being afraid to defend themselves against what they view are inappropriate criticisms (Oles, 2010). These findings communicate a British crisis communication culture centered on openness, dialogue, and engagement.

America's Consumer Culture Personified in Crisis Response

The findings are not so complimentary in what they reveal about American public culture. They reveal message strategies focused on brand identity, idealizing the brand identity, and blanket self-promotion against the reality that the organization was financially struggling. While the WNBA did communicate an interest in dialogue in two of their talking points, the majority of the communication was unidirectional and relatively superficial. It could be summarized as promotionalism (Knight & Greenberg, 2002) without the essential component of social responsibility that made Nike successful in managing allegations of sweatshop labor abuses. Another way to think of the American crisis response approach is conspicuous consumption. Conspicuous consumption represents purchasing consumer products as a way of signaling income or social status (Giacomo & Olivier, 1997). McCracken (1986) explains consumption has important cultural implications – advertising, fashion, and consumption rituals transmit cultural values. Those cultural values become a part of consumption and can over time influence personal values as is evidenced by the strength of consumerism in North America. This process has not simply emerged overnight; we see it in the inadvertent socialization of American children where parents, educators, and business interests acculturates children into different consumer identities (Milner, 2006). As such, from an early age, Americans define themselves and their peers based on consumption. The challenge for American crisis communication is that conspicuous consumption may adequately reflect some underlying American values, but based on the last couple of decades of research, it represents poor crisis response, yet it seems to be a consistently employed approach to managing crises for American companies.

Certainly, this research raises several questions. For example, how do competing cultural values (e.g., consumerism and social responsibility) compare in terms of crisis response effectiveness? While cultures may hold some popular cultural values, during crisis situations these may not be the most effective memes to communicate. Therefore, future research needs to directly examine stakeholder reactions to different models of crisis response. For example, it may well be that the British approach to crisis response is also culturally more appropriate for an American audience compared to the image focused and fairly superficial approach evidenced in this research.

Though there are questions that must still be answered, this research remains an important next step in understanding crisis communication, viable contexts of study, and the role of culture in crisis response. Future research should develop cultural typologies for crisis response among Western nations and identify if these methods are appropriate for non-Western societies as well. These data indicate that as organizations try to manage crises in an increasingly virtual and shrinking world, they cannot underestimate the power and influence of culture. These data also suggest it is a mistake to only compare vastly different cultures – we must focus our analyses on both very similar and very different cultures in order to better understand the influence of culture on crisis response.

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