

# Crisis Management and Sports in the Age of Social Media: A Case Study Analysis of the Tiger Woods Scandal

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## Abstract

*Tiger Woods saw his reputation crumble as reports of infidelity leaked to the press in November of 2009. This research evaluated the crisis management strategies of Woods and his crisis management staff, as well as social media's role and reaction to the scandal. The eight press statements issued by Woods between November 29, 2009, and August 23, 2010, served as the primary documents for this case study analysis. Results found that mortification was the most frequently used crisis management strategy. Despite the criticism Woods received for his handling of the crisis, social media research indicates that his team's approach has been effective in shifting online conversations away from the scandal and back to Woods and golf.*

## I. Introduction

The term crisis has a wide variety of definitions and interpretations. Typically, it is understood to be an extraordinary disruption of standard operations that threatens the safety, reputation and success of an organization or individual. In some instances of crises, there is an opportunity for a company or person to subdue a situation before it causes serious damage. However, too often the problem spirals out of control before it can be contained. The way in which the problem is prepared for or handled, also known as crisis management, can determine how devastating the event is to the bottom line of an organization. Though crises occur in every industry, none receive a more disproportionate share of media attention than in sports (Henry, 2008). Sports organizations and the lives of highly paid athletes are of great interest to the American people. Given the spotlight on athletics, it has become necessary for teams and players to employ crisis management staff who specialize in keeping their names out of the negative press. The growth of the Internet and social media makes the jobs of these crisis management teams more difficult than ever before. Stories, from both internal and external sources, can spread in a matter of minutes through sites like Facebook and Twitter and have the ability to impact public opinion.

The present study focused on crisis management strategies and their application to the 2009 Tiger Woods scandal. A case study analysis was conducted of Woods' official press statements following the scandal to evaluate what strategies and tactics his crisis management team used and how successful they were in restoring Woods' image. This review relied upon prior research of crisis management and image restoration techniques (Burnett, 2002; Caywood & Stocker, 1997; Coombs, 2007; Curtin, Hayman & Husein, 2005; Fink, 1986; Gottschalk, 2002; Larsen & Massey, 2006; Mitroff, 2000) as well as the development of social media (Cross, 2011) and its impact on sports scandals (Brown, Dickhaus & Long 2012; Davie, King & Leonard, 2010; Henry, 2008; Len Rios, 2010; Phua, 2012; Reed, 2011; Teitelbaum, 2010).

\* **Keywords:** crisis management, Tiger Woods, scandal, social media, image restoration  
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## **II. Literature Review**

### ***Definition of Crisis and Crisis Management***

According to Steven Fink, crisis is defined as “an unstable time or state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending—either one with the distinct possibility of a highly undesirable outcome or one with the distinct possibility of a highly desirable and extremely positive outcome” (1986, p.15). Some experts on the subject have placed emphasis on the idea that crises create as much opportunity for organizational perseverance and growth as it does for failure (Burnett, 2002; Fink, 1986). There are three basic categories with which all crises are classified: crises that befall an organization or individual, those that are manufactured, and those that escalate from an accident (Curtin, Hayman & Husein, 2005). For an incident to qualify as a full-blown crisis, the situation must be “escalating in intensity, falling under close government or media scrutiny, interfering with normal business operations, jeopardizing public image and damaging a company’s bottom line in anyway” (Fink 1986, p.15). Crises can range from industrial accidents to sex scandals to company lawsuits and have the potential to threaten public safety, as well as reputation and financial loss (Coombs, 2007; Larsen & Massey, 2006). According to Caywood and Stocker, a crisis and how it’s managed can be the “life-or-death difference for a product, career or company” (1997, p. 189). The purpose of crisis management is to prevent or minimize the damage of an organizational crisis at all costs. Effective crisis management involves a combination of pre-crisis preparation and post-crisis action. In the past, prior to the world of instant communication, handling these situations could be deliberate and well thought out. Organizations had time to draft responses and arrange for legal consultation before dealing with media. That has obviously changed with the rapid development of the online community and the demand for immediate answers. Given the many interpretations of crisis and the ever-evolving forms of communication, it is difficult for experts to agree on a universally applicable crisis management approach (Larsen and Massey, 2006). There are, however, some generally accepted components to it.

### ***Stages of Crises***

All crises have a lifespan. There are patterns of when they begin, worsen, plateau and return to normalcy. Experts on crisis management have debated how exactly to classify these different stages of a crisis. Fink (1986) established a generally accepted four-stage model that can be applied to all situations. The prodromal crisis stage is the initial stage of any crisis, where warning signs may be apparent. The creation of a crisis management plan (CMP), discussed later in the review, can help an organization identify the warning signs of a crisis in this early stage. If a crisis is flagged at this stage, the organization can recover more easily than otherwise. Next is the acute crisis stage. Once an event has reached this stage, damage has been done. The amount of damage depends on how swiftly and appropriately a crisis management team can react. An organization’s goal in this stage is to control details like how or when the story is released (more easily done with a CMP). Third is the chronic crisis stage, which is all about regrouping and recovering after the crisis. Depending on the success of the crisis management team, this stage, the longest of the four, can be met with celebrations or total staff overhaul. Lastly, the crisis resolution stage signals the successful recovery of an organization or individual. Business operations return to normal. However, employees need to be aware that crises are cyclical and have a tendency to reappear in the future.

### ***Crisis Management Plans***

As previously mentioned, a critical element to successfully navigating any crisis is the development of a well-organized crisis management plan (CMP) (Caywood & Stocker, 1997; Coombs, 2007; Fink, 1986; Henry, 2008). A CMP functions as a short guideline or contingency plan, should any crisis arise. Caywood and Stocker (1997) described a CMP as a step-based plan that prepares for the dynamic changes of a crisis. It includes decisions like who to contact, what resources will be needed, and how and when to handle the media. Businesses of all sizes, regardless of industry, need to have a CMP established and updated annually. John Burnett stated that “50 to 70 percent of the largest profit-making organizations, surprisingly, do not have a written disaster plan” (2002, p. 7). It is often companies that do not have CMPs in place that suffer the most following a substantial crisis. Organizations should prepare by looking at past crises related to their industry and identifying trends, and determine what the warning signs were and the techniques that were previously effective (Mitroff, 2000). According to Ian Mitroff, companies should produce CMPs for at least one crisis in

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each of the following categories: informational, economic, physical, human resources, reputational, psychopathic acts and natural disasters.

But before establishing a CMP, there must be a crisis management team (CMT) in place. This is a group of employees, ideally from various departments, that will be responsible for developing the CMP and implementing it (Curtin, Hayman & Husein 2005; Fink, 1986).

Fink found it is not uncommon for companies to either outsource their crisis management, or to bring in consultants that simulate crisis scenarios and evaluate the performance of the CMT. Studies have shown that very few companies, even those with CMPs, have actually practiced their plan and made adjustments according to its success (Larsen & Massey, 2006). While the CMP should be thorough, it is important for staff to not get distracted in its specific details. The plan is designed to be broad, but should help companies avoid making major decisions in the “heat of the moment.” The growth of instant communication requires organizations to respond with speed; avoiding the media for too long can be viewed as deceptive. It is common that when decisions or speech are rushed, responses can be inadequate and therefore, detrimental to the resolution of the crisis.

### ***Social Media’s Impact on Crisis Management***

Crisis management has always been a difficult task. However, it is safe to conclude that the development of social media amplifies the challenges facing crisis management teams today. In Mary Cross’s book, *“Bloggerati, Twitterati: How Blogs and Twitter are Transforming Popular Culture”* (2011), she discussed the birth of social media and the impact it has had on communication. Twitter, a social media site created by Jack Dorsey in 2006, allows users to post 140 character updates on any topic they choose. As of March 2011, Twitter had over 300 million users with about 140 million tweets posted daily. That comes out to almost a billion tweets a week. The site allows for the rapid dissemination of information and has become a resource for bloggers, analysts and journalists alike. Facebook, another popular social networking site, was launched by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004. It allows users to create profile pages, where they add photos and share links and comments on various topics with friends. According to Sada Reed’s article in the *Journal of Sports Media* (2011), Facebook had more than 500 million users as of May 2011.

The development of social media and its high levels of user participation, though beneficial to mass communication, creates two dilemmas for organizations or individuals dealing with a crisis. First, messages and stories can spread instantaneously. The primary concern is no longer what the *New York Times* will write about you in the newspaper tomorrow—but what will be written 15 seconds from now online. The speed of online communication makes it more challenging for the crisis management team to get out in front of a story (Gottschalk, 2002). It allows for the prolonged discussion of any scandal. The other problem these sites pose for organizations is that internal members can post information that reflects poorly on the company, creating or augmenting a crisis entirely on its own. Given that sports fans reportedly spend 13 hours online each week searching for information on their favorite teams and players, it is almost guaranteed that anything published on these sites will be seen and spread fast (Phua, 2012). It is after a crisis has broken that a CMT is forced to employ a series of crisis management or image restoration strategies to minimize the damage.

### ***Best Practices and Strategies***

There are several basic words of advice for any crisis management team: be quick, accurate and consistent (Coombs, 2007). It is often difficult for an organization to manage both speed and accuracy simultaneously unless previous preparation for a crisis has been done. Initial response is critical, as every sound bite, interview, or press conference will be available for replay on YouTube.

There are five well-accepted categories of crisis management responses, including non-existent strategies, distance strategies, ingratiating strategies, mortification strategies, and suffering strategies (Brown, Dickhaus & Long, 2012; Coombs, 2007; Larsen & Massey, 2006; Len Rios, 2010). With non-existent strategies, CMTs look to avoid any ownership of wrongdoing by denying, clarifying, or attacking claims of fault on behalf of the organization (Larsen & Massey, 2006). Next are distance strategies. With distance strategies, the goal is to remove any association of the company with the crisis (Larsen & Massey, 2006). Distance can be created through a series of excuses or justifications. Justifications involve minimizing the perception of damage (Coombs, 2007). Third are ingratiating strategies that aim to generate support on issues beyond the crisis event, including bolstering and transcendence. Bolstering is defined as the attempt to create credibility

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based by referencing prior good behavior (Brown, Dickhaus & Long, 2012; Len Rios, 2010). On the other hand, transcendence, which is used to deflect attention onto something else, is placing a fact or sentiment in a larger context that viewers are not currently seeing (Brown, Dickhaus & Long, 2012). Mortification strategies are strategies that admit involvement and simply request public forgiveness for the issue, specifically involving remediation, repentance, and rectification (Larsen & Massey, 2006). Mortification is also commonly referred to as atonement. Last are suffering strategies, which are used in an attempt to garner public sympathy (Larsen & Massey, 2006). It is up to the CMT to determine which strategies will be most effective given the situation and audience. Often, the type of strategy may change over the lifespan of the crisis.

Crisis management and image restoration take on a bigger role in today's society, specifically in sports, due to the increased media coverage of athlete scandal (Teitelbaum, 2010). No sports story is too small or insignificant for social media users to grab a hold of. Considering that an athlete's public image is worth more monetarily than it ever used to be, the ability to successfully implement these strategies and control how a story spreads is a highly valuable skill (Brown, Dickhaus & Long, 2012).

### **Research Questions**

In considering the basic principles of crisis management and their role in the 2009 Tiger Woods scandal, this case study aimed to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What crisis management strategies were used most frequently following Woods' scandal?

RQ2: How did the type of strategies used change throughout the life cycle of the crisis?

RQ3: What was the reaction to the crisis on social media and did it differ from traditional media coverage?

RQ4: What effect, if any, did Woods' crisis management approach have on public opinion and company sponsorship?

## **III. Case Study Analysis of Tiger Woods Scandal**

Data for this research were collected through Tiger Woods' press statements following the break of his 2009 sex scandal. It included the examination of eight statements, all released from the official Tiger Woods website, that ranged from November 29, 2009, two days after the initial accident, until August 23, 2010, with the announcement of his divorce from Elin Nordegren. Of the eight statements, two were press conferences held at professional golf tournaments. The crisis management strategies used (non-existent, distance, ingratiating, mortification and suffering) within each press statement were identified and recorded. This data helped determine how often certain strategies were employed. To provide context for the case, social media feedback and news coverage reports were also examined.

### **Overview of the Tiger Woods Scandal**

In 2009, Tiger Woods, an American professional golfer, was caught amidst one of the most high-profile sex scandals of all time. Since the beginning of his professional career in 1996, Woods was regarded as one of the best—if not the best—golfer in history. He won 96 golf tournaments, 72 on the PGA tour and recorded the fastest progression to the No. 1 spot on the Official World Golf Ranking ("About Tiger Woods," n.d.). Woods was estimated to be the highest paid athlete in the world in 2009, earning about \$110 million (Badenhausen, 2009). Part African American, Asian, American Indian and Caucasian, Woods broke countless ethnic barriers in the sport of golf and became the face of minority athletes across the world (Davie et al., 2010).

His fame and popularity made his fall from grace in 2009 that much harder. Reports of infidelity with a woman named Rachel Uchitel surfaced on Thanksgiving Day of that year from a tabloid magazine (Davie et al., 2010). It was immediately met with disbelief, but the situation became increasingly suspicious following a 2:30 a.m. car accident two days later. It was reported his wife, Elin Nordegren, was chasing his Cadillac Escalade with a golf club. Over the next several weeks, 10 other women came forward admitting to having had affairs with the married-Woods. The *New York Daily News* reported there were 120 allegations of adultery

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(Davie et al., 2010). The mistresses ranged from prostitutes to porn stars to waitresses. Woods saw several big-name sponsors like Accenture, Gillette, and Gatorade, drop him as a spokesperson, stating that he no longer represented the values of their organizations. It led to extensive media backlash, his withdrawal from tournament play, a stint in a sex rehab facility, and an eventual divorce from his wife, Elin.

### ***Crisis Criteria***

The Tiger Woods scandal meets all criteria of a typical crisis. It was a period of instability that arose from the misbehavior and indiscretions of an individual, in this case, an athlete. The crisis threatened not only reputation loss but also financial loss, as more and more sponsors chose to part ways with Woods. Media paid close attention to each twist and turn of the scandal and information spread rapidly with the availability of social media. The stories of the affairs had a significant, negative influence on public opinion.

### ***Stages of the Crisis***

It is difficult to define specifically when the prodromal stage of the crisis began. The earliest report of infidelity came on November 25, 2009, from the *National Inquirer*. However, it is possible that there were warning signs prior to then that were not made public knowledge. There has been no discussion as to whether or not Tiger Woods' PR staff prepared a crisis management plan—likely because admitting the existence of one would imply they were aware of his indiscretions prior to the scandal. So given the knowledge available, the prodromal stage started on Thanksgiving Day and lasted for approximately two days. It marked the first ripple in Tiger's perfect public image, but at the time, the opportunity to discredit the rumor of a single affair from a non-credible source still existed.

Just 48 hours later came the accident that sparked the beginning of the acute crisis stage. As mentioned, Tiger Woods left his house in the middle of the night and moments later crashed into a nearby fire hydrant. It was then that it became a full-fledged crisis. It was no longer a single allegation of an affair from the *National Enquirer*. There were police reports and hospital intake forms that corroborated the stories of unusual behavior. The press was immediately made aware of the accident and the crisis reached a point-of-no-return. It escalated as voicemail messages he left mistresses were leaked, and several more women came forward admitting to sleeping with him. Stories of his checking in to a sex rehabilitation facility and his unwillingness to answer the media's questions extended the length of the acute crisis stage.

The Woods' scandal entered the chronic crisis stage, also known as a period of regrouping and recovering, on February 19, 2010. It was the first time Woods spoke directly to reporters since the incident. He offered an apology to his family and fans, making it clear he was ready to move on. Though a handful of sponsors continued to drop him after his public statement, no new information surrounding the scandal was released. He began granting interviews and making his way back into the professional golf circuit. Social media conversation slowly returned to talking about Woods in conjunction with golf.

Some analysts and fans believe that Tiger began the crisis resolution stage on March 26, 2012, at Bay Hill with his first PGA Tour win since the scandal. Reports of "Tigers Back!" filled newspapers headlines and social media. Woods experienced a drought in victories when the crisis broke. His win in Bay Hill was a sign of restored confidence, confidence that will likely yield a return in positive media coverage and more company sponsorships.

### ***Crisis Management Strategies by Statement***

**Statement 1, November 29, 2009:** On November 29, 2009, two days after the initial crash and four days after the report of infidelity, Woods' PR staff issued their first public statement on the rumors circulating in the media ("Statement from Tiger Woods," 2009). The statement was written as a direct letter from Woods (see Table 1). By explaining the accident and the injuries he sustained from it, he took sole responsibility for its occurrence. Woods used mortification strategies, like accepting blame for the incident and apologizing, but did so referring exclusively to the car accident. He avoided any mention of infidelity and went so far as to use non-existent strategies like denial and attacking the accuser when addressing those allegations.

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**Table 1. Statement 1. Crisis Management Strategy**

Strategies	Quotes
Mortification -Repentance	“This situation is my fault, and it’s obviously embarrassing to my family and me. I’m human and I’m not perfect. I will certainly make sure it doesn’t happen again.”
Non-existent -Denial -Attacking accuser -Clarifying	“Although I understand there is curiosity, the many false, unfounded and malicious rumors that are currently circulating about my family and me are irresponsible.”
Suffering	“This incident has been stressful and very difficult for Elin, our family and me.”

Woods’ initial attempt to deny indicates that his PR team likely did not have a CMP in place prior to the scandal. If they did, they would not have initially managed the crisis through outright denial. The fact he openly reprimanded the media for creating these stories when they turned out to be true is a poor reflection on Woods’ credibility. It was in essence, a lie, the cardinal sin of any crisis management team. Towards the end of the statement, Woods sought to generate sympathy for him and his family by pointing out the stress these allegations have caused.

**Statement 2, December 2, 2009:** The statement issued by Tiger Woods on December 2, 2009, (see Table 2), marked the first apology for his implied extramarital affairs (“Tiger on Current Events,” 2009). Though he never specifically mentioned infidelity or cheating, he alluded to his “transgressions.” He used mortification strategies at great length in the second statement. Not only did he apologize to his family and fans but made a promise to do better by both parties in the future.

**Table 2. Statement 2. Crisis Management Strategy Table**

Strategies	Quotes
Mortification -Repentance -Redemption	“I will strive to be a better person and the husband and father that my family deserves. For all those who have supported me over the years, I offer my profound apology.”
Suffering	“Although I am a well-known person and have made my career as a professional athlete, I have been dismayed to realize the full extent of what tabloid scrutiny really means. For the last week, my family and I have been hounded to expose intimate details of our personal lives.”
-Clarifying	“The stories in particular that physical violence played any role in the car accident were utterly false and malicious. Elin has always done more to support our family and shown more grace than anyone could possibly expect.”

Woods called for the respect of his family’s privacy and emphasized that whatever issues may have gone on needed to be dealt with behind closed doors, not in front of the media. To elicit feelings of sympathy from the general public, he described being followed by the paparazzi and its negative impact on his family. Woods used non-existent strategies like clarification and denial in this statement, however, not in regards to his own indiscretions, rather in an effort to absolve his wife of any blame for a physical assault.

**Statement 3, December 11, 2009:** Woods announced on December 11, 2009, that he would be taking a hiatus from professional golf (“Woods Taking Hiatus,” 2009). He stated that it was a decision he came to after much thought and that he needed to focus his attention on becoming a better husband, father, and person. It was also the first time Woods directly took responsibility for cheating, rather than just implying it. It took a total of 15 days from the time of the accident until Tiger would specify he had betrayed his wife, a period of silence that would earn him heavy public criticism. He used mortification strategies exclusively throughout the remainder of the statement (see Table 3).

**Table 3. Statement 3. Crisis Management Strategy Table**

Strategies	Quotes
Mortification -Repentance -Redemption	“I am deeply aware of the disappointment and hurt my infidelity has caused to so many people, most of all my wife and children. I want to say again to everyone that I am profoundly sorry and that I ask forgiveness.”  “It may not be possible to repair the damage I’ve done, but I want to do my best to try.”

**Statement 4, February 17, 2010:** The fourth statement from Woods’ staff announced that Tiger would address the media publicly for the first time since the scandal on February 19 in Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla. (“Tiger Gives Remarks,” 2010). It was not a news conference, therefore, eliminating the opportunity for a question and answer period. This was the first report from Woods in more than two months, which allowed for long periods of speculation and criticism. Though it was a brief statement, his staff utilized the opportunity to employ mortification strategies like atonement and remediation once again (see Table 4).

**Table 4. Statement 4. Crisis Management Strategy Table**

Strategies	Quotes
Mortification -Repentance -Redemption	“He also recognizes that he has hurt and let down a lot of other people who were close to him. He also let down his fans. He wanted to begin the process of making amends, and that’s what he’s going to discuss.”

**Statement 5, February 19, 2010:** The speech given by Tiger Woods on February 19, 2010, was the most extensive made during the scandal (“Tiger’s Public Statement,” 2010). It was written and designed to signal the end of the acute crisis stage and transition into a period of recovery and regrouping. He began with more mortification strategies, primarily atoning for his sins wherever possible. Woods made an effort to not only acknowledge the hurt he caused family and fans, but his business partners as well. It is then that he included a reference to his foundation and the good work it had done in the past, an ingratiating strategy known as bolstering (See Table 5). Many media members criticized him for his attempt to pitch his foundation during a speech that was meant to center around his apology.

He finally came clean about his 45-day stint from the end of December to early February in a sex rehabilitation facility during the 13-minute speech. Woods discussed his Buddhist background and how he planned to use his faith to return to a life of happiness and restraint. He included suffering strategies by drawing attention to the harm the media attention had caused his family. He stated that he would return to golf when he was ready but that it would be dependent on his progress and ability to establish balance in his life.

**Table 5. Statement 5. Crisis Management Strategy Table**

Strategies	Quotes
Mortification -Repentance	<p>“Now every one of you has good reason to be critical of me. I want to say to each of you, simply and directly, I am deeply sorry for my irresponsible and selfish behavior I engaged in.”</p> <p>“I am also aware of the pain my behavior has caused to those of you in this room. I have let you down and I have let down my fans. To those of you who work for me, I have let you down personally and professionally.”</p>
Ingratiating -Bolstering	<p>“Thirteen years ago, my dad and I envisioned helping young people achieve their dreams through education. This work remains unchanged and will continue to grow. From the Learning Center students in Southern California to the Earl Woods’ scholars in Washington, D.C., millions of kids have changed their lives and I am dedicated to making that continue.”</p>
Suffering	<p>“However, my behavior doesn’t make it right for the media to follow my two-and-a-half-year-old daughter to school and report the school’s location. They staked out my wife and they pursued my mom.”</p>

**Statement 6, March 16, 2010:** On March 16, 2010, Woods announced that he would return to professional golf at the Masters (“Tigers Return,” 2010). He reminded readers of the therapy he had undergone and the efforts he made to restore his family life. Woods also offered an apology for the tournaments he had to miss as a result of his rehabilitation, the use of yet another mortification strategy (see Table 6).

**Table 6. Statement 6. Crisis Management Strategy Table**

Strategies	Quotes
Mortification -Repentance	<p>“I have undergone almost two months of inpatient therapy, and I am continuing treatment. Although I’m returning to competition, I still have a lot of work to do in my personal life.”</p> <p>“I called both Joe Lewis and Arnold Palmer and expressed my regrets for not attending the Tavistock Cup and the Arnold Palmer Invitational. I again want to thank them both for their support and their understanding.”</p>

**Statement 7, April 8, 2010:** After completing day one at the Masters, Woods held a press conference open to all reporters (“Tiger’s Masters Conference,” 2010). It was the first time he took questions from the media since the scandal. During the duration of the interview, Tiger was able to deflect all questions that related back to the scandal and spoke specifically on his golf game. He mentioned the warm reception he received from the fans out on the course. There were no identifiable crisis management strategies used throughout the duration of the interview.

**Statement 8, August 23, 2010:** The final statement in the 2009 Tiger Woods scandal was a joint statement by both him and his wife (“Nordegren, Woods Statement, 2010). It announced that they were divorced and that though they were no longer married, they would remain wonderful parents to their two children. The statement called for sympathy from the public, a suffering strategy, as a way to encourage others to respect their privacy and move on from the scandal (see Table 7).



**Table 7. Statement 8 Crisis Management Strategy Table**

Strategies	Quotes
Suffering	<p data-bbox="358 302 1284 363">“We are sad that our marriage is over and we wish each other the very best for the future.”</p> <p data-bbox="358 415 1284 476">“The weeks and months ahead will not be easy for them as we adjust to a new family situation, which is why our privacy must be a principal concern.”</p>

### ***Social Media’s Reaction to the Woods Scandal***

In the days immediately following the accident, traditional media outlets allotted 2 to 7% of its coverage to the Woods scandal (see Appendix Figure 1), good for the second leading story between November 30 and December 6 (Jurkowitz, 2009). Since the details of Woods’ infidelity took the back seat to President Obama’s speech on the War in Afghanistan (see Appendix Figure 2), the level of traditional media coverage did not accurately reflect the fervor the Woods’ scandal created among social media users.

Online communications saw dramatic spikes in how often Woods’ name was mentioned and how often it was mentioned on issues unrelated to golf performance. According to a Nielsen Wire report (2010), Woods’ name was almost always associated with words like “cheater,” “infidelity,” and “crash” on social media sites (see Appendix Figure 3). This pattern continued for several weeks as Woods avoided directly addressing the public and failed to provide the media with consistent updates on his progress. The same report found that between January 29 and March 19, 2010, online conversations slowly began to return to their discussion of Woods and golf (see Appendix Figure 4). A majority of these more positive conversations were likely triggered by his first press conference on February 19.

### ***Summary***

Woods relied predominately on mortification strategies to manage the crisis and restore public perception. Of the eight statements made, six included mortification strategies and often more than one instance of them. He initially employed non-existent strategies like denial when addressing rumors of infidelity, which suggests that his staff did not have a CMP in place. As more and more information regarding his indiscretions was released, he was forced to take greater ownership for the scandal and change the types of approaches used. Woods was criticized for his initial denial of the affairs and for going more than two months between statements (December 11 till February 17). A swifter approach may have shortened the length of the acute crisis stage and minimized the number of dropped sponsors. Four of the five types of crisis management strategies were incorporated into his statements throughout the lifespan of the crisis, all with the exception of distance strategies. The media drew attention to his attempt at “bolstering” with the mention of his foundation and his repeated use of suffering tactics. Traditional media coverage was common, but not as potent as the discussion of the scandal on social media. Woods’ name was mentioned frequently in association with his wrongdoings up until his first press conference. Though it may have been a prolonged process, research indicates that discussion of Woods and the scandal has died down on social media sites. Woods’ slightly restored image has landed him two new sponsorships with Rolex and Fuse Science Inc. since the scandal.

## **IV. Conclusion**

Crises can arise at all times, in all industries. But no industry sees a more disproportionate share of media attention than sports. The growing interest of the American people and the development of social media have created an environment that disseminates rapidly information surrounding athlete scandal and extends its discussion. It has increased the need for pre-crisis planning and post-crisis responses. In 2009, Tiger Woods experienced it firsthand, as stories of alleged mistresses and a furious wife made their way to the media. Woods’ PR staff relied primarily on mortification strategies to manage the crisis, accepting blame and apologizing to his wife, family, and fans whenever he spoke. Though it is highly unlikely Woods’ image returns to what it used to be, social media research indicates conversations regarding the professional

golfer are slowly returning to the discussion of his game. Public opinion of Woods has improved, since the break of the scandal; and though the public disapproved of his behavior and occasionally the way the crisis was handled, the mortification strategies used were mildly effective. One can conclude that atonement helps humanize once larger-than-life athletes. But ultimately, his success on the course will have the biggest impact on how people regard Tiger Woods.

## **Acknowledgments**

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## Appendix

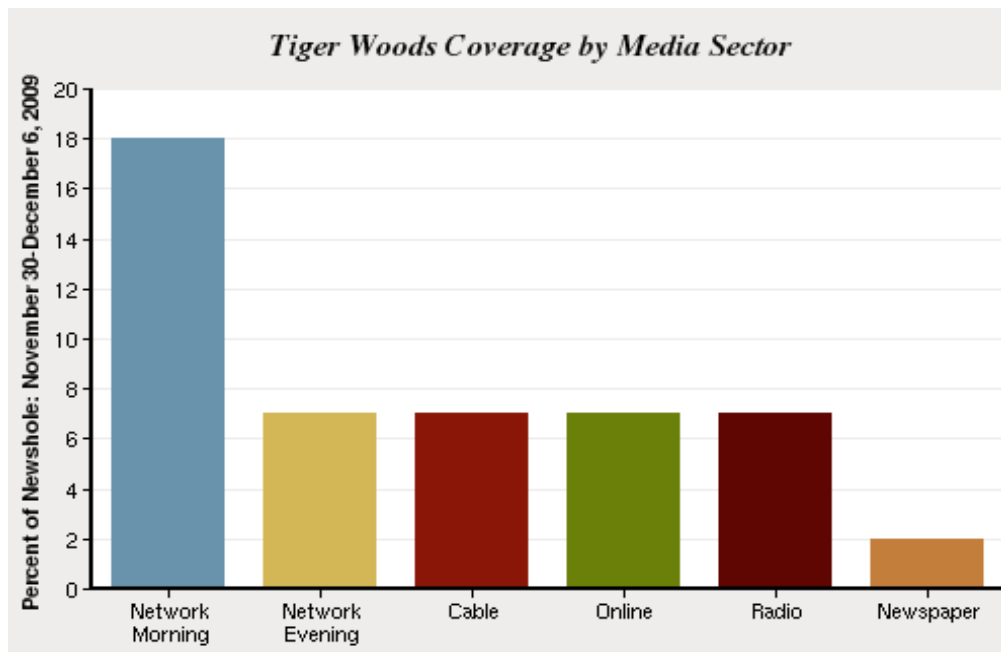


Figure 1. Tiger Woods' coverage by media sectors. Copyright by Pew Research Center Publications

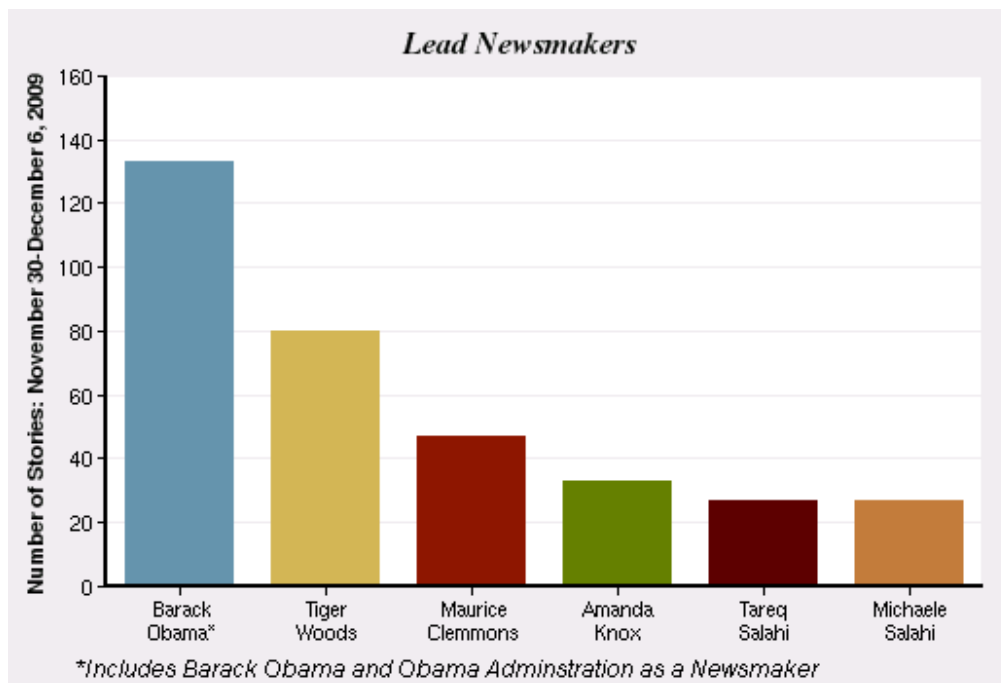


Figure 2. Lead newsmakers' coverage. Copyright by Pew Research Center Publications

### Tiger Woods Brand Association Map Post Controversy

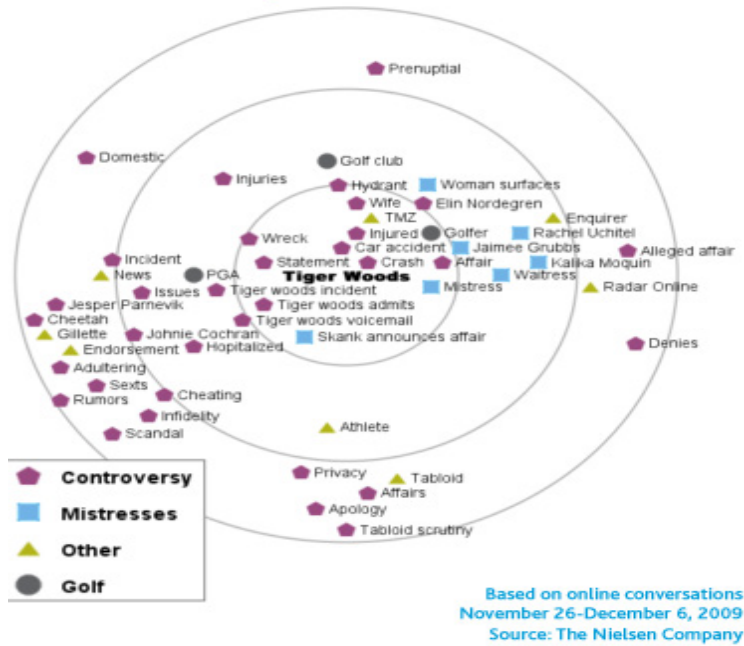


Figure 3. Tiger Woods’ brand association map—Post controversy. Copyright by Nielsen Wire.

### Tiger Woods Brand Association Map - Golf Back In Play

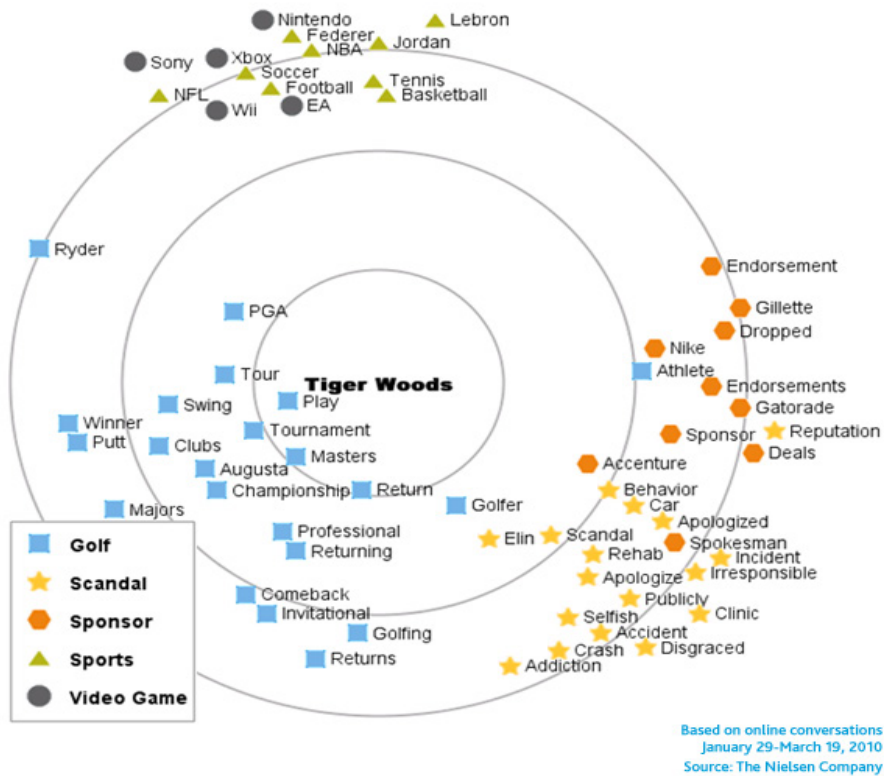


Figure 4. Tiger Woods’ brand association map—Golf back in play. Copyright by Nielsen Wire.

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