# Social Media and Reputation Management During Crisis: A Case Study of the 2012-2013 NHL Lockout

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"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has

taken place."

- George Bernard Shaw

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**<u>Abstract</u>**

The aim of this study is to understand the influence of online discussion forums during times of crisis. These forums can be considered as a form of social media, a relatively new form of technology that is constantly evolving and gaining in popularity. It has become an important medium, and can be integral in communications plans, specifically with regards to crisis communication. Through the use of these media, message delivery has unbelievable breadth and speed, making it crucial to understand its implications in crisis events. In order to understand social media's implications in reputation management, during times of crisis, an ethnographic content analysis was conducted through the analysis and comparison of comments posted on news forums and media documents issued by the NHL during the 2012-2013 lockout. Literature suggests the importance of relationship management prior to crisis onset, as social media has the potential to inflame and contaminate the perceptions of others. Through social media, the formation and emergence of an engaged and active public was observed and studied. However, when considering traditional crisis communication theories, results from this particular case are counterintuitive; the findings counter traditional crisis communication theories, suggesting that cases such as this one are to be investigated further.

Keywords: *Crisis communication, crisis management, social media, corporate reputation, stakeholder relations, sports communication*

**1.Introduction**

Sports play an interesting role in society. It is a multifaceted topic that spans multiple dimensions, such as culture, business, health and entertainment. It can be compared to religion, where in certain cases, fans worship athletes as though they were gods. While sports today have adopted a major role in the entertainment industry, they have also taken on a cultural role, playing a big part in cultural and identity formation. The symbiosis between business, culture and identity influences perceptions of corporate entities in the sports industry; these are increasingly influenced in the advent of a crisis.

Crises cause major disruptions in the organizational system. Not only must management work to de-activate a crisis, it must also ensure that it does not cause any further damage, which includes reducing detrimental consequences to an organization's reputation. Today, corporate entities exert much less control on the messages published about their business. Social media gives everyone the capacity to publish and distribute messages to others at large and impressive speeds; crisis management teams must be prepared to affront this new communication factor during times of crises in order to protect their reputation.

This particular study seeks to understand how social media influenced the message framing of a corporate sports entity, during the course of a crisis, in order to maintain its reputation.

1.1 Background and Statement of Problem

Social media is a relatively new medium that has been impacting communications since its emergence. Its more popular uses, such as "blogs, wikis, podcasts, social networking websites, video and RSS feeds", along with other tools, have allowed for increased interactivity amongst individuals (Askool & Nakata, 2011, p. 207). Many

companies have turned to Social Network Sites (SNSs) as tools for marketing and advertising because they can help harbor new relationships with the public, making them advantageous for the survival of a business (Askool & Nakata, 2011). Customers are core to a business' existence, making relationship maintenance crucial; social media provides a perfect platform to sustain such bonds (Gremler et al., 2001 as cited in Askool & Nakata, 2011). However, due to the novelty and importance of this medium, its functions and uses are still undergoing research. This study will help understand social media's role, particularly in online discussion forums, in effectively communicating during crises.

1.2 Purpose of Study

The aim of this case study is to understand the influence of social media, specifically the comment sections (online forums) of online news websites, on organizational messages and how communication strategies may influence public engagement and perceptions during a crisis. For the purpose of this study, public engagement is defined as social media use and users' reactions to news publications.

1.3 Thesis Outline

*Chapter 1* gives the reader an introduction and overview of the topic under discussion: crisis communication and social media in the context of reputation management. In this chapter, readers can understand the problem presented, the case studied, as well as the research questions posed, in order to comprehend the implications of social media within crisis communication. The purpose of the study is also presented in order for readers to position the study within the context and research in this particular field.

*Chapter 2* provides readers with an analysis of the current research presented in the fields of crisis communication. It includes the definition of crisis and a review of current research on crisis causes and management. Since the study centers on social media, readers can learn its influence on this particular area of communication. Two leading crisis communication theories are presented in this section to better understand the data collected through this study: Coombs' (1998; 2006; 2009; 2012) Situational Crisis Communication Theory and Grunig and Hunt's (1984) Situational Theory of the Publics. Since data collected stemmed solely from Canadian news outlets, it was also important to review the literature surrounding hockey and Canada. This chapter sees to that requirement, giving insight into the rational for certain messages posted by fans during the lockout. This chapter also provides readers with the theoretical framework that guided the research, informed the case at hand and helped answer research questions.

*Chapter 3* provides the research questions that guided the study, in addition to a dissection of the methodology used to conduct the research. Reasons for research design and data collection choices are described, while delimitations, limitations and data analysis procedures are also illustrated in this section.

*Chapter 4* provides readers with a synopsis of the data collected, the analysis, as well as the findings. Ethnographic content analysis was used to determine if the framing of the NHL's messages changed as the lockout progressed, and if potential changes were a reflection of fan reactions on online forums. Research sought to understand the reasoning for the evolution, or lack thereof, in NHL messages.

*Chapter 5* includes a discussion of the analysis in relation to the literature reviewed. An understanding of the framing of NHL messages and fan reactions

surrounding said messages, must first be understood in order to answer the research questions. Consequently, an exploration of the influence, if any, imposed by fans' comments on the NHL's framing follows the synopsis of NHL and fan messages.

*Chapter 6* summarizes the conclusion of the findings of this study. It provides readers with limitations within the study, and provides them with suggestions for future research in this particular field.

## 2. Literature Review

2.1 Crisis Defined

Undisputed is the fact that incidents or issues that go ignored or unattended have the potential to turn into crises and to ultimately destroy an organization's image (Stoldt, Dittmore, Branvold, 2012). But what are crises? According to Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger (2007), an organizational crisis is defined as "a specific, unexpected, and non-routine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and threaten or are perceived to threaten an organization's high-priority goals" (p.7). Pearson and Mitroff (1993) suggest that for an event to be deemed a crisis, it must threaten the organization's reputation as well as its capability to perform its daily operations and attain its goals. Coombs (1999) defines it as "an event that is an unpredictable, major threat that can have a negative effect on the organization, industry, or stakeholders if handled improperly" (p.2). He elaborates by explaining that disagreement might surround the definition of a crisis, resulting in the ambiguity of its manifestation, since "crises are symbolic as well as objective" and "exist ultimately in people's heads", ultimately giving power to stakeholder perceptions, when determining crisis onset (Coombs, 1999, p.89; Ury & Smoke, 1985, p.94). Coombs (1999) explains that prior to defining a crisis, one must understand the difference between an incident and a crisis: an incident is a minor, localized disruption that does not affect the routine operations of the organization, while a crisis causes such a disruption.

Crises are "unexpected by the organization", and threaten the organization's high-priority values, causing the need for control and immediate attention, despite "a restricted amount of time, in which a response can be made" (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993;

Herman, 1963, p.64). Though signals can suggest an oncoming crisis, organizations are usually caught by surprise by the insurgence of one. Institutions will often avoid signals out of denial. As Lerbinger (1997) explains, "environmental monitoring activities and risk assessment are a first line of defense against the surprise element of a crisis" allowing for planned "defense mechanisms… with an attitude of openness to information about the organization's internal and external environments" (p.8).

Crises are comprised of essential elements that differentiate them from other situations. There exists a perceived importance in correcting the situation due to the high stakes involved in the crisis (loss of life, sales, investment opportunities, reputation, etc.) (Coombs, 1999; Ury & Smoke, 1985; Marcus & Goodman, 1991). Time pressures increase the sense of immediacy and urgency to avoid further damage: "As [time] increases, decision-makers naturally become less sensitive to [incoming] indications …[causing] tentative feelers toward finding some kind of resolution [to] be dismissed or downgraded" (Ury & Smoke, 1985, p. 98). While high-stress levels associated with crises make decision-making increasingly difficult, rash decisions can aggravate the situation and make it grow worse; crisis managers must therefore proceed strategically and consider long-term consequences of any actions (Coombs, 1999; Ury & Smoke, 1985). Uncertainty is the last factor characterizing crises. Managers either lack crucial information or are presented with ambiguous details regarding crisis onset (Coombs, 1999; Ury & Smoke, 1985).

<u>2.2 Crisis Types</u>

Crises threaten organizations in the same way, however they vary in nature. Academics describe different ways to classify crises. Pearson and Mitroff (1993) created

a quadrant (Appendix A) to explain different types of crises, causes (mega damage crisis, psychopathic saboteurs, external economic attacks, occupational health diseases, breaks, external information attacks and perceptual crises) and potential levels of damage. Each type is placed on a scale from severe to normal; severe indicates "aberrant or deviant causes [as the crisis'] source", while normal suggests, "[regular] occurrences that [have] escalated to a major crisis"(Pearson & Mitroff, 1993, p. 51).

Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger (2007) suggest a different perspective, arguing that there exist two main categories for crises (intentional and unintentional) with several sub-categories. Appendix D lists each category, along with an explanation.

Marcus and Goodman (1991) suggest three types of crises: accidents, scandals and safety and health incidents. Accidents are defined as unexpected and undesirable, one-time events, with identifiable victims (injured/killed/loss/misfortune), while scandals are "disgraceful or discreditable occurrences that compromise the perpetrators' reputations" and are generated by organizational fault or misdeed, causing "people's sense of fair play [to be] violated by someone's achieving power or [through the accumulation of] riches in way the generally accepted…rules of the game prohibit" (Marcus & Goodman, 1991, p.284; p.287). Reoccurring events that have the potential to expose a large number of people to danger are defined as safety and health incidents; their harmful consequences are not immediate, causing victims to realize their repercussions well after the crisis has passed (Marcus & Goodman, 1991).

Lerbinger (1997) also classifies crises into three categories. He explains that crises are often associated to unexpected occurrences with natural or technological causes, but can also be caused by confrontations or malevolence due to an organization's

failure to comply with stakeholder expectations (Lerbinger, 1997). He explains that management failure, the last category, occurs when "management values and processes of corporate governance do not adequately keep pace with new environmental and social requirements and obligations", consequently triggering a loss of confidence, credibility and legitimacy amongst the public (Lerbinger, 1997, p.13).

2.3 Crisis Stages And Effective Management

Many academics suggest that crises possess a cyclical nature (e.g., Pearson & Mitroff, 1993; Eid, 2008; Coombs, 1999; Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt, 1995; Jacques, 2007). Jacques (2007) explains that a cyclical process has evolved from a linear approach to one that integrates pre-crisis and post-crisis stages. He further postulates that the concept of crisis lifecycles "broadly [relies] on two common propositions –that some problems left unaddressed trend towards increasing seriousness and greater risk; and that the longer an issue survives, the choices available decrease and cost of intervention and resolution increases" (Jacques, 2007, p.2). Eid (2008) elaborates on this by suggesting that a crisis may be managed but may never be resolved. Management can only minimize threats of destruction, byproducts of mismanagement or avoidance of the crisis; there is never an end to a crisis (Ibid.) This explains the term lifecycle; since an end is never possible, the potential for a conflict to grow and mature into a crisis and to disrupt an organization's system is immanent (Ibid.).

Coombs (1999) explains that crisis lifecycles create a staged approach, meaning, "the crisis management function is divided into discrete segments that are executed in a specific order" (p.10). He roots his stages in both Fink's (1986) four-stage model, and Pearson and Mitroff's (1993) five-stage model, which both suggest that crises are

evolutionary and require different managerial actions at every stage (Coombs, 1999). Fink's (1986) model includes the prodromal stage, the crisis breakout/acute stage, the chronic stage and resolution. The model is comparable to that of Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt (1995), which is analogous to the human life cycle: birth, growth, maturity and death (decline, in the case of crises). Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt (1995) explain, however, that though crises are not always born, abortion is possible with proper prevention techniques.

Coombs (1999) also relies on Pearson and Mitroff's (1993) model that suggests that crises are cyclical processes composed of five steps: signal detection, preparation/prevention, containment/damage limitation, recovery and learning (Appendix B).

In signal detection, a series of crisis warning signals (prodromes), manifest themselves (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). Proper crisis management requires organizations to be proactive and to constantly scan for prodromal issues that might signal the emergence of a crisis and thus permit avoidance (Fink, 1986). This includes scanning the environment (surveys, media content, conference attendance, key websites, etc.) for public trends or single issues, as well as collecting and evaluating data related to said issues. The development of communication strategies allows redirection in order to prevent the occurrence of a crisis (Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt, 1995; Stoldt et al., 2012).

Preparation and prevention assumes that organizations "prepare for crises systematically and continuously search for potential breaks before they are too big to fix"; the goal is to take precautionary measures to prevent crises from occurring and to prepare for ones that are inevitable or harder to prevent (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993, p.53).

The third step, containment and damage, calls for proper crisis management procedures to be put in place to avoid the aggravation and the spread of the crisis to other parts of the organization or to its surrounding environment (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). Recovery is the subsequent stage; the organization follows procedures to return business operations to normal (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). Finally, the organization reflects on the actions taken during the crisis and how management could improve (Ibid.). Review of the appropriate and inappropriate actions taken during crisis management provides crucial solutions and can drastically prevent the reoccurrence of a crisis.

Based on previously mentioned models, Coombs (1999) created a three-staged cyclical model: Pre-crisis, Crisis event and Post-Crisis. In the pre-crisis stage, managers are expected to be proactive and to search the environment (ex. media, case studies) while also observing "changes, trends, events and emerging social, political and health issues" in order to prevent the onset of crises (Coombs, 1999, p.23). Prevention includes measures, such as relationship building through communication and risk prioritizing (Coombs, 1999). Credibility, trust and honesty also play a part in relationship building and crisis management and are dependent on an organization's ability to conform to stakeholder expectations; failure to comply, results in criticism, poor support and negative perceptions (Coombs, 1999).

If the pre-crisis stage proves unsuccessful, crisis onset is initiated. At this stage, the organization reacts to the crisis and must employ contingency measures in order to reduce potential damage (Coombs, 1999). Several rules should be followed during crisis containment in order to reduce the spread and duration of the crisis; management should ensure quick and accurate responses (immediately following crisis identification),

consistency and openness in messages, expressions of sympathy, and instructive information (Coombs, 1999). Marcus & Goodman (1991) explain that organizations can either express an apology (accommodative signal) or a denial (defensive signal) when communicating the crisis. They also justify accommodative responses to serve the interest of victims and shareholders; defensive signals serve only to benefit the interests of the organization (Marcus & Goodman, 1991).

If uncertainties in information exist, management should inform stakeholders that notifications are to be made as soon as information becomes available (Coombs, 1999). Uncertainty, combined with a lack of information, increases the media's interest in a crisis (bad news sells more), therefore a "failure to act can allow damage to spread to other areas of an organization, into surrounding communities or to additional stakeholders" (Coombs, 1999, p.91). Messages should also include information regarding the recovery efforts being made by the organization, the cause of the crisis (if known), the actions being taken to avoid reoccurrences, and reports of any third-party assistance received to resolve the crisis (Coombs, 1999). Maintaining and promoting open lines of communication allows the organization to address the concerns and questions of stakeholders while sustaining the credibility of the organization (Coombs, 1999). Proper crisis containment acts as impression management, and is ultimately used "to strategically shape the public reputation of an organization" (Coombs, 1999, p.122).

The post-crisis stage requires the organization to evaluate the crisis management team's performance during the crisis (successes and failures), and to identify areas that need improvement, in order to avoid reoccurrences (Coombs, 1999). Feedback from

stakeholders provides organizations with important insight that can be integrated in future CMPs (Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt, 1995).

2.4 Stakeholder Perception and Crisis Causes

Stakeholders play an important role in crisis management; they are " [persons] or [groups] that [have] an interest, right, claim and ownership in an organization (Coombs, 1999, p.20, p.22). As mentioned earlier, the mismanagement of relationships can heavily influence the onset and management of a crisis, as highlighted by Coombs (2009) when he states, "the perception of an event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can impact the organization's performance" (p. 99). These relationships include those with customers, employees, suppliers, amongst others, and, in times of crisis, can include victims (Marcus & Goodman, 1991). These connections directly impact the dynamics within an organization, as well as its actions and messages (Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Coombs, 1999).

A violation of stakeholder expectations can be seen as a threat to the organization's legitimacy, and can consequently threaten its success, making it crucial for organizations to implement proper reputation management techniques and communications in the wake of a crisis (Caillouet, 1991 as cited by Allen & Caillouet, 1994). When an organization fails to meet expectations, stakeholders expect management to provide an account of the reasoning behind the failure, as well as the actions surrounding it (Scott & Meyer, 1991). Crisis management, which encompasses crisis communication, aims to implement damage control during a crisis, and can be used as an opportunity to promote the mission, values and culture of the organization (Lerbinger, 1997). However, proper techniques must be utilized when dealing with organizational

crises. Lerbinger (1997) stresses that organizations should ensure that all possible information surrounding a crisis is collected, in order to communicate it accurately to its varying stakeholders. Management should not deny the crisis and should speak with a single voice, while providing meaningful ways for stakeholders to protect themselves from potential repercussions (Lerbinger, 1997.). He emphasizes that rapidity, openness and honesty go a long way, because the "news media are likely to become impatient, if information is slow coming [and will] attempt to find other sources, and, sometimes cast suspicion on the non-cooperative source" (Lerbinger, 1997, p.46).

2.5 Value and Crisis

During a crisis, the public attributes characteristics to the event, while also assigning it a value. Value is an assessment of one's beliefs and desires in terms of truth, utility and beauty, and includes a subjective and psychological dimension of these components (Tarde, 1902/2006). Value is usually associated to quantities and numbers; however, though beliefs and desires are not quantifiable in any way, not even in monetary terms, their intensity is. Tarde compares value to colour; something

> "That we attribute to things, but that, like color, exists only within us by
>
> way of a perfectly subjective truth [and consists of] the harmonization of
>
> the collective judgments we make concerning the aptitude of objects to be
>
> … believed, desired or enjoyed. " **(**Tarde as cited by Latour & Lépinav,
>
> 2009, p.8)

It is natural for people with different beliefs and values to cross paths, an even truer reality since the emergence of modern technology (Internet, computers) and

globalization. Tarde (1902/2006) explains that economic change is a result of three stages: "the repetition of a first difference, the opposition created by the repetition, and finally, the adaption making it possible for it to temporarily get out of these oppositions thanks to new differentiations" (Tarde as cited by Latour & Lépinav, 2009, p.34). The spark of an idea, in addition to repeated exposure to this idea, brings upon changes in desire, and gives inflexion points in economics, allowing it to progress. Tarde (1902/2006) explains that "Invention produces differences; repetition allows for their diffusion; [and that] conflict is inevitable" (Tarde as cited by Latour & Lépinav, 2009, p.39). Without conversation, new ideas and products would never be disseminated. From one person to the next, judgments and opinions surrounding these novelties are what are distributed and what allow for the adoption of new desires and beliefs, thus explaining that rhetorical influence is what renders economic matter powerful.

Values attached to ideas and objects are either determined by the individual, or may be the result of a "collective process", in which a group agrees on an assigned value due to their mutual "passionate interests" (Tarde as cited by Nahon-Serfaty, 2013, p.430). Interest levels towards certain issues differ depending on attachment levels felt towards said issue. A problem with "high personal relevance in an individual's life … [is] more salient and will be processed at greater rates" (Grunig, 1997; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Aldoory, Kim & Tindal, 2009, p.135). Grunig (2007) further posits that if an individual recognizes a dilemma, he is more likely to consider it, and consequently tend to it. If one feels inspired enough to take action, assumedly, they feel strongly towards this issue, and thus value what is at stake. As previously mentioned, when organizational crises arise, the organization's operations, as well as the interests of stakeholders, are at stake. If an

individual strongly values the endeavors of a certain organization, a prevention of output will certainly affect said individual; this affectedness leads to a value assignment of the crisis by this person. The relevancy of the situation is dependent on the impact felt by the issue at hand. Crises are often a result of perceptions; if value is assigned to a certain issue due to high personal relevancy, it will most certainly be seen as a problem, and even worse, a crisis.

Tarde also suggests that values are determined through the influence of social networks and their contexts, and are reinforced by way of "reproduction and diffusion" (as cited by Nahon-Serfaty, 2013). For example, sports are comparable to religion because they act like "chapels" for loyalty and trust because "supporters [invest] money and emotion into [sports teams]" (Smith 2002, as cited in Bruce & Tini, 2008). Values assigned by stakeholders should also be considered in stakeholder relations and CMPs.

2.6 Effective Crisis Communication and Management

The likelihood and impact of potential crises are measured in order to forecast and prepare a CMP for the most prominent and high-priority crises; Stoldt et al. (2012) explain, "if a crisis possesses the potential to devastate the organization, it too should be addressed, even if it is deemed less probable to occur than others" (p. 200). During preparation, organizations must also pick appropriate channels to communicate with their stakeholders. Stoldt et al., (2012) stress the use of face-to-face communication versus print when dealing with key stakeholders, but suggest using websites to provide general crisis-related information as well.

An example of a failed CMP, relating to sports, is the Duke University scandal, which saw allegations of rape made against members of its lacrosse team. The

organization made four major mistakes managing this crisis: a lack of internal communications; a failure to maintain consistent messages and communication with the media throughout the incident; an avoidance of further media relations through the cancellation of the season; and a failure "to wait on all relevant facts before acting" (Stoldt et al., 2012, p.212). This compilation of failures increased uncertainty, causing lengthened media and public scrutiny.

2.7 Social Media and Crisis Communication

Pearson and Mitroff (1993) explain that despite organizational efforts to keep up with crisis management, a decrease in human operators and "the potential negative effects of technology exceed the ability of … organizations and management structures to control them" (p. 48). New technologies, such as social media, are increasing the speed and breadth of information sharing; while crises used to be isolated events, technology has permitted stakeholders to communicate, with an increased ease, to larger and more remote groups at rapid speeds (Coombs, 1999). This puts more pressure on organizations, especially when dealing with angry stakeholders, because "business now operates in an information society in which people are 'wired together' [through technology] in one gigantic global village" (Lerbinger, 1997, p.14). Messages can spread across the world in the blink of an eye, making it increasingly important for managers to monitor the media carefully for prodromes.

But what exactly is social media? It can be defined as any platform permitting online word-of-mouth forums, where products and services can be rated and discussed, and includes blogs, discussion boards and chat rooms and forums (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). It allows users to have a platform where they can create and participate in

dialogues within a given online community and permits organizations to collect information, such as concerns, questions, and assistance needs, through two-way communication and posts made on SMSs (Palenchar & Freberg, 2012, p.161; Hallahan, 2009). The dialogic and interactive nature of social media increases its prominence in both the social construction and deconstruction of crises within organizations because of the availability of tools, such as Twitter and blogs, which permit environmental scanning, and consequently, issues management, which prevents the occurrence of crises or repairs organizational reputation in times of crisis (Schultz, Utz & Goritz, 2011; Palenchar & Freberg, 2012; Hallahan, 2009).

As with any other technology, social media comes with its own set of benefits and disadvantages. It can serve public relation (PR) professionals in establishing credibility and a positive reputation for their organizations, while also providing them with a platform for online campaigns, a means to hold discussions with stakeholders, and make important announcements, such as product recalls (Hallahan, 2009; Palenchar & Freberg, 2012). Despite its useful nature, it can also act as a double-edged sword, catapulting certain issues into crises.

Social media gives users power. For instance, it can be used to launch a crisis. According to Castells (2011), there are four different types of power: Networking power, network power, networked power and network-making power. For the purpose of this study, the most crucial form of power will be explained, that of network-making power, which includes the power to exercise control over others through "programming" and "switching" (Castells, 2011.) While programmers generate processes within a network to

reach and achieve goals, switchers communicate and negotiate between other networks in order to "[induce] synergy and [limit] contradiction" (Castells, 2011, p.777).

While switchers and programmers can be used to enforce power, they can be used to resist it; programmers can create new rules and processes, while switchers can block unwanted connections and promote those necessary to reach power (Castells, 2011). Communication and technology present an ideal opportunity for resistance.

Ems (2014) and Iwilade (2013) provide perfect examples of how social media platforms facilitated power adoption and the instigation of political protests because "negotiations of power and the positions/motivations of conflicting parties are now more public than ever before" (Ems, 2014, p.721-722). In the instances studied, protesters grew rapidly in number as a result of messages that were posted and disseminated through social media. In the Iranian elections, Iranians took to social media as a way to propagate the truth surrounding fraudulent election results, since western reporters were banned from the country (Ems, 2014). The Ahmadinejad government attempted to bloc Twitter within Iran, as it was the cause for unrest, however was prevented from doing so due to the American government's acknowledgment of Twitter's "important [role] in challenging the Iranian government"(Ems, 2014, p.725). Social media served both as a news source for western media outlets, and as a means to protest corruption within the government. The author argues that the Iranian protest ignited others in Tunisia, Egypt Libya and certain ones held in the United States (Ems, 2014).

Iwilade (2013) considers social media's power to re-create identities in which individuals can be seen as social agents. Iwalde (2103) explains, "global crisis has deepened resentment of traditional centres of authority", which has in turn led the youth

to attempt to "reconfigure the nature of power", while also encouraging resistance through the emphasis of certain messages (p. 1056; 1057). The Mozambique food riots indicate how social media "[highlighted] events [and denounced] mainstream media for not giving the protests fair coverage" (Iwalde, 2013, p.1060). Twitter, Facebook and SMS messaging allowed youth to reconfigure power attribution, and permitted independent newspapers to provide coverage, despite limited access to their offices during the riots (Iwilade, 2013).

Today, mass communication is used to construct meaning and truth (Castells, 2011). The ubiquity of digitization gives users distribution power through the mass diffusion of messages, causing corporate networks (businesses, government, etc) to lose power, despite exercising "network power over the messages they convey [through] protocols of communication" (Castells, 2011, p.780). The Internet poses a challenge to multimedia networks by interfering with their gate keeping abilities (Castells, 2011). Despite the power of corporate networks to shape ideas, they must first be consumed; corporate control over messages is now challenged by mass self-production, or user-generated messages (Castells, 2011). The examples provided by Iwalde (2013) and Ems (2014) are perfect illustrations of the rejection of such ideas due to challenges posed by user-generated messages.

Social media significantly reduces response times, and creates the need for real-time responses (Palenchar & Freberg, 2012). Harmful comments, hoaxes and rumors over the Internet and SMSs, can potentially create a crisis situation, preventing messages from corporate networks from being consumed (Hallahan, 2009; Castells 2011). The accessibility of the Internet, and its "power to disseminate information quickly and

broadly, [throws organizations] into disarray from comments [made] online", an outcome similar to the negative publicity found in traditional news sources and media  (Hallahan, 2009, p.417).  Many examples exist of such social media "wildfires". An example of this is the Twitter incident involving ex PR Director of InterActive Corp, Justine Sacco. Sacco posted an offensive and racist post on Twitter prior to traveling to South Africa, which quickly generated enough controversy to cause the "hashtag #HasJustineLandedYet  [to top] Twitter's list of trending topics in the U.S. and [cause a] real time flight tracker [to be] added to the top search results for Sacco's name on Google." (O'Neil, 2013).

The unlimited anonymity granted to Internet users encourages them to post inflammatory and/or crisis triggering comments, regardless of their truths (Hallahan, 2009). This is problematic due to society's increasing necessity to obtain information through smart phones and the Internet. According to Hallahan (2009), one-fifth of Americans engage in web-searches, on an average, while one in six Americans accesses news online (Fallows, 2005; Rainie, 2005). Individuals engage in personal risk assessment through searches, which includes information seeking and information sharing (Hallahan, 2009). SMSs have created opportunities for people to have their voices heard, regardless of their perceptions, while also being able to problem-solve with a community that they see as relatable (Hallahan, 2009).

Social media gives PR professionals the opportunity to control information by disputing what is being published (Palenchar & Freberg, 2012). "Stakeholders can use digital technologies to create and disseminate their own influence, de-centralize the dissemination of information, and reduce official control", however, the success of an

organization's use of a "counter-attack" is heavily dependent on the nature of stakeholder relationships prior to the publication of user-generated content (Palenchar & Freberg, 2012, p.158).

According to Alexander (2013), "social media are a robust means of exposing corruption and malpractice" but are also a way of reducing risk and preventing aggravation in light of a crisis (p.717). He explains that in times of crisis, members of the public might sometimes deliver misinformation, which if delivered through social media, it is spread with a wide and quick reach. If corrections are not made in a timely manner, the public's perception of the matter can be distorted and damaging. Alexander, (2013) explains that while listening is used passively, monitoring involves the collection of information, permitting communication professionals to understand people's thoughts and ultimately mold and manage their communications based on the public. Since citizens are usually the first responders to crisis situations, social media provides a perfect communication platform between stakeholders and managers to create social cohesion and to promote therapeutic initiatives and should therefore be integrated in emergency planning and CMPs (Alexander, 2013). These platforms create unity, and give users a sense of identity and community as a result of their involvement in a particular issue (Alexander, 2013).

In a study conducted by Snoeijers et al. (2014), different social media tools and communicators were reviewed to understand their influence on crisis communications with university students. Students were deemed more likely to respond to messages when communicated through Twitter, rather than through Facebook (Snoeijers et al., 2014). The brief structure and content of Twitter messages made it easier for users to follow

information and share it, in comparison to Facebook messages, which require more attention due to an increased message length (Snoeijers et al., 2014) Messages delivered by spokespeople, particularly from company leaders/CEOs, were more likely to be shared with peers or to receive comments, rather than messages delivered by the organization as a whole (Snoeijers et al., 2014). Another important conclusion was that adaptive (emotional) messaging was more likely to be shared than instructive information, as "emotional messages…can cause viral spreading of message" (Snoeijers et al., 2014, p.657) because it is extraordinary and counters the expectations of the public.

2.8 Sports and Crises

Historically, crises have succeeded in plaguing the most prominent and established sports organizations and athletes alike. Examples of such are the hostage-taking incident at the Munich Olympic Games and the bombings at the Boston Marathon in 2013. Both incidents were similar in nature, but were communicated in different ways.

In 1972, 11 Israeli athletes were taken hostage by members of the Black September Organization (BSO), and later murdered at the Munich Olympics. In order to ensure the safety of the hostages, the German government had to engage in negotiations with the opposition. Reuben Miller (1990) studied these negotiations, through the Game Theory Lens, a mathematical theory used to help guide decision-making through the probability of outcomes from available actions (Eid, 2008). By using this theory, "actors can choose their moves based upon their own preferences regarding the outcome, and on the basis of their knowledge of the choices available to their opponents" (Miller, 1990, p. 16). This knowledge comes from information availability and levels of communication established between participants in the negotiations.

Unfortunately, the Germans were ill prepared for such occurrences: "security for the Olympic Games was handled by the local Bavarian authorities, who treated [the games] as a domestic matter" (Miller, 1990, p. 27). They had no previous experience with international terrorism, and were not equipped to manage security issues of this nature (Miller, 1990). This was not the only shortfall of this government; negotiation skills needed improvements as well. As negotiations progressed, communication lines between both parties deteriorated, failing to keep mutual interests "alive" (Miller, 1990). Ultimately, the lack of risk management, crisis preparedness, communication and information led to the breakdown in negotiation strategies and to the death of the hostages.

The Boston Marathon experienced a similar terrorist attack in 2013. Though hostages were not taken, several injuries and deaths resulted from the detonation of two bombs placed at the finish line. The predictability of such an event and the prevention of the deaths was not a possibility, but the Boston Police Department (BPD) succeeded in using social media to keep the media and public informed during and after the crisis. Their success in using social media to build trust and credibility was not accomplished overnight; consistent with Coombs (2009), the BPD's successful relationship building was a result of previous social media use.

Davis III et al. (2014) explain that for the BPD, "one of the most important uses [of social media] was correcting the misinformation that was spread through both professional media and social networks" (p.4). In addition to this, they used social media to give the public accurate information (status updates, casualty tolls) and to correct misinformation. Thanks to their previous social media use, the BPD built trust and

integrity with their audience; the public turned to department knowing it was a reliable source of information.  Long before the bombing, their account achieved official twitter status to demonstrate it was a credible source of information. Soon after, the department started its *Tweet from the Beat* program, to allow officers to connect directly with the public (Davis III et al., 2014). In addition to standard tweets about crime alerts, safety tips, arrests, etc., officers were able to tweet directly from the BPD twitter account in order to share their experiences at community meetings, humorous photos, and other positive interactions within the community (Davis III et al., 2014). ) This served to increase engagement and to give the department the ability to share a more personal and caring side of officers with the public. Trust and credibility from the public was consequently built over time. During the bombings, this positive relationship allowed the BPD to communicate effectively with their public through social media, allowing them to bypass reporters and the media, removing the potential for distorted messaging.

Reporters became less of an integral part of the communication process. Rather than use the media, the BPD communicated directly with its publics through Twitter and Facebook. The removal of this third party avoided potential distortions and sensationalism. Following the bombing, uncertainty caused speculation, panic and misinformation amongst the public, as the suspect was still at large. Consequently, blogs started appearing, suggesting that individuals were conducting their own investigations alongside law enforcement. Overnight, one man became the focus of accusations resulting from to multiple retweets; prior to any actual arrests, CNN had reported that one had been made (Davis III et al., 2014). Others echoed this report; the message was retweeted 5,000 times (Davis III et al., 2014.). Through social media, the BPD was able

to correct the error with accurate information within 20 minutes ("there has been no arrest"), which saw approximately "11,000 retweets in a matter of minutes" (Davis III et al., 2014, p. 11). While Twitter was used to reach a large number of people quickly, the BPD also made use of Facebook to seek the public's assistance in the investigation.

Evidently, social media proved to be an invaluable asset to the BPD during this crisis, however the authors stress that despite its advantages, conventions and rules must be followed in order to prevent messages from backfiring (Davis III et al., 2014). Similarly to their predecessors, the authors stress that monitoring and relationship-building are an expectation and requirement (Davis III et al., 2014). Tone of messages must also be appropriate for the audience/organization and must be genuine (Davis III et al., 2014). This is a direct reiteration of Castells' (2011) explanation of networks and power; though the BPD created the content, it was forced to format and frame its messages according to social media, i.e. the multimedia communication networks.

Not all sports crises are of the same nature. Reputational crises exist, such as the Duke University scandal, or the University of Ottawa hockey team scandal. In 2014, two hockey players were accused of sexually assaulting a woman in Thunder Bay while out of town for a game. The university's administration did not learn of the incident until three weeks later, following a botched attempt by the coach to fix the problem (Urback, 2015). As soon as they learned of the accusations, they immediately reported the assault to the police (Urback, 2015). Rape accusations, like in any other crisis, are "cancerous" to the organization in which they are associated, as they spread, grow and ruin the reputation of said organization (Urback, 2015). As mentioned earlier, it is crucial that management act quickly in order to avoid this propagation and to communicate corrective

action to the public, to demonstrate lessons learned so that future repetition are avoided (Coombs, 1998, 1999, 2012; Marcus & Goodman, 1991; Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2006). The university's president, Allan Rock, chose to suspend the team during the investigations and for the following season ("University of Ottawa", 2014), while also appointing a task force to "battle sexist behaviour and violence against women" by providing recommendations to improve the institution's culture, especially in regards to respect towards women ("University of Ottawa", 2014, para. 1). Amidst the police investigation, four student leaders resigned as a result of the publication of a "sexually explicit Facebook chat about …the head of the student federation" ("University of Ottawa appoints task force to tackle sexism, violence against women", 2014, para. 1). This appointment was a response to the evidence of rape culture on campus; the university wanted to demonstrate that it had learned from the situation and that it was working towards remedying the problem ("University of Ottawa appoints task force to tackle sexism, violence against women", 2014).

Reputational crises can also vary in nature. A good example is the publication of the photo of Olympic champion Michael Phelps smoking marijuana. In order to understand the response strategies used by the athlete and his sponsors, one study focused on the release of this photo using Benoit's Image Restoration Theory (Walsh & McAllister-Spooner, 2011). While the photo generated negativity towards the Olympian, he escaped the ordeal unscathed, despite having been charged with a DUI earlier the same year. His positive reputation acted as a buffer to protect his reputation in both situations, but his effective use of responses helped him protect his image throughout the ordeal (Coombs 2007). The authors explain that Phelps' sponsors' reputations were also

at stake, but that all involved in the ordeal effectively used of mortification, apologia, bolstering and corrective action techniques to protect their reputations. They stress that in avoidable circumstances, such as these, the actor in question must explicitly admit to the wrongdoing and state their corrective action, indirectly highlighting the lesson learned from the situation (Walsh & McAllister-Spooner, 2011).

2.9 Crisis and Fans

Sports hold a prominent place in popular culture; devoted fans tend to demonstrate "passionate interests", as referred to by Tarde. Fearn-Banks (1996) stipulates that a strong relationship with stakeholders can either help prevent a crisis or at least diminish its effects and duration, if one does occur (as cited by Bruce & Tini, 2008). If an organization fails to please its publics, mutual and passionate interests may create high value towards this failed circumstance. Increased value results in higher visibility (within the media/communities), leading to the perception of a crisis: "if stakeholders believe there is a crisis, the organization is in a crisis" (Coombs, 2009, p.99).

Nicholson (2006) explains that sports crises usually refer to problems within a club, league or association that "[have] the potential to cause a negative impact or at the very least negative publicity…transforming the functional into the dysfunctional" (p.181). Stoldt et al., (2012) describe a crisis as "a situation or occurrence possessing the potential to significantly damage a sport organization's financial stability and/or credibility with constituents" (p.197).

Nicholson (2006) lists four types of crises possible within a sports organization: internal, external, sporadic or systemic. Internal crises occur within the organization, without any impact on the public, while external crises penetrate the walls of the

organization, impacting its stakeholders (Nicholson, 2006). Sporadic crises are unexpected, and provide no possible warnings (for example, a plane crashing into a stadium) (Nicholson, 2006). Systemic crises are the opposite of sporadic crises; Nicholson (2006) explains that this crisis "has been growing and festering within, usually as a result of organizational inadequacy, such as corruption, illegal activity or manifestly inappropriate culture and procedures" (p.183). He highlights that this is the most dangerous type of crisis, because management is difficult due to the crisis' ability to feed into the media's appetite (Ibid.).

As professional sports have grown into complex organizations, their management has also become increasingly intricate, making proper crisis and media management paramount (Nicholson, 2006.). Without proper crisis management, media management is impossible, and leads to potentially disastrous reputational consequences (Nicholson, 2006). Media management includes perception management and the effort to conform to societal norms and to the expectations of stakeholders; "if the distance between the actions of the sport organization and the values of society is small", a crisis is unlikely (Nicholson, 2006, p.185). A crisis assumes a large distance (Nicholson, 2006).

2.10 Situational Theory of the Publics

Situational Theory of the Publics, developed by Grunig and Hunt (1984), seeks "to explain when and how people communicate and when communications aimed at people are most likely to be effective" and has roots in classic public opinion theorist, John Dewey's, studies on the role of the public in democracy (p.148). Dewey suggested that, when faced with a common problem or interest, otherwise disconnected people will

resort to the same behaviours, eventually organizing themselves into groups in order to promote change (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig, 1997).

Grunig and Hunt (1984) built on this theory, suggesting that organizations can determine when, why and how individuals will communicate about a given issue, and how their cognitions and behaviours will be affected through their segmentation into different publics. PR professionals can then detect emerging publics, determine whether or not communication should be initiated and also predict the publics' "responsiveness to issues, [their] amount and nature of communication behaviour, [the] effects of communication on cognitions, attitudes and behaviours, and the likelihood of participating in collective behaviour [aimed at pressuring] organizations" (Dozier & Ehling, 1992; Grunig, 1997, p.8).

The three main concepts related to this theory are attitudes and cognitions; situations (signifying reoccurring issues such as Aids, pollution, heart problems, etc.), and issues, defined as the creation of conflict within a system (Grunig & Repper, 1992). These concepts help determine the type of public, and their communication behaviours and cognitions. This theory also "captures dynamics of changing *linkages* between organizations and those involved or affected by them" (Dozier & Ehling, 1992, p.170). Regular maintenance of these linkages (relationships) is crucial; during turbulent times, it is imperative that an organization manages these linkages, as they are apt to change more rapidly than usual (Grunig, 2007). "People are more likely to be motivated to think, evaluate, and act in situations that involve them [and that] they view as problematic" (Grunig, 1997, p.20); a stakeholder that feels he is affected by an issue is more likely to pursue solutions, and will consequently escalate an issue into a crisis.

Four types of publics exist: non-publics (no connections between individuals), latent (individuals face similar problems, without this recognition), aware (latent publics who have recognized that they face similar problems) and active (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Based on public type, PR professionals can determine effective communication strategies and levels, as well as the public's likelihood of cognition/attitude construction and engagement in participative behaviours (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig, 1997).

Active publics are aware publics, who have organized their attitudes and cognitions, and have proceeded to take action against their shared problem through activities (boycotts, letters, meetings, etc.) with the goal of raising awareness amongst their peers (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig & Repper, 1992; Grunig, 1997). Communication with this public is difficult due to their constructed opinions and their resistance to dissonance; they selectively seek and retain information that supports their beliefs (Grunig & Repper, 1992; Grunig & Hunt, 1984). It is also viewed as reactive communication, as active publics have already initiated the onset of a crisis through action (Grunig & Repper, 1992). Grunig & Hunt (1984) suggest that PR practitioners engage with aware publics as they have disorganized thoughts, weak attitudes and are less likely to take action, easing the influence of opinions and the avoidance of crises (Grunig, 1997; Grunig & Repper, 1992).

An individual's level of engagement in information seeking or information processing, when presented with a message, is what helps classify a public. These two dependent variables are what differentiate active communication behaviours from passive ones; however, this theory cannot provide insight on cognition types, or whether they will be associated to positive or negative attitudes (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig, 1997).

Information seeking is defined as purposeful environmental scanning and information analysis, whereas information processing refers to the passive message discovery/recognition, without any personal effort (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig, 1997). Additionally, there exist three independent variables: level of involvement, problem recognition, and constraint recognition. Publics are deemed situational due to the strong link to attitude and cognitions; as situations and issues change, so do their solutions, and, consequently, the associated attitudes and cognitions (Grunig, 1997).The different variations of these independent variables are what create different situational publics, as they "affect the construction of cognitions about issues" (Grunig & Repper, 1992, p.157).

The degree of connection an individual feels towards a certain issue defines *level of involvement*. An increased magnitude of this variable causes certain messages to resonate more, contributing to a greater level of processing, and therefore a higher likelihood to possess organized cognitions, attitudes and a willingness to engage in problem solving behaviours (Grunig, 1997; Grunig & Hunt, 1984). "An individual's cognitive perception of a situation [is what determines] that he or she has a connection to [it]", thus increasing their likelihood of creating an active public (Grunig & Repper, p.136). It is important to note that a message's saliency increases if an individual perceives that others, within the same community, share the same opinions or are similarly affected by said message; the increase is greater if it is shared by public figures, such as news reporters (Aldoory & Van Dyke, 2004 as cited by Aldoory et al., 2010).

The second independent variable, *problem recognition*, indicates an individual's detection of a problem within a given situation, as well as their thoughts about solving said problem (Grunig, 1997; Grunig & Hunt, 1984). This causes people to seek out

information and find solutions when they are faced with an uncertain and problematic situation (Grunig & Repper, 1992). The last variable determines the level to which an individual recognizes the barriers that hinder problem solving (regarding said message); barriers discourage communication behaviour, while a lack of them promotes dissonance (Grunig, 1997; Aldoory et al., 2010; Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

In 1982, Grunig and Hunt conducted a study that demonstrated that cognitions were formed amongst individuals who were highly involved in an issue, suggesting that involvement influences thoughts towards particular issues and causes a change and/or formation of attitudes and behaviours towards said issues (Grunig & Repper, 1992). Though communication may influence behaviour temporarily, long term behavioural changes only occur when an issue resonates with the public; organizations must ensure that issues never resonate strongly with stakeholders.

2.11 Situational Crisis Communication Theory

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), developed by Coombs (1998; 2006; 2009; 2012), allows organizations to understand the levels of reputational threat caused by a crisis, through the assumption that individuals feel an increased desire to understand causes of *negative* events and to attribute different degrees of responsibility for crisis onset. Coombs (2012) uses attribution theory as a base theory due to its "social-psychological … attempts to explain how people make sense of events" (p.37). Responsibility attributions are more likely to occur during a crisis due to its negative nature, thus affecting stakeholder interactions with the organization (Coombs, 1995).

SCCT provides three tools: a framework for categorizing crises, a means to predict and understand responsibility attribution, and respective response strategies

(Appendix G) (Coombs, 2006). The significance of matching the appropriate response to the public's perceived level of responsibility is crucial; providing a response that denies appropriate responsibility serves only to decrease the reputation of the organization (Coombs, 2006). Responsibility plays a large part in SCCT; levels are proportional to the levels of threat and image damage faced by the organization in question (Coombs, 1998; 2004; 2012). Coombs (2009) advises organizations to follow two steps when assessing the public's attribution of responsibility, in order to create a suitable crisis communication plan. Step one requires the determination of the crisis cluster in which the organization belongs: was the organization a victim? Was the crisis an accident? Was the crisis preventable (Coombs, 2009)? Clusters are based on responsibility levels; the victim cluster is attributed the lowest level, and consequently the mildest reputational threat, while the preventable crisis possesses the strongest responsibility attributions and poses the most severe threat on the organization (Coombs, 2004). The accidental cluster is situated midway, holding minimal responsibility attributions due to the perception that the crisis was unintentional or uncontrollable (Coombs, 2004; 2006).

Higher levels of damage may cause stakeholders to view the organization as a victim (Coombs, 1998). Positive stakeholder relationships also work in the organization's favour, because they have a deflective power versus crises; individuals tend to ignore negative criticisms when they are partial towards an organization (Coombs and Holladay, 2001). Studies on relationships, reputation and crises, however, suggest that relationships and performance have higher impacts on reputation than do a history of past crises; Coombs and Holladay (2001) coined this phenomena the *Velcro Effect* to explain that "a performance history is like Velcro [that] attracts and snags additional reputational

damage" (p.338). Though positive performance and relationship history may have no impact on the attributions of responsibility, a negative history can increase reputational damage (Coombs & Holladay, 2001).

Step two involves understanding the intensifying factors of the crisis: a history of crises (consistency) and negative/positive relationships with stakeholders (distinctiveness) (Coombs, 2004; 2006; 2009; 2012). If an intensifier manifests itself, the crisis is promoted to the higher cluster level (Victim → Accidental → Intentional) (Coombs 2004; 2006; 2007). Coombs (2012) also explains that stakeholder anger acts as an intensifier, causing individuals to spread negative word-of-mouth.

Based on assessments made in these two steps, "the crisis manager can select the appropriate response for the crisis" (Coombs, 1998, p.178). Depending on the severity of the repercussions on members of the public, messages might need an "accommodating" frame to prevent further reputational damage; management should focus efforts on helping the victims and providing corrective advice, such as instruction, while guaranteeing future crisis prevention (Coombs, 1998, 2012). Accident crises require organizations to provide justifications/excuses, while messaging following an intentional crisis/accident (with an intensifier) should focus on apologies and compensation to stakeholders (Coombs, 2012).

Coombs (1995) states "people make judgments about the causes of events based upon the dimensions of locus, stability and controllability" (p. 448). Locus relates to control over a situation: are the factors causing the crisis internal, making the actor responsible? Or, are they external, making the environment is responsible (Coombs, 1995)? External locus of control reduces responsibility attributions, since control comes

from outside of the organization (Coombs, 1995). Stability determines if the cause of a crisis is permanent or in variance, and is determined by reviewing an organization's performance history (Coombs, 1995). Coombs (2004) concluded that history was a crucial factor in responsibility attribution, as it has the potential to intensify each cluster. This is particularly true when negative information is presented; it increases negative perceptions of the organization as well as responsibility attributions (Coombs, 1995; 2004). If a crisis has occurred before, it is viewed as stable, making the organization responsible; the public is more forgiving when it is an isolated event (Coombs, 1995). Controllability establishes organizational impact over the crisis; was there any intention in causing one? Or, was it completely unintentional? (Coombs, 1995). Coombs (1995) explains that attribution is reduced when the public deems crises as unintentional. The highest level of responsibility is attributed to organizational crises that are high in stability, low in external control and high personal control; the lowest possible responsibility attribution would be for the inverse (Coombs, 1998; 2004).

Schultz, Utz and Goritz's (2010) study elaborates on SCCT, concluding that when information strategies were used via Twitter, "[they] resulted in less negative crisis reactions, than the strategy of apology and sympathy" used via blogs and newspaper as a result of the ambiguity in these types of responses (p. 25). The study also assessed the effects of media on secondary crisis communication and reactions, defined as message "recipient's intentions to tell a friend about the crisis, to share the received information with others and to leave comments", while secondary reactions included "behavioural intentions such as the willingness to boycott the organization and to persuade others to do so" (Schultz et al., 2011, p.21). They also concluded "secondary crisis communication

was highest in the newspaper condition…[as] people talk more about newspaper articles than about blogs or tweets" (Scultz et al., 2011, p.25). They explain that newspapers are seen as more reliable and neutral sources, and, thus, do not project subjective views of an organization in crisis (Schultz et al., 2009). However, the authors maintained, "talking about something and acting are …two different things", meaning that actions do not always correspond to the words or ideas expressed by individuals (Scultz et al., 2011, p.25).

The literature presented served as a guide to fully comprehend the case at hand, and to place the study within the context of current research surrounding crisis communications, specifically with regards to social media. A thorough understanding of the socio-cultural implications of hockey within the Canadian context (presented in the following section) permitted an even richer knowledge base and contributed to a higher level of understanding of the data during the analysis. .

### 3. NHL Lockout and Socio-cultural Context

Nationalism, according to Alan Bairner (2001) can be defined by ethnicity (where you are from, your language and race), civics (citizenship within a political entity) or it can be social (an equal mix of both ethnic and civic nationalism linked to the idea of a shared community and culture). Similarly, identity is explained through dichotomies (Jackson, 2002). However, while nationalism is described through categorization, he explains that identity manifests itself through similarities and differences to other cultures (Jackson, 2002). Sports are seen as a means to celebrate identity and can be studied to observe displays of nationalism; though not always articulated, they are visible through actions and behaviours. Jackson (2002) explains that, "Sport has long played a major role in the social construction of national identity in Canada" (p.171). For example, the Gretzky trade between the Edmonton Oilers and the LA Kings, which occurred simultaneously to the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement, caused Canadians to perceive an impending national crisis, leading them to fear that Canada was becoming increasingly Americanized (Jackson, 2002). To aggravate the situation, Canadians saw Gretzky's marriage to an American as a realization of their worst fears: an "excessively close political, economic, and cultural [tie]" to the USA (Jackson, 2002, p.174).

But how does culture relate to identity? According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, culture can be defined as "the beliefs, customs, arts, etc., of a particular society, group, place, or time" or "a way of thinking, behaving, or working that exists in a place or organization" (Culture, Merriam-Webster, 2015). Our identity relates to our actions and our behaviours, while culture encompasses these behaviours, implying our membership to a certain group, and therefore to a certain culture. Globalization has

played an important part in making Canada multicultural, and in leaving room for cultural heterogenization, but has also made it difficult to extract behaviours and actions that define Canadians. Culture is no longer limited to locality; individuals buy and eat the same things, speak the same way and resemble each other, by reason of technology and globalization (Bairner, 2001).

Many associate hockey to Canadian identity and culture because it has been considered one of the rare things that unites Canadians (Buma, 2012). Despite hockey's existence prior to WWI, its influence manifested itself in Canadian culture at the emergence of mass communications. Telegraphy, magazines, radio and TV permitted a wide reach to broad viewers, allowing it to gain a national audience (Whitson & Gruneau, 1994). Consequently, nearly a century of traditions, heroes, folklore, community teams, memories and pop culture permitted the sport to be branded into the identities of Canadians across the nation, regardless of religion, class, race or language (Buma, 2012).

Hockey plays a big role in communities across the nation. Communities, as well as fans, are given commonality (*their* team) and the opportunity to come together to encourage their team. In 2014, Canadian Tire released a commercial for Team Canada's Olympic Hockey team. It highlighted the notion of community within hockey by focusing on team Canada captain Jonathan Toews and also lending the spotlight to everyone in the community that gave him the opportunity to succeed in professional hockey (Team Photo, 2014). When a player gets their "town's name on Hockey Night in Canada [they are] recognized nationally as an important local component of the larger hockey-playing whole" (Buma, 2012, p.82). This success requires the community's dedication, hard work, good will, sociability and pride (Whitson & Gruneau, 1994).

Canadian Tire makes the commercial relatable because of the "commonality [that] has fixed itself in the Canadian collective memory to the point where it has helped to build a national popular culture" (Whitson & Gruneau, 1994, p.214).

The knowledge and "accumulated experiences of playing and watching the game at different levels has settled so deeply in the Canadian social memory that the very act of consuming the game has had a tendency to make people feel 'Canadian'" (Whitson & Gruneau, 1994, p.214). When hockey players from small towns make it to the big leagues, their community views their success as a national contribution, as well as source of pride (Buma, 2012). Today, technology has reshaped the traditional concept of the community, dispelling proximity as a factor that maintains relationships and bonds (Whitson & Gruneau, 1994). With these tools, we are able to watch, discuss and participate in memories on a national level, such as in Canada's gold-medal game against the USA, at the 2014 Sochi Olympics.

3.1 The evolution of hockey culture and commercialization

When civic builders recognized professional hockey teams as investment opportunities, they built stadiums promoting the sport as an exciting and satisfying form of entertainment. Hockey would allow consumers a sense of collective identification so strong that, despite ownership and operations not belonging to their municipalities, residents still felt that they were city-owned (Whitson & Gruneau, 1994). This sense of community centers around commercialism; residents associate the team to a part of their municipality, while forgetting that hockey is in fact a business and that they are the consumers. Today, identity is associated to purchases, a concept that is transferable to hockey (the product) (Whitson & Gruneau, 1994). Whitson and Gruneau (1994)

emphasize this when they states that "the rhetoric of civic loyalty in hockey [is now] completely promotional" (p.220).

Canadians have always felt it necessary to distinguish themselves from Americans; they consider the US's intervention with the game as a risk to their identity (Buma, 2012). As a result of the country's "wary, yet largely unrestricted attitude towards American media products" (Jackson, 2002, p.167), the Americanization of Canadian products and culture is permitted. Canadians fear that their culture and identity are disappearing in the wake of the "continental monoculture, increased globalization, and the loss of centralized homogenous Canadian identity" (Buma, 2012, p.85). This fear is a result of Americans' inability to fully appreciate the sport, and has been a reality since the 1920s (Buma, 2012; Whitson & Gruneau, 1994). Capitalism is also a contributing factor; Canadians see "American capitalism as having ruined professional hockey by making it more about profit than play" (Buma, 2012, p.90). Historical events between big and small towns are often used as allegories in Canadian hockey literature to illustrate the war between the USA and Canada, as well as the cultural consequences of hockey capitalism" (Buma, 2002, p.103). The battle between theses fictitious towns helps "establish and entrench the pastoral myth of recreational small-town hockey as being more authentic or pure than profit-driven big city professional hockey" (Buma, 2002, p.286).

The fear of Americanization loomed when Gary Bettman was hired as the NHL's first commissioner in 1992. His vision involved expanding the league and acquiring high-profile investors in new American markets to increase the number of teams in the league (Buma, 2002). At the time he was hired, two Canadian teams (Quebec City and

Winnipeg) were struggling due to their "inability to tap into the NHL's expanding media efforts, the lack of a league-wide revenue sharing … [and] outdated arena facilities" (Buma, 2002, p.97).  As a result, Canadians saw "'[their] game'…being systematically dismantled and shipped south" (Buma, 2002, p.98); both teams were relocated to Colorado and Phoenix respectively.

3.2 Hockey and Myth

As with other professional sports, many hockey fans idolize their favourite players, viewing them as "larger-than-life folk heroes, exemplars of skills and apparent personal qualities that most people can only dream about" (Whitson & Gruneau, 1994, p. 216). Professional athletes' achievements are inspirational and suggest "a life of passion and possibility, in which self-expression and total commitment still matter" (Whitson & Gruneau, 1994, p.217).  This ideal promises that hard work, dedication and perseverance lead to success. Whitson and Gruneau (1994) compare "the twentieth-century male sports hero [to] the modern successor to the masculine heroes of ancient Western mythology" because they both always emerge successful when "the forces arrayed against [them] seem most daunting" (p.142). Hockey players who do not meet these expectations fail to hold the position of hero in the minds of hockey fans.

3.3 Case: The NHL lockout 2012-2013

On June 29, 2012, the NHL began negotiations with the Players' Association (NHLPA), concerning a new collective bargaining agreement (CBA); central to the negotiations was the NHL's desire to place a salary cap on the players (Timeline, 2012). On September 16, 2012, a lockout was announced due to a failure of both parties to agree on contractual terms; months had gone by with many proposals ending in stalemates.

Negotiations persisted until January, causing a loss of four and half month's worth of games and revenue (Leonard, 2012). In addition to game cancellations, the NHL also cancelled the annual Winter Classic hockey game, its accompanying festival, and the All-Star Game/Week slated for January 2013.

Towards the end of the lockout, the NHLPA's board of directors requested a vote by their membership on the decision to file a disclaimer of interest, "in which the union would cease to represent its members and disband, allowing [the players] to file individual anti-trust lawsuits against the NHL" (Leonard, 2013). This was a result of the players' belief that the league had failed to honour its contracts. In response, the NHL filed a class-action complaint with the National Labour Relations Board for unfair labour practices (Leonard, 2013). Ironically, cancellations, lost revenue and legal issues were only a portion of the consequences of the lockout that, ultimately, aimed to determine the allocation of hockey related revenues (HRR).

This was not the first lockout in recent NHL history; it was the third lockout in less than 20 years under Commissioner Gary Bettman. Fans were frustrated and disappointed with the reoccurrence of work stoppages. Communities, whose livelihood depended heavily on their local hockey team for revenues produced during the season, saw local business falter and fail.

As the lockout progressed, the public lost interest in the NHL, and moved on to different sport leagues. The loss of half the season seriously affected the NHL's revenues, their fan base, brand value, stakeholders; the 2004-2005 lockout cost the company a major contract with ESPN (NHL brand value lost, 2013; NHL Lockout, 2012).

3.4 The NHL Lockout – A Crisis?

As mentioned earlier, many scholars (ex. Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger (2007), Pearson and Mitroff (1993), Coombs (1999)) explain that the main symptoms of a crisis are the inability of an organization to perform daily operations and to meet its high priority goals. Uncertainty and time constraints are also contributing factors to crisis onset (Coombs, 1999; Ury & Smoke, 1985). Since games are the league's primary source of revenue, everyday operations were inhibited by the lockout, subsequently preventing the attainment of a high priority goal: profit. Uncertainty, in this instance, came in the form of time and stakes; the NHL was uncertain of the compromises it was to make during negotiations and was also ignorant of the duration of the lockout. These factors suggest the onset of a crisis.

The lockout came about as a result of the NHL's inability to come to an agreement with the NHLPA prior to start of the hockey season. By locking out players, and accordingly cancelling games, the league was unable to meet stakeholder expectations and to fulfill its obligations of a 2012-2013 hockey season. According to Coombs (1999), crises can be symbolic, just like they can be objective; power is given to stakeholder perceptions. Unfulfilled expectations result in negative reactions on the part of fans and stakeholders; the gap, between actions and values or expectations, in this case, was large, therefore a crisis was to be expected (Nicholson, 2006). Failure to meet these expectations threatened the legitimacy and credibility of the league (Caillouet, 1991 as cited by Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Lerbinger, 1997). When the financial stability of the organization is threatened and when stakeholders become doubtful of the sport organization in question, Stoldt et al. (2012) suggest that a crisis has indeed been

initiated. Nicholson (2006) also explains that this can be viewed as a systemic crisis, as disagreement surrounding CBA terms was imminent. Due to the league's inadequacy in managing negotiations in a timely manner, it was forced to initiate a lockout, and consequently a crisis (Nicholson, 2006).

This case also provided information regarding the use of crisis communication within social media, and reputation management, within the context of sports and online forums. Canada hosts two major and historical hockey franchises; the Montreal Canadiens and the Toronto Maple Leafs are part of the 'Original Six' NHL hockey teams. Failed HRR allocation and negotiations are what ultimately caused the lockout, significantly impacting attitudes and opinions of Canadian fans. Not only were they losing their sense of community and belonging, they were also losing their faith in the heroes they once revered.

Through comments posted on online forums, by active Canadian fans during the lockout, it was possible to understand opinions and thoughts of fans. This provided insight into their reactions and included pertinent information, such as the underlying causes of said reactions. The same rationale was applied to press releases and conferences held by the NHL during the same time frame. Analyzing messages communicated through these deliverables was key in the proper comprehension of strategies used to protect the league's reputation during the crisis. Comparing data from both sources, allowed for the recognition of strategy and messaging evolution (as fan feedback became available), and helped identify if perceptions of the league evolved throughout the lockout.

**4. Methodology**

4.1 Research questions

Crisis communication is a large component of organizational communication and reputation management. It requires strategizing due to its inherent capability to alter perceptions held by stakeholders. Social media creates another dimension to be considered within this type of communication; the relatively new medium has the potential to drastically alter the views held by the public as a result of its interactive nature. Organizations now have even more at stake and more to consider. The novelty of this medium makes it unfamiliar; little research surrounds it. To understand it better, the following research questions were posed through the lens of the NHL Lockout:

I. How did the comments made by fans in discussion forums affect the framing of the NHL messages during the lockout?

II. How did the NHL frame its messages to the media during the lockout?

   i. How did fans react to the lockout? What opinions and comments did they convey through the use of online forums?

4.2 Type of research design

This research utilized ethnographic content analysis to answer research questions. Content analysis, according to Krippendorff (2004), "entails a systematic reading of a body of texts, images, and symbolic matter, not necessary from an author's or user's perspective" (p.1). Content from the NHL's external communications (press releases) and social media messages posted by its public were collected as the data for the study.

There are a variety of uses for content analysis, such as *rhetorical analysis* (the study of message delivery, and its intended/actual effects); *ethnographic content analysis*

(the study of themes/ideas pulled from specific texts); *conversation analysis* (the study of verbal interactions as they appear in a natural setting) (Krippendorff, 2004). For the purpose of this research, ethnographic content analysis was used. Ethnographic content analysis is oriented in documenting and understanding the communication of meaning and theoretical relationships through the reflexive and interactive investigation of messages (Altheide and Schneider, 2013). Central to this type of methodology is the comparison of documents to discover similarities or differences from case to case. The aim is to develop concepts through circular and reflexive analysis of data, rather than through theorizing and hypothesis confirmation. Researchers are in a constant state of discovery and comparison; while categories and variables initially guide the study, others are expected to emerge as the study progresses.

Unlike in quantitative content analysis, rather than using frequency and word counts to analyze data, the objective of this type of research is to discover new and emergent patterns through reflexive and circular analysis. (Altheide and Schneider, 2013)

4.3 Data Collection

According to Yin (1994) there are six important data sources that may be used for case studies: "documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participation-observation and physical artifacts" (p.78). For this study, the data collected was used to evaluate and to understand the relationships between the NHL and its fans. It also served as a tool to observe the evolution of public perception throughout the lockout.

Samples were determined through purposive and systematic sampling. Data was collected within a specific time frame, determined by the duration of the lockout (September 16, 2012 – January 9, 2013), and was categorized by communication type

(press release or article) and source (news outlet or the NHL). Press releases were chosen based on major announcements within this time frame, such as the cancellation of the Winter Classic or the announcement of the official end of the lockout. Media availability transcripts were also analyzed because they provided a wealth of information, directly from official spokespeople, which might otherwise be unavailable in carefully crafted news releases. This provided further insight into the types of crisis strategies and messages planned by the organization.

Four Canadian news outlets were chosen due the cultural link between hockey and Canada, for their clout, and sports coverage. Those chosen (the Sun, the National Post, CTV News and TSN) also offered the opportunity to comment on their stories. Using national outlets allowed for a broader reach and for a more complete analysis of fans' feedback during the lockout. Consequently, messages from these news sites' online discussion forums were chosen based on the accompanying news article's correspondence to the dates and messages released at key moments during the lockout. Due to the high number of user comments from each news outlet, comments were chosen based on systematic sampling: the first and last 20 comments from each news article were analyzed totaling 955 user comments. This was in addition to the nine press releases and the four press conference transcripts from the NHL that were also analyzed.

4.4 Analysis Protocol

Three phases emerged during the analysis of the data: analysis of the discussion forums, analysis of the NHL's press releases and transcripts, and a merger and comparison of the messages from the discussion forums with the press releases from the league.

In phase one, each unit of analysis was a user comment. These comments were coded for:

- Themes: reoccurring ideas and patterns within the text

- Tone: were messages positive or negative in nature? What sentiments were expressed? Were the words used derogatory or positive?

- Reactions: responses made by users as a result of comments made by other users or messages relayed from press releases

The second phase constituted of the analysis of the NHL's press releases & transcripts. They were also coded for themes, as well as fan mention (messages directed at/or mentioning fans). The last phase included a comparison of the findings from phase one and two. In this phase, themes were refined, narrowed and consequently compared in order to answer questions derived from guiding theories:

- How did the public define the crisis? How did the organization define the crisis?

- How did organization refer to their fans in their communications?

- How did the public influence the framing of messages made by the NHL?

- How did the public communicate their views on the lockout?

## 4.5 Delimitations and Limitations

The delimitations of this study were as follows:

- A public corporation, rather than multiple, was being studied.

- Comments posted on news site forums were the only social media tool assessed.

- The focus was on communications that occurred during a crisis within an rganization, therefore they were limited to a certain time frame.

- Communications made by the organization (NHL) and comments made in public forums were the only types of communication studied.

The limitations of this study were as follows:

- The history, size and location of the NHL, as well as their position during the time frame selected had the potential to affect levels of influence on the messages being studied, potentially influencing the overall results of the study.

- Since the study focused on a single corporation, conclusions could not be generalized to all corporations, but could serve as guidelines.

- Data was collected during a particular time frame (September 16, 2012 – January 9, 2013); effects on public perception could not manifest themselves until after the study was completed.

- Users sometimes used vague, unclear language and terms making it difficult to decipher intended messages.

- Though news reports on announcements were issued on the same day, content could differ amongst news outlets, thus influencing the content of users' comments.

- Comments could have been posted on forums of an earlier date. This did not mean that users did not have other or newer information at their disposal. They simply could have waited until later dates, to gather information, before posting on the forum of a past date.

4.6 Validity and Reliability

To ensure reliability, the data collected was not misrepresented or falsified during data collection and analysis. Though samples were systematically selected, they were not

selected with the intention to sway or influence the results of the study. In order to understand the framing of the messages, NHL press releases and press conferences were utilized as sources and studied. Data concerning fan comments and reactions was obtained through discussion forums, particularly the comment sections found below reports on news websites. All data collected was analyzed using the same analytical protocol to ensure consistency throughout the study.

Validity was ensured through a detailed and reflective description of all messages studied. No exclusive claims were made, as there was no guarantee that the findings were applicable to all situations. Through analysis, connections from data were carefully considered to maximize findings and claims. Final claims were made based on the empirical data that presented itself consistently through a thorough and diligent analysis.

## **5. Analysis and Findings**

More than 100 codes were drawn from the comments posted in discussion forums during the lockout, while thirty-eight codes were drawn from media deliverables and transcripts pushed by the NHL. As mentioned earlier, different analysis phases allowed for each code to be categorized and separated based on senders (NHL or engaged fans), for a better understanding of themes manifested throughout the duration of the lockout. Themes facilitated the understanding of opinions and reactions of the fans during the crisis, and also provided insight on how the NHL framed their messages to the media during the crisis. Findings allowed for comparisons to be made between user comments and NHL deliverables, and to understand the evolution, if any, of the framing of the league's messages from the start to the end of the lockout.

The two guiding theories helped decipher the type of public dealt with during the crisis as well as their responsiveness and attitude towards the issue. In this particular case, since participation in online forums was high, fans were classified as an active public; predictions of communication levels, cognition and attitude formation, and collective participation were possible (Grunig and Hunt, 1984; Grunig 1997).

Determining threat levels during a crisis, as well as the type of public involved, is crucial in determining message framing. Coombs' SCCT was used as a reference to understand the reputational threat caused by the lockout. Based on this theory, potential levels of responsibility, attributed by the NHL's stakeholders, and reactions to messages were determined. As previously mentioned, Coombs (1995, 1998, 2004, 2012) explains that stakeholders attribute different levels of responsibility to organizational crises based on a series of factors, such as a history of past and similar crises. Through responsibility

levels, he suggests that organizations can select specific message framing in order to mitigate threats, such as negative word of mouth (Coombs, 1995). Appendix E provides a list of themes drawn from the analysis of the comments posted by fans in online forums.

5.1 User comments

*September 15, 2012*

Comments following the announcement of the lockout took on a negative tone. Users often mention the problems they perceived within the league, such as over-priced tickets/merchandise; reoccurring lockouts; revenue sharing that enabled the existence of failing teams'; a decrease in product quality. These problems have evidently been an issue for consumers for a while; fans expressed a lack of hope in the league, believing it to be unable to function efficiently. Some expressed concern towards the potential repercussions that could manifest as a result of the lockout, while others were so frustrated with the league that they had become apathetic.

Fans immediately sought to attribute responsibility for the lockout to either the league or the players' union. Much of the blame attributed to the league was directed at Gary Bettman, the league's commissioner. Some expressed their desire for his resignation or termination, for example, "GET RID OF BETTMAN". Criticism is, however, aimed at both parties. Users suggested that players were egotistical, childish, unappreciative and greedy. Comparisons to "spoiled children [who have] tantrums", suggests that fans are not very supportive of their cause. Users viewed players' salaries as too high, suggesting that their plight to get higher salaries were unwarranted. These character attacks were a result of responsibility attributions.

Greed was a contentions topic that overwhelmed criticisms; users believed that money was the only factor influencing business decisions made by the NHL, causing fans to express that they felt neglected, ignored and underappreciated; its was as if the NHL cared more about money than their stakeholders. One user expressed that "in all the talks through all the discussion – I have not heard one word about those will suffer the most: the working-class members whose jobs will be terminated or negatively affected [by the lockout]". (Toronto Sun September 15, 2012). As a result of such feelings, fans stated that they would no longer support the NHL, and would turn to other alternatives and leagues, such as football and other hobbies. A popular suggestion was to support local leagues, or to boycott the NHL in an attempt to make a statement. The fans saw a boycott as a withdrawal of revenues through an absence of ticket and merchandise sales, and perceived it as a form of payback to the league for the hardships caused by the lockout.

Sarcasm and skepticism was also evident; fans saw the owners' and players' arguments on how to divide money greedy, as many fans faced unemployment or the inability to afford NHL tickets. They also expressed their failure to comprehend how such high earners could complain about a lack of money: "It is disgusting that multi millionaires are fighting over money; there's an incredible amount of fans that don't even have jobs". (CTV September 15, 2012)

Though infrequent, some users came to the defense of the league's owners. In response to the negative criticisms, some reminded their counterparts that the NHL should still be regarded as a business and that the owners should ultimately be able to choose how to divide their profits. For example, one user stated that the players are "overpaid and ultimately when the boss doesn't want to pay you too much he won't. [The

owners] are successful business men that can invest elsewhere and DON'T NEED [the players]. The players on the other hand need the owners. [They should consider themselves] fortunate if [they] get anything over 40%".  (CTV September 15, 2012)

Speculations and discussions surrounding the details and possible solutions for the impending lockout emerged on this date. Possible risks, possibilities and rewards were discussed, such as the disbandment of the league, measured and weighed in these discussions.

There is an overarching dichotomy of us against them that is easily deciphered in the comments published by users in these forums: rich vs. poor and Canadian vs. American. The disparity between the incomes of the fans and those of the owners and players was a popular topic due to the negotiations at hand. The phrase  "millionaires fighting with millionaires" was often used suggesting a barrier between differing tax brackets. Users often made reference to the notion that hockey is Canada's game, and that it has become increasingly Americanized, and consequently commercialized.

*September 19, 2012*

The same themes seen in the previous dates' comments were visible on this date, however negativity, anger and criticism levels had seemingly increased. Comments, from this date, focused mainly on the neglect felt by the stakeholders from the league; the attribution of responsibility to Bettman for the lockout; as well as suggestions of more attractive alternatives for a league that fans perceived as failing. Fans tended to heavily dissect and criticize the behaviours of the players and of the commissioner, along with the league's operations.

This date also saw the emergence of player support. There was an obvious discord in regards to the way player contracts had been issued and honoured.  Some fans wished to see players hold their ground and stand up for their legal rights; they expressed their resentment towards the league for the lockout. Fans used the forums to remind the league that they are the ones that pay for the tickets and merchandise; without them, the league was null.  Playcop reminded owners and players alike that "it's us little guys who pay your salaries making only 40,000 a year buying hockey tickets spending 100 dollars to watch a game", while dave_the-everyday_gey explicitly "remind[ed] them who REALLY pays the bills" (National Post September 19, 2012).

There was an apparent emphasis on the problems fans perceived with league operations and structure. These problems were blatantly obvious to them and, due to their experiences with past lockouts, they were unsurprised by the onset of another lockout. As a result, fans asked that the NHL not return at the end of it or that it cancel the season, rather than keep fans hoping for a short negotiation process. Once again, responsibility attributions were aimed at the league: "So much BS from Gary Bettman and the owners, cancel the next ten years, I'll watch soccer or football." (SUN September 19, 2012).

Disapproval towards the players' cause was also evident. The idea of replacement players seemed to gain traction in discussion forums and presented a viable solution, as it would bring hockey back, while also replacing players whom the fans deemed as too greedy.

It was also increasingly apparent, on this date, that fans did not relate to the situation in any way, shape or form. They could not empathize with the players or the owners, and were therefore unable to understand their cause. Since most fans were not

millionaires, they felt anger and resentment towards the parties involved: "Yep, it's hard to feel sorry for millionaires arguing dollars with billionaires" (SUN September 19, 2012)

*October 19, 2912*

Anger became the main emotion displayed within the comments posted by users on this date. While users made mention of the usual themes, such as feelings of neglect, under-appreciation, threats of boycotts and fan loss, it was increasingly evident that fans held Bettman accountable for the lockout, as well as its prolongation. Though comments from past dates tended to criticize players and show them disdain, this date's comments saw a shift in responsibility attribution: harsh accusations aimed primarily at the league were a result of fans' focus on prodromal warnings and problems associated with the league. Anger, blame, and greed were pronounced in these comments. For example, one user exclaims: "Fuck the NHL" (SUN October 19, 2012) while another wrote, "Screw them all. Maybe they need to get real jobs" (Ibid.).

Though some felt anger towards the parties involved, others had progressed to apathy towards the situation. An increasing number of users requested that the NHL "cancel it", indicating disappointment and anger, on top of apathy. And while "it" could hold various meanings, it most often referred to the NHL season, as in the comment made by oil90," cancel the year I could care less if they took 2 years off…" (TSN October 19, 2012)  or p_guy : "Cancel the whole season. Next year they'll play for half. NoHockeyLeague." (SUN October 19, 2012). Others expressed their desire to see the cancellation of the NHL in general: "Just fold the league and get it over and done with" (CTV October 19, 2012).

As mentioned previously, disappointment was also visible. Rastatc expressed that "the whole process has been 'thoroughly disappointing' quite frankly"; others pleaded with the NHL and NHLPA to "Git r' dun!" (TSN October 19, 2012). While Jennifer George said that the situation was "really unfortunate for Canadians alike. Us true hockey fans who grew up playing outdoor hockey, and remember the famous red beard [of Lanny McDonald] are truly heart broken. I wish it was not about money, and all about the game" (CTV October 19, 2012).

As mentioned previously, most of the responsibility of the lockout is attributed to Bettman, the NHL's primary spokesperson, and the owners. This belief caused users to mock and criticize his past actions, decisions, as well as those of the league. Some believed that he views lockouts as a "reset button" that he resorts to every time there is a problem (TSN October 19, 2012). Users wanted owners to be more accountable for the contracts they issued; their avoidance of the negotiation process suggested to the fans that they were dishonest.

Fans also began visibly accusing Donald Fehr, the face of the NHLPA, suggesting he too had contributed to the onset of a lockout. As they did with Bettman, fans attacked Fehr personally, suggesting that he was trying to "ruin" the NHL, as he did with Major League Baseball (Major League Baseball). For example, Forumghosts stated "the card up Fehr's sleeve is indeed decertification…Fehr is not afraid to use it, he has threatened MLB with it before" (TSN October 19, 2012). While many took to personally attacking him, others start aiming these attacks at players as well. Fans either suggested that players were clueless/weak negotiators or that they did not want to negotiate at all. One user went as far as to suggest that players were not fully aware of the clauses within their contracts

and that they were chasing ideas that would ultimately cause more harm than good (TSN October 19, 2012). One fan expressed his need to "say just how stupid these players look in turning down this kind of money. The old saying is really true, 'Stay in school'" (TSN October 19, 2012). This also highlighted another topic often referred to, entitlement, which was often mentioned in relation to players' greed, and was often suggested to be the cause of fan idolatry.

In posts referencing money, fans expressed their disapproval and disappointment in the commercialization of the game: "Most teams today have become corporate entities with interest only on the bottom line, hockey is just another portal to that advertising revenue" (SUN October 19, 2012). When mentioning this, they often used "our game", suggesting that the game belongs to Canada, and not to the United States. Thehousehunter explained that "We have allowed our game to be hijacked by Billionaire owners who treat our teams as nothing more than a franchise part of their business" (TSN October 19, 2012). Fans were angered by the drastic changes being made to "their game": "Perhaps also this is the time for the Canadian teams to split from the NHL; form the Canadian Hockey League, and then we get to keep the Stanley Cup in it's rightful place." (CTV October 19, 2012).

The lack of resolve towards negotiations caused fans to realize that money was a priority over themselves; greed and neglect were still very prominent emotions felt by the fans. They found it hard to believe that a "bunch of millionaire owners [were] haggling with millionaire players for who gets what" (National Post October 19, 2012). Fans also recognized insincerity and the NHL's attempts to manipulate stakeholders through their communications. One player sarcastically commended the owners and Bettman for the

"great PR campaign [that was] taking the players union to school in the court of public opinion" (TSN October 19, 2012).

As a result of their frustrations with the league and the players, fans expressed their desire for payback and retribution from both parties. One user hoped that "Maybe by the time the league is in the hole by $1500 million, and players, owners…oh yeah, AND BETTMAN, are all lining up at the food banks, a less greedy mentality will prevail amongst all concerned and they'll get back to playing hockey" (CTV October 19, 2012).

Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) discussions became slightly increased in frequency. In comparison to CBA related comments from previous dates, which centered primarily on fact sharing, this date's CBA comments morphed into a dialogue rather than only close-ended comments; users started asking each other questions and correcting misinformation. Though factual information was being posted, it was rarely posted in a neutral tone; it was often accompanied by speculations of negotiating that was taking place or the possible outcomes/consequences of the lockout.

*November 2, 2012*

On this date, users focused on pointing out their awareness of the league's public relation tactics. There was also an intensification of the following themes: boycott, fan retribution and compensation, apathy, criticism and personal attacks on Fehr. Past themes were still mentioned on this date (stakeholder neglect, greed, support), however there was less focus on the notion of player entitlement and, instead, a shift towards responsibility attributions towards Bettman.

Organizational operations, such as revenue sharing, were quite evidently a point of contention amongst fans; they explained that the quality of hockey had deteriorated as

a result of this system. Comments about revenue sharing suggested that the league purposely enabled failing markets, such as this one: "How much more can you reduce tickets in places like Pheonix, Florida and Tampa Bay…The reason we are in a lockout now is because of these sad markets" (SUN November 2, 2012). Fans saw the league's system as a priority that should have been addressed before problems surrounding salaries. They suggested that they would rather the league cancel the season rather than attempt resolving the issue surrounding players' salaries, indicating the onset of apathy towards the pursuit of the remainder of the season.

Anger was very prominent in the comments posted on this date. It was especially evident in the users who had bought tickets to the Winter Classic Game, as the NHL showed no signs of remorse towards those who had lost out due to the game's cancellation. Fans held both parties responsible for the negative repercussions that were ultimately affecting their emotions and finances. Some went as far as to list the repercussions resulting from the cancellation: "We had to cancel our flights to Detroit, and of course we were penalized monetarily for that" (TSN November 2, 2012). Others suggested that the league purposefully scammed the fans: "smart move by the NHL [to] sell out the event, cancel it, offer reimbursements or lose priority for 2014, so most will keep tickets" (TSN November 2, 2012). This cancellation caused a resurgence of other emotions as well. Fans expressed, once again, that they were being taken for granted, and were consequently neglected in the negotiation process. Staggered cancellations made them feel even more overlooked, as it gave them hope for the return of hockey. It is important to note the league was directly responsible for the cancellation of the Winter Classic, as it was a by-product of the lockout.

Comments surrounding responsibility for revenue control emerged on this date as well. Many mention that the players were not the owners, nor the bosses, and therefore did not exert the power to manage or to allocate revenues. Al questioned other users' comments surrounding this topic with incredulity: "K, can you imagine working for a private company and telling your boss that you want MORE than half of his profit??? NHL is a joke" (CTV November 2, 2012). Darryl also wondered if there were any other "[companies that] would have its employees demand 57 percent of revenue, [while] the owners take all the risks and pay all the costs" (National Post November 2, 2012)

This date also saw the emergence of fan blame. What this means is that fans started pointing fingers at fellow fans. The main complaint was that fans contributed to the problem by complaining about the ongoing lockout, but would go back to the NHL, as soon as it made its return. Fans were concerned that the only way to send the league a message (avoidance of product consumption) was being destroyed because no one was actually willing to avoid consumption. Fans were compared to sheep that meekly took whatever was handed to them, without argument. Truenord claimed that "99.9% of the people swearing the game off will be back", including himself. (TSN November 2, 2012) Another user pointed out, "so many people say they don't miss the NHL and have given up on it, but as we saw after the last lockout, the fans will be back as soon as the puck is dropped again…and all will be forgotten" (CTV November 2, 2012). Fans were compared to a "gullible bunch that [needs their] fix" or robots: "Trust me [the NHL has] calculated that we will all come back like robots" (National Post November 2, 2012).

*November 23, 2012*

New concerns and issues arose on this date, pushing older ones aside. It was evident that fans were starting to lose hope in the NHL's return for the season. Main topics of discussion surrounded negotiation strategies, or a lack thereof from players; the hope that the NHL would cancel the season; possible lockout repercussions, and feelings of apathy. There was a lot less mention of player and owner greed, players' salaries, overpriced NHL products, boycotts, and criticisms of Bettman.

This date saw an influx in criticisms of the negotiation strategies used by both parties. Fans had come to the realization and expectation that the lockout would last. They demonstrated a mix of lost hope, as well as skepticism. For example, one user suggested, "They might as well go and cancel the rest of the season [along with the games they just cancelled]. There is no way they will get a deal done now" (CTV November 23, 2012). Another told other fans not to worry, "the rest of the season will be cancelled too!" (CTV November 23, 2012). This loss of hope was accompanied by anger or disappointment; some fans expressed that the lockout was causing them to go through hockey withdrawal.

There was an obvious shift in responsibility attribution on this date. While criticism from earlier dates focused primarily on blaming the owners, this date saw the blame shift to the players due their inability to negotiate effectively. For example, one user explained that the players' push to decertify the union would cause "the number of teams [to] shrink and … minimum wages [to] come down. Big win for the owners but real pain hasn't even started for most players" (SUN November 23, 2012). Another user

blatantly criticized the players by stating that they "still look like meercats" (TSN November 23, 2012).

Another consequence, of the prolongation of the lockout, was the perception that owners were dishonest. Fans paralleled the owners' dishonesty towards players to dishonesty towards fans, causing them to lose trust in the league. Fans consequently ignored and discredited any messages issued by the NHL. John Finigan explained that he is "totally fed up with the attitude taken by both sides in this dispute with NO regards for anyone else but themselves" (CTV November 23, 2012). Foxk13, a self-proclaimed die-hard fan of 40 years, thought it was "Funny how neither side seems at all concerned that average income people can't afford to bring their kids to the games as it it" (CTV November 23, 2012).

The hypocrisy demonstrated by many users triggered mockery from others. Fans knew that their peers' complaints spoke louder than their expressions of apathy and their desire for progress in negotiations. Anger and incredulity was evident in responses to other users, such as the following; "Uhm? Everybody cares. You're clearly not a hockey fan if you don't care." (National Post November 23, 2012).

*December 14, 2012*

Fans' support of the league and players was much less evident on this date. They continued to express anger towards the situation, the behaviours of those involved, and the entitlement and greed displayed by the players and the owners. If there was any evidence of support by the fans for either party, it was overshadowed by the negativity coming from the remainder of the fans. Criticisms of the league's flawed operations overpowered criticisms aimed at the owners and players.

An increase in the levels of apathy towards the situation was evident in comparison to previous dates. Phrases such as "don't come back" or "just cancel it" reoccurred often, demonstrating the disenchantment felt by the fans towards the lockout. If apathy was not displayed, hopelessness was; some fans had come to expect no season at all. One user told the NHL to RIP, while another told it "buh bye". Those, who were disappointed or angry, expressed a desire for payback. As a result of the prolongation of the lockout, and both parties' childish approach to it, fans had lost patience in the situation. Ideas for payback ranged from violence, such as death to the NHL, to less aggressive actions, such as the hope that Santa would give those involved coal for Christmas.

Comments suggesting that Fehr wants to destroy the NHL increased on this date. Fans saw this choice of a leader and negotiator as a poor one, confirming the players' poor decision-making abilities and negotiating skills. Many comments read as follows: "Don Fehr is more interested in representing the Don Fehr Brand than the NHL players. Players, don't get sucked into doing what's best for Don's brand. Do what's best for your career. Sign a deal" (TSN December 14, 2012). Another user pointed out that "they are willing to put to vote proceed with disclaimer on interest –but NOT put to a vote on the NHL's proposal. It looks like Fehr likes playing Dictator and have his top 10% of NHL players being his henchmen" (TSN December 14, 2012).

Rather than maintain unidirectional communication, users started taking it upon themselves to correct misinformation more candidly, while also participating in more CBA related discussions. As a result, they became increasingly vocal about their disagreements with each other, by providing rebuttals and creating conversations within

conversations. Diplomacy also became less important to convey in their responses; judgments, incredulity and cruelty were obvious in rebuttals to arguments Though this was a new manifestation, discussions still focused on the same issues referred to in past forum posts (speculation, suggestions for solutions, apathy, etc.).

As usual, solutions for the lockout were discussed. While some had potential, others exude mockery and sarcasm.  One user proposed that, if the players were indeed voting for a disclaimer of interest, that they should also vote on the NHL's proposal to end the lockout (TSN December 14, 2012). Another recommended that the "next step [should be] to bring the NHL to US court on charges of collusion" (SUN December 14, 2012). This user believed that this would cause the NHL to quickly make a deal in order to avoid a lawsuit; "without the union the league's revenue sharing system is over. Without the [CBA] most teams will be out of business within a year or two" (SUN December 14, 2012).

*December 20, 2012*

This date saw an evident increase in apathy and an awareness of entertainment alternatives that could serve as replacements for the NHL. Criticism of both Fehr and Bettman had seemingly reached equality; there was no obvious disparity between comments against either leader. The four-month duration of the lockout had caused users to scrutinize and criticize the league to a heightened degree. Consequently, they often made reference to the faults perceived within the organization, while also pointing out that the reoccurrence of lockouts suggested a disregard for stakeholders. Fans repeatedly asked for compensation from the league for taking away their game, and for causing such negative repercussions, particularly to the businesses dependent on the NHL for income.

Many made pleas for compensation from the league. Others were resigned to the fact that the owners would not help the communities in which they operated nor would they compensate their fans for the lockout. It is important to note that the TSN report from this date focused primarily on the lockout's negative impact on local businesses and employees.

Staggered cancellations caused false hope in the fans. After each series of cancellations, fans had their hopes killed by the report of another round of cancellations. This hopelessness caused some to call for payback against the league and players. One suggestion was to "throw all the players and owners in jail for damages done to individuals and businesses alike until a settlement is figured out" (TSN December 20, 2012). Others hoped that both the players and owners would lose money: "I hope they lose billions" or "let them choke on their millions" (National Post December 20, 2012).

*January 9, 2013*

Many new categories surfaced at this date due to the announcement the agreement reached between the NHL and the NHLPA. During the lockout, users made a point to mention that they would not return to watching NHL upon its return, however, following the announcement, fans were very vocal about returning to the game. Nonetheless, such comments were overshadowed by those exclaiming frustration with the situation, particularly with the insincerity of Bettman's apology. Fans saw it as insufficient with respect to their losses; many claim that Bettman's resignation or termination would have been more appropriate than the apology. While some fans announced their return to fandom, others claimed that other entertainment alternatives, specifically the NFL, had won their viewership and allegiance. Interestingly, the anger displayed in the comments

from this date were not always geared at the players and/or the owners; some of it was directed at the fans who complained about the NHL, yet were ready to watch as soon as it returned.

As mentioned earlier, many held Bettman responsible for the lockout, hence their desire for his resignation or termination. They wanted him to "forget the apology…what [they] really need to see is [his] resignation, and the sooner the better" (National Post January 9, 2013). Because fans held him and the owners responsible, they sought compensation; rather than an "apology, [they] want his undertaking to approve three more Canadian teams and his pledge to shut down at least an equal number in the U.S." (National Post January 9, 2013). Little blame was geared solely at the players. Interestingly enough, the blame for the lockout was mostly attributed to owners only or both the NHLPA and NHL as a unit.

As was previously mentioned, fans perceived the apology from the NHL as insincere. This suggests that they did not feel as though they were valued by the league, as had been stated by fans throughout the lockout. Fans rejected the leagues apology, exclaiming that "sorry doesn't cut it". This was due to the neglect they felt throughout the lockout, causing them to believe that the apology was a public relations tactic to protect the league's reputation. The decision to proceed with half of a season seemed to many users as "an attempt to grab some money" (TSN January 9, 2012), and contributed to the feelings of neglect. One user expressed sarcastically, "at least they were thinking of us, and our money of course" (CTV January 9, 2013). The staggered and constant cancellations were a significant factor in the feelings of neglect felt by the fans. Due to

the creation of false hope, fans felt as though the league had "toyed with them", causing their positive perceptions to decrease.

Unlike comments from previous dates, users pleaded with other fans to support the businesses that were affected by the lockout. Such a petition shows that fans had become more realistic in the actions they attempted to take against the league. One fan suggested a way to get back at the league, while providing a means to enjoy the game at the same time:

"You all should go out and watch your team with the people that suffered the most…Go and help them out. Just don't go pay stupid expensive ticket prices to help pad the wallets of the millionaires and billionaires who took our game away. Lets see how angry we really are" (TSN January 9, 2013).

Despite some fans' realistic approaches to compensations, others remained unrealistic with their suggestions. For example, the league should play a full season prior to the 2013-2014 one, in order to compensate for the games missed during the lockout.

In light of the new deal, fans expressed the need for the NHL and the players to come through with a deal that would prevent the reoccurrence of a lockout. One fan suggested that rather than rush back to play half a season, both parties should take the time to make an appropriate deal that would last, in order to avoid the repetition past mistakes.  As had been the case in previous dates, users again reiterated a list of all the problems they saw within the league, providing specific areas for improvement, such as expansions markets (south), stakeholder appreciation, and lockout repetition.

5.2 NHL Press Releases and Press Conferences

To communicate with the media, and consequently with the public, the NHL made use of news releases and press conferences (with transcripts) to relay pivotal decisions and provide insight into the league's communication strategies. Thirty-eight codes were derived from the NHL's news releases and media availability transcripts, which were then categorized into the following themes:

A.  The NHL does not believe it has made any mistakes in decision-making

B.  The NHL follows strict crisis communication strategies

    a.  By-laws are in place, regulating items such as spokespeople

    b.  Misinformation is corrected to avoid its dissemination

    c.  Negotiations do not take place in public forums

    d.  Speculation is never addressed publicly; the league only discusses facts

C.  The NHL shifts the blame to the players' association (PA)

    a.  Denial of responsibility

    b.  The PA is unwilling to negotiate

    c.  The PA is unfair in negotiations

    d.  The NHL is a moral organization

D.  The NHL really wants hockey to return

E.  Messaging addressed to the fans

Press releases and press conferences transcripts can be found in Appendix I.

*September 13 (NHL, 2012a)*

The league announced the onset of the lockout on this date. Many of the questions asked to the league revolved around negotiations and the proposals to date. Bettman, who

acted as the league's primary spokesperson, quickly issued corrections in response to rumours and speculation, in an attempt to prevent the spread of misinformation. Throughout this conference, Bettman constantly reiterated that the NHL had always been willing to negotiate, unlike the Players' Association (PA), who constantly requested contract extensions in order to delay and avoid negotiations.

*September 19 (NHL, 2012b)*

This news release announced the cancellation of a series of games, and the postponement of an NHL related event. There was no mention of fans in this communication.

*October 16 (NHL, 2012c)*

Once again, in this press conference, the NHL reiterated its willingness to negotiate with the PA. Bettman stated that along with his team, "We've given it our best shot", and that they were trying to expedite the process. While the conference focused primarily on the delivery of a contract proposal to the PA, Bettman emphasized that the league did not want to release the specifics of the contract. At this time, there was very little mention of the fans. They were mentioned but once, in the context of the difficulty of the situation.

*October 18 (NHL, 2012d)*

This date marked the release of a proposal. The news release merely announced the public release of the details of the CBA proposal to the NHLPA.

*October 19 (NHL, 2012e)*

This date followed an identical pattern to the news release from September 18.

*November 2 (NHL, 2012f)*

The NHL released a news release on this date to announce the cancellation of games and events. For those who purchased tickets to these events, the release also provided them with directions on what to do with the tickets (once the lockout was over) or how to obtain a refund. In addition to the usual explanations for game cancellations, the league provided an explanation for the cancellation of said events.

*November 23 (NHL, 2012g)*

This news release followed a similar format to those from previous releases; however, this one saw certain formatting modifications. Firstly, Daly mentioned his sympathy for the fans that missed the game. This date's release also mentioned that the league was working on returning the event to the fans "as quickly as possible", while in the previous release, it was stated that the league would return its event in the coming year.

*December 14 (NHL, 2012h)*

As per usual, this news release served to make an announcement. In this case, the league wanted to make its charges and complaints, made to the federal government and against the NHLPA, public.

*December 20 (NHL, 2012i)*

This date followed an identical pattern to the news release released on September 18 and on October 19.

*January 6 (NHL, 2013a)*

This transcript provided the media with quotes from both Commissioner Bettman, and from NHLPA Executive Director, Donald Fehr. For the purpose of this study, only

the messages from the NHL were analyzed. When asked about the fans, Bettman sidestepped the question, replying that the league would deal with them later.

*January 9 (NHL, 2013b)*

As usual, the league made announcements similar to those throughout the duration of the lockout. On this date, the announcement was that both the league and the NHLPA had reached an agreement.

*January 9 (NHL, 2013c)*

In this interview, there were significantly more messages addressing the fans. The league issued an apology, but acknowledged that their apology could not make up for the disappointment that they had caused. Jeremy Jacobs, owner of the Boston Bruins, attempted to win the fans back by calling them the best fans in the world. Bettman made note of the passion displayed by the fans in the their blogs and twitter posts; he admitted that the league was responsible in remedying the wrongs that were committed to the fans.

No mention or effort was made by the league to communicate with the fans or compensate them during the lockout, despite requests made on online forums. Fans are only mentioned at the end of the lockout, once both negotiating parties reached an agreement. It is important to note that Bettman states, in this press conference, that he was in constant communication with the sponsors to ensure that they were comfortable with the compensation.

*January 9 (NHL, 2013d)*

In this media availability, Bruins owner Jeremy Jacobs used the opportunity to communicate a message to the fans. In the transcript, terms like "best fans in the world" are used, and attempts to build excitement are relayed, like "to the fans all around the

globe, [NHL hockey] is back"! The difference in content and tone from one spokesperson to the next is fairly obvious on this date.

With careful consideration and analysis of the data presented, it was possible to answer the previously mentioned research questions in great detail. The wealth of data available made for interesting discoveries and permitted the understanding of the phenomenon at hand.

## 6. Discussion

**Research question I. How did the comments made by fans in discussion forums affect the framing of the NHL messages during the lockout?**

In comparing the data from the comments posted by the fans to the messages published by the NHL, it is fairly evident that the league did not take the feelings and concerns felt by people into consideration. Though an evolution of language and of themes was evident in the comments posted by the fans in the forums, such changes were not apparent in the official communications of the league. Fans incessantly expressed themselves through discussion forums, upon learning of the announcements made by the league, but there was very little fluctuation and evolution in the messages pushed by the league during this time. Tone, words and content were consistent until the end of the lockout. In the final communication made by the league, announcing the end of the lockout, its spokespersons attempted to apologize to the fans; this is the only apology issued throughout the duration of the lockout.

**Research question II. How did the NHL frame its messages to the media during the lockout?**

Throughout the duration of the lockout, the NHL maintained communication with the media to keep the public informed on new developments and announcements. Their news releases contained information regarding cancellations and other matters affecting the NHL only; very little was given in the form of apology or sympathy towards stakeholders affected by the lockout. There was no messaging directed at fans; very rarely were they mentioned in any deliverables. In fact, the commissioner demonstrated how little he knew about his consumers when, in the league's initial news release, he

stated that "The game on the ice has never been better. That's a function of this system". This countered many complaints made by fans about the flaws they had perceived on the operational side of the league. Despite Bettman's claims that he had read letters, tweets and blogs about the lockout, he did not acknowledge complaints or was seemingly unaware of those being made.

**Claims made without actions to match**

Though it is the fans that keep them in business, owners and the league showed them little attention, suggesting that their interests take precedence over those of the fans. Spokespeople suggested that they were working to bring the game back to the fans, however their actions did not demonstrate any sense of urgency. For instance, on October 4, Deputy Commissioner Daly addressed the fans to express that his colleagues were "committed to getting [an agreement] done". Unfortunately, this statement did not reflect the actions taken by the league. Bettman, on a later date, explained that the league had given the PA control and that the owners were awaiting their proposals. Giving such power away does not demonstrate a desire to expedite the process, in order to reach an agreement. And though there was awareness that the lockout would "hurt" the fans, there was never any mention of how they ere looking into the ways they could remedy this hurt. The failure to match words to actions, led to a loss of credibility and trust from fans.

On October 4, NHL Deputy Commissioner Daly expressed that the league was "extremely disappointed to have to make [the announcement of game cancellations]. The game deserves better, the fans deserve better and the people who drive their income from their connection to the NHL deserve better". Unfortunately for the NHL, its actions again did not match its word, causing the loss of trust, from the fans, due to a lack of honesty

and transparency from the league. When asked about plans to have fans return to watch games, rather than answer the question directly, Comissioner Bettman evaded the question, suggesting that he was avoiding anything that related to the fans. He offered neither apology nor suggestion plans that would re-establish a positive relationship with this group. Additionally, he showed no knowledge of what the fans and the stakeholders were feeling or what they wanted. Despite claims to have read letters, followed tweets and read blogs up until the end of the lockout, and to regain positive relationships with the fans, the NHL made no visible efforts to do so. Bettman later suggested that the prevailing sentiment from the fans was that they "did not care who was at fault. They wanted hockey back". Though this was partially true, as was obvious in user comments, responsibility attribution was the prime topic mentioned in discussion forums. In his response, Bettman demonstrated that honesty towards the fans was of no concern; the priority was to protect his reputation and that of the league. This had the potential to cause serious repercussions towards the public's perception of the NHL (Coombs, 1999). Rather than lying, he should have opted for transparency and honesty. Bettman also had a poor public image prior to the lockout; his inability to provide a truthful account of the situation only furthered his negative image with the public.

**Poor spokesperson choice**

During his time as commissioner, Bettman saw three lockouts under his management, causing him to harbour much hostility from the fans and was the target of many fans' angry messages and criticisms. Due in part to being the main spokesperson for the NHL, a poor relationship with the public was also a factor in these criticisms. Bettman made reference to an NHL by-law in a media availability transcript (September

13, 2012) that stated that only certain NHL employees are designated as spokespeople and are reserved the right to communicate with the media. Though the league has communication by-laws in place, followed closely by its employees, its weakness comes in its failure to follow proper crisis management theory. When selecting members of the crisis management team, the commissioner should not have been chosen as the league's primary spokesperson, as he was not well liked by the public, and could have been deemed as a vulnerability (Coombs, 1999; Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt, 1995). In comparison, Daly, also a designated spokesperson, received virtually no criticism throughout the ordeal; the NHL could have benefitted by using him as the primary representative of the league. He was better received because he spoke to the needs of the fans. Most of his communications included feelings of sympathy; Bettman included no such comments in his communications. Failure to appeal to the needs of the fans suggested ignorance, making him even more dislikeable in their eyes. This was reflected in their comments: many attacked Bettman, while Daly emerged unscathed. While having a communication plan that designates specific spokespeople is commendable, choosing a likeable spokesperson could have proven advantageous for the league.

**A lack of urgency in correcting misinformation**

It is crucial to correct misinformation as quickly as possible. The spread of misinformation or rumours only adds to the stresses of managing a crisis. On October 16, during a press conference, the league realized that there was erroneous information that was being shared about the lockout. Rather than address the misinformation immediately after this realization, the league waited two days to issue corrections. It attempted to remedy the public's misunderstanding of the term 50/50 on October 18. However, rather

than correct this error, Bettman chose merely to explain that fans did not understand the true situation, particularly relating to the percentages of hockey related revenues allocated to both owners and players. Instead of clarifying the definition of the term, he ignored misconceptions and simply stated that the public was wrong. This situation alone demonstrated a lack of urgency, as well as the league's reactive nature towards any issues they might face. Communications with the public are supposed to be delivered as quickly as possible with accurate information (Alexander, 2013; Coombs, 1999; Lerbinger, 1997). When the league discovered the spread of erroneous information, they should have acted quickly to provide the correct information to their publics, rather than wait, allowing for further dissemination of erroneous details.

**Lack of apology and sympathy for the fans**

Despite Daly's acknowledgement that the lockout impacted the fans and the stakeholders, the league's spokespeople never issued any messages of regret or apology directed at the fans. More often than not, they mentioned the effects of the lockout on the players and owners, but failed to acknowledge the impacts that would be felt by their stakeholders. Only once was there reference made to the *hurt* of stakeholders. No elaboration was provided, making it hard to determine how fans would be hurt or how the league would attempt to remedy this hurt.  To make matters worse, the league explained that it would be  "going to be on-call to [the players]", meaning they were going to leave the ball in their court. This claim did not suggest that the league was proactive nor was it determined to find a solution to the current negotiations. Coombs (1999) suggests they should have constantly explained to their stakeholders the plans in order to remedy the situation, specifically in regards to actions being taken to avoid a reoccurrence. They

should have also described their plan to help third parties affected by the lockout (in this case, businesses dependent on the NHL for income) (Benoit, 1997). Stakeholders were neglected because of the focus on money; as suggested by Coombs (1999), this caused even more contention amongst the fans. By ignoring the fans in communications, the leagues caused fans to feel neglected, which ultimately caused a worsening of relationships and a bad reputation. Due to poor communications, trust and legitimacy was lost.

**Poor risk management contributed to poor framing**

Though responsibility was attributed to both parties as a result of the ignorance of prodromal warnings, the failure to use proper communication strategies during the crisis remained as an intensifying factor. Rather than acknowledge and console the fans in their news releases, the league published releases that contained nothing more than information relaying details of announcement and decisions, such as the dates of cancelled games. Considering its history of lockouts, and a seemingly unstable relationship with the fans, the league should have used a more accommodative and informative approach, rather than defensive ones, when communicating such information to its fans (Coombs, 1999; Marcus & Goodman, 1991).

Despite Bettman's referral to issues deemed important by users, the league failed to describe such items as ones needing its attention. As mentioned earlier, he described the current structure of the NHL as having contributed to the height of its success. In the fans' opinion, this is false; throughout the duration of the lockout, the fans constantly mention the decreasing quality of the game, believing this to be Bettman's responsibility.

The league could have also benefitted from an attempt to maintain a positive rapport with its stakeholders; this would have included listening to their concerns, and making attempts to remedy the issues they perceived within the organization (Coombs and Holladay, 2001; Coombs 1999; Palenchar & Freberg, 2012). As Coombs and Holladay (2001) explain, a positive relationship with the public has a deflective power in times of crises. The repeated occurrence of lockouts only served to aggravate the fans. However, it is important to note that fans did not hold only the league accountable; they also attributed responsibility to the players. When a crisis occurs, stakeholders expect the release of instructive information, as well as consistency and transparency in their messages (Coombs, 1998, 2012; Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2006). As suggested by Coombs (1999), the failure to deliver quick, accurate and accommodative messaging causes damaging messages to spread. The NHL took a very different approach: it chose to provide the bare minimum of information to its publics. Interestingly, instead of taking advantage of new media, such as Twitter and Facebook, to directly address the fans, as did the BPD, the league chose to deliver its messages through traditional media only (news releases and news outlets). It also chose to avoid addressing its fans directly in these news releases. This only served to aggravate the fans, making them more upset and spoiling their relationship with the league even further.

**Research question i. How did fans react to the lockout? What opinions and comments did they convey through the use of online forums?**

When fans came across information regarding the lockout, they immediately engaged in risk assessment; they sought information and shared it as well (Grunig, 1997; Grunig & Hunt, 1984. However, the NHL's failure to maintain a positive relationship

with its fans, inadvertently contributed to an increasingly negative one. Because hockey is such an important part of Canadian culture, the lockout was allocated a higher value by fans, consequently causing it to be a matter with high visibility (Castells, 2011). Since such a large demographic was aware of the lockout, individuals were more likely to perceive it as a crisis; as a result of this perception from the masses, it became the truth (Coombs, 2009).

**Anger at the cusp of the lockout**

Right from the beginning, the league was put in a challenging position. In the eyes of the fans, the league had called for the lockout and was therefore responsible for it. Additionally, this was the third lockout to occur in the span of twenty years, and many held the belief that owners had been dishonoring the contracts they offered. Fans attributed the lockout to organizational inadequacy: poor management of the league, incompetent employees, as well as inappropriate culture and procedures (Nicholson, 2006). To aggravate matters, the lockout revolved around the allocation of huge amounts of money; though a trivial matter to the league and its player, this was not the case for the fans. Most fans are never exposed, and never will be, to the amounts of money under discussion and could, therefore, not relate to either party's plight. This caused fans to feel undervalued and insignificant, despite being one of the league's main sources of revenue. Oftentimes, fans mentioned the difficulty they faced obtaining tickets to games, as they could not afford them; spending their hard-earned money on a single event was not plausible. The greed displayed by players and the league, in combination with the neglect felt by the fans, is what fueled their anger and frustration. Resentment and under-appreciation were strongly expressed in the comments posted by the fans. These feelings

were amplified as the lockout progressed, consequently increasing levels of incredulity and criticism aimed at the players and commissioner.

Early on, fans were critical of the operational structure of the league. They often made reference to the problems observed within the organization prior to the lockout, suggesting that prodromal warnings amongst fans had been available for the league's consideration prior to crisis onset.  This list includes:

- Ticket prices: Prices are not affordable for the average fan. Paying hundreds of dollars on a single event is not feasible.

- Flawed operations within the league: For example, owners write contracts that include large player salaries, which are withdrawn when it is convenient for the owners, as they no longer work to their benefit. Fans also believe that the greed displayed by the players is directly caused by large and undeserved contracts.

- A lack of Canadian teams within the league: There is a domination of American teams. Fans believe that some of the failing American teams should move to Canada.

- Revenue sharing: This causes the dilution of quality and a large number of teams to be situated in markets that do not promote hockey (mainly the southern United States). There should either be a smaller league or teams should move to Canada.

Had the league attempted to remedy some of these problems, the relationship with the fans could have been improved and allowed for a buffer, preventing further negative comments (Coombs, 1999; Fink, 1986; Pearson & Mitroff, 1993).  The concerns of fans

had been left unattended, causing resentment and a poor relationship. Environmental scanning would have allowed for these issues to be made visible to management, to build solutions for better relationships with stakeholders and to improve their operations and success as a business (Fink, 1986; Schultz, Utz & Goritz, 2011; Palenchar & Freberg, 2012; Hallahan, 2009).

**Aggravation and amplification by the onset of the lockout**

Fans were quite visibly upset with the decision to proceed with the lockout and they sought to attribute responsibility as a result. Though they were quite aware that this outcome was inevitable, they believed that the NHL had almost willingly set itself up for a crisis. If fans were able to extract the problems from within the system and predict a possible lockout, they could safely assume that the league was capable of doing the same. Fans felt justified in criticizing the NHL's communications and late apology; the league should have communicated and addressed the fans' concerns more frequently throughout the lockout, rather than wait until its end to issue an apology (Coombs, 1999; Gonzalez-Hererro & Pratt, 1995; Marcus & Goodman, 1991). Some users explicitly pointed out the league's inability to seem sincere; according to the fans, it seemed as though management was following direction from public relations professionals. Fans also felt ignored throughout the entire process; the reactions to Bettman's insincere apology were all but positive. Fans saw it as a final attempt to make amends in order to protect the league's reputation, and ultimately their profits.

As suggested by SCCT, responsibility attributed by the fans was increased by the presence of two intensifiers: a history of lockouts and a poor relationship with the publics (Coombs 2004, 2006, 2009, 2012). These factors reduced the potential to easily reconcile

any relationship with the fans and stakeholders, ultimately decreasing the likelihood of evading disastrous economic impacts to the business. This was a preventable crisis that had occurred in recent history. The NHL entered it without having its fans on its side, putting it in a difficult position to communicate the crisis successfully and resolve it rapidly. Its failure to adopt proper environmental scanning and to learn from past events, contributed to an ineffective crisis communication strategy. From the onset of the lockout, fans enumerated the problems they noticed within the league's operations, with the emphasis on this list only growing as the lockout progressed.

**Passion leads to lobbying**

Fans made up an active public, meaning that they engaged in information seeking (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). This is a result of their high involvement in the matter; hockey is a part of their culture as well as a part of their identity. Consequently, this results in organized attitudes and opinions, which leads to selectively sought information that supports their beliefs. As was evident in the comments, fans were easily aggravated by opposing beliefs; such opposition led to arguments amongst users. If supportive voices were not found, rather than ignore opposing rhetoric, fans would explain their positions in an attempt to prove their points. Oftentimes, arguments escalated, leading to insults and personal attacks amongst users. Simultaneously, though opposition was strongly countered, similarity was strongly repeated and duplicated; this explains the spread and increase in intensity of negative comments aimed at the NHL. Due to this snowball effect, comments reached a climax at the end of the lockout, when the commissioner issued an unsuccessful apology.

In accordance to Grunig and Hunt's (1984) Situational Theory of the Publics, because of the public's high involvement in the lockout, its ability to recognize a problem, as well as an absence of barriers, made it prone to dissonance. This was particularly evident in the attempts to lobby others for a fan boycott. The organized thoughts and opinions of fans and their constant need to seek information served only to strengthen their resolve in solving the problem. It is interesting to note, however, that contrary to the study conducted by Snoeijers et al. (2014), despite the possible length of news content/messages via the medium of discussion forums, fans were still quite active in posting messages. This can be attributed to unrestricted message length in discussion forums, which permits the description of problems and concerns in detail, unlike with Twitter, where it is difficult to write anything of significance with a limit of 140 characters. Content from these forums could have provided the NHL with a bank of knowledge; fans' concerns could have been addressed directly and this knowledge could have been served to improve league operations.

Interestingly enough, throughout the duration of the negotiations, there was an emergence of responsibility attribution towards the players. At the beginning, the majority of the blame was geared at the owners or both (owners and players). Responsibility attributed to both parties remained fairly constant throughout the lockout, but as the negotiations persisted, there was an increase in mentions of the responsibility of the players. A lack of attribution towards the players at the onset of the lockout was probably a result of the press releases pushed by the NHLPA, which directed blame at the NHL. As the lockout progressed, this tactic became obvious to certain fans causing them to shift their responsibility attributions. This finding supports the suggestion that denial

does not serve as a deflection of responsibility, and in fact only makes responsibility attributions greater, while proportionately decreasing positive perceptions of the organization by the public (Coombs, 1995, 1998, 2006).

6.1 Strategic Review

A viable solution to managing the league's crisis communication strategy effectively, with regards to social media, would have been to combine Situational Theory of Publics with Situational Crisis Communication Theory. Firstly, the league should have determined if their public was active or passive (do they engage in information seeking or processing?). By determining that the public was active, the next step would have been to determine its level of involvement, problem recognition and constraint recognition, followed by an assessment of the level of responsibility attributed by its stakeholders, through cluster classification (victim, accident or preventable) and by the presence of intensifiers (consistency or distinctiveness). Following this, the organization could decide on the type of crisis communication messaging to use. In this particular case, as suggested by Coombs (2007; 2012), the league should have taken an accommodative approach to communicating with its public. It should also have attempted to meet stakeholder expectations prior, during and after the onset of the lockout  (Caillouet, 1991 as cited by Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Scott & Meyer, 1991).

Due to the cultural impacts that hockey places on Canadians, nationals value hockey much more than any other forms of entertainment and are highly involved in the sport. This causes them to have a peaked interest in the matter, making them more likely to seek information; this high level of involvement, accompanied by interest, causes individuals to have organized thoughts and opinions. Such publics are more likely to find

others that support their beliefs –the perfect place to do so is within an online community, whose members have also sought information with the intention of discussing it. While attitudes and opinions form, fans consequently evaluate possible barriers that might impede achieving solutions to their problems. Unfortunately for the NHL, engaged fans recognized that a boycott was a simple and realistic solution. As was evident in the comments, many users attempted to recruit others in their action against the NHL.

In a similar vein, users wanted to help those who were financially affected by the lockout. This was especially evident following the announcement of lockout's end. Pleads were made with other fans in the hopes of recruiting them to support businesses that were negatively affected by the absence of NHL hockey games. They suggested that rather than buying NHL tickets and merchandise, fans should watch games at bars and restaurants to help establishments that relied on professional hockey to keep them in business. Fans had little faith in the league and did not believe that it would compensate these businesses for their losses. Active fans tried hard to have their voices heard through a boycott, an attempt at retaliation. By attempting to have a voice, they not only found support in the other engaged fans, but also held the potential to influence and sway "regular" fans (not necessarily engaged at that moment) to join them in their activism.

An attempt by the NHL, to prevent the public from becoming opinionated and organized, could have proven useful. However, this action would have had to occur prior to the lockout. Any post-lockout communication would have been deemed reactive, rather than proactive. By considering the creation of a positive relationship, through effective communication techniques, prior to the lockout, the NHL could have appeased the concerns of fans, while also preventing lobbyists from threatening the league with a

boycott. As mentioned by Schultz, Utz and Goritz (2011), messages delivered by a key spokesperson were disseminated to a higher degree, in comparison to those delivered by the organization as a whole. This was proven through the high degree in which messages were posted and discussed within forums on news media websites. Since commissioner Bettman delivered most messages, they were more likely to be shared. Unfortunately for the league, many of his messages were accompanied by criticism and negativity. Through social media, fans have the ability of congregating and forming normative linkages, because of their similar interests, allowing them to discuss the lockout further and to share opinions and information (Grunig, 2007). Many engaged fans suggested alternatives to NHL hockey, like the junior leagues, or other sports leagues, like the NFL, rather than making calls to action. In suggesting such alternatives, they planted ideas in the minds of others in the hopes of their dissemination and adoption. As concluded by Jin et al. (2014), messages that were negative in nature, were shared by third parties, making them more likely to be spread via social media, consequently aggravating the crisis. This is especially evident as the lockout progressed; the negativity stemming from users' comments snowballed. Discussions and communications within these forums allowed for fans to realize that that they are not alone, but in fact part of a community (Alexander, 2013).

The issue's high personal relevancy to the fans meant that it was processed to a higher degree in comparison to other news (Grunig, 1997; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Aldoory, Kim & Tindal, 2009). This caused the story to be of high value, making it a more desirable story for media outlets to report. Since fans already had formed opinions, media reports only served to support their existing beliefs, giving them even more reason

to share the information. To make things worse, the league essentially ignored any communications with the public via Twitter, making direct information even harder to access. As was suggested by Schultz, Utz and Goritz (2011), crisis communication strategies were better received through this medium than those communicated through newspapers (in this case news websites as well). The league should have also considered closely monitoring the comment sections of newspapers, as publics tend to discuss traditional news media over content they find on tweets and blogs (Schultz et al., 2011).

As was mentioned, themes found in discussion forums from different dates varied depending on the content of the news report. Media reports contained more than just the information published in the press releases; details of the stories differed from outlet to outlet. As explained by Lerbinger (1997), journalists seek other information sources to give their pieces different angles; reporters looked to varying information sources to accomplish this. The NHL should have factored this into their communication strategies. For example, the TSN news report on December 20 focused on the impact of the lockout on businesses that relied on their local NHL team for profit. User comments on this news site immediately took to criticizing the NHL and NHLPA on this date, suggesting the power of persuasion in relation to passionate interests. This phenomenon was reflected on multiple dates, highlighting the influence that peers had on the direction of discussions and posts. This was particularly evident on user comments from the same outlet. As explained in Situational Theory of the Public, this suggests that messages do indeed travel through word of mouth; people can raise awareness through words, in hopes of influencing and inspiring others (Coombs, 2012; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig & Repper, 1992; Grunig, 1997).

As the lockout progressed, users increasingly mentioned the need for the creation of a new league. Fans, as mentioned previously, strongly believed that the league was overrun with operational flaws; with the creation of a new league, there would be new rules, regulations and management who would manage the NHL differently. The repetition of this message suggested that engaged fans believed that the problem should have been addressed long before the lockout.

Users eventually focused their efforts in asking the league to consider eliminating staggered game cancellations and to consider the cancellation of the entire season; they felt that this cancellation process was unfair and/or frustrating to the fans. Instead, they wanted the league to "rip off the band-aid" and take the proper time to negotiate a deal. Fans evidently felt no sympathy towards the negotiating parties, and were losing interest and eagerness for the return of the game. While not a direct expression of apathy, it parallels, as well as supports those who explicitly stipulated their lack of interest and their apathy through comments such as "Meh" and "Who cares?". Such feelings were only amplified by the progression of the lockout. And though this might have caused a decrease in criticism towards players and owners, it did not decrease the fans' anger or potential for fan loss.

Despite prodromes, angry fans, and looming threats of fan loss and boycotts, the NHL did not seem concerned about possible negative repercussions that they might have faced at the end of the lockout. Like other members of the entertainment industry, hockey players and teams are idolized and revered, making them exceptions to traditional crisis management rules. Hero worship, in association to hockey's influence in Canadian culture, made the possibility of fan loss and boycotts unlikely. Though some fans might

have been lost as a result of the lockout, the league was hardly impacted following the end of the crisis. Unlike the 1994 MLB lockout, the NHL did not suffer team loss (MLB lost the Montreal Expos as a result of the lockout). In fact, at the return of the NHL, the average attendance at games increased by 2.6 percent compared to the previous season's attendance, while viewership of televised games, including the Stanley Cup finals, had the strongest recorded rating in both Canada and the United States since the 1993-1994 season (Klein & Hackel, 2013).

Users often mentioned, during the lockout, that fans spent much of their time complaining about the lockout and its length, while also claiming that they would not return.  Many saw past this claim, including the NHL. Through past experiences, they could almost guarantee that fans would all return as soon as the lockout ended. Users often used the word sheep to describe those who made such claims, because of their inability to stand up for themselves and for what they believe to be wrong. It is important to note that Canadians include hockey as a part of their identity and culture, and cannot, therefore, fathom or desire a world that does not include this sport. The NHL is a key factor in Canadians' identity and culture, and despite being a commercial entity, it provides fans with a sense of community and belonging (Buma, 2012; Whitson & Gruneau, 1994).

Excitement for the return of pro hockey surfaced sporadically, but was especially evident at the announcement of the end of the lockout. Many active fans seemed to have been going through withdrawal; some stated that as soon as the game returned, they would be back to cheering their favourite team. Such comments, in addition to "sheep" comments, caused the NHL to feel no concern towards remedying and improving any of

the perceived issues mentioned by the fans. As suggested previously, the league knew that most of their fan base was guaranteed to return; they were right. Fan loss was inconsequential to it, and therefore of little importance. The league did not attribute any importance to the constant complaints and threats made by fans. Fans unknowingly inflicted their predicament onto themselves; they complained incessantly about the ignorance of the league towards their feelings and concerns, yet when given the chance to make their voices heard, they failed to act.

The NHL sees itself as a monopoly; it sees threats from other leagues or sports as trivial. However, many fans suggested in their comments that due to the gradual loss of quality in the product, they would watch hockey of a comparable caliber elsewhere (as "lower" caliber sports are often mentioned as equally or more entertaining and exciting than the NHL) or that they would get their sports and competition fix from other sports. Some even expressed that they would resort to other activities all together. Contrary to the belief of the league, there is ample external competition for the time and money of NHL fans; ignoring their concerns and neglecting them from communications may only serve to veer their attention elsewhere. The repeated lockouts frustrated the fans as well; for those, who were already flirting with the idea of leaving the NHL, this lockout served as a solidifying argument to stop watching it altogether. However, unlike other crises situation, it is this monopolization of its industry that essentially protected the NHL from any negative repercussions, ultimately leaving it unscathed, and in fact, more successful than it had been prior to the lockout.

**7. Conclusions and Future Research**

At first glance, this study reveals that the messages and reactions posted by active NHL fans did not appear to influence the crisis communication strategy put forward by the league. Regardless of strategies, it was obvious that fans would return to the game, based on their return following past lockouts and due to their passion for the game. Despite overwhelming feedback received via discussion forums, the league and its managers decided against modifying and shaping messages to address fans' displeasure in league operations and the product (hockey).

If one digs deeper, it is evident that there is a more interesting conclusion. Throughout the lockout, the fans using the discussion forums formed an active public. This is noticeable through their behaviours: they sought information by reading news websites; they were aware of a lack of barriers to solving their problems; they lobbied and attempted to influence others to start a boycott in an attempt to end the lockout and to remedy what they perceived as substandard league operations. What makes this case interesting is the role that social media played in enabling the formation of this public. Social media acted as a catalyst; it provided users with a platform, with large reach, to discuss the lockout and to mobilize others to take action against the league.

It is important to note that this public is not representative of all publics; engaged fans stood apart from the general fans. Together, engaged fans formed an active public who attributed responsibility to NHL for the occurrence of the lockout. During this crisis, the league dealt with a highly involved public who was very interested in the situation and who strongly believed in the organization's responsibility in the lockout.

The active fans took advantage of social media as a tool to provide extensive feedback to the organization and to attempt to solve their problems. Through this new medium, they attempted to communicate with the league, thus highlighting the intended use of social media: two-way communication. The NHL alternatively chose to exclude this new medium from its crisis communication strategies. It adopted a more traditional approach, ignoring social media as a tool; the league instead chose to communicate solely through press releases issued to the media. Rather than utilizing dialogue, the approach was unidirectional, thus ignoring any potential to receive and integrate feedback from the public. As a result, there was an obvious disconnect between the active public and the organization.

This disconnect was also evident in the framing of the messages issued by both the NHL and the engaged fans. Engaged fans relied heavily on emotionally driven framing to convey their messages to the NHL. This stemmed directly from their anger and the responsibility they attributed to the league for the onset of the lockout. The perception, from fans, that the league had ignored their concerns only caused emotions to be even more pronounced. Engaged fans' attempts to initiate and to open lines of communications, through feedback (suggestions, complaints, etc), showed a willingness to include the NHL in their discussions. This inclusiveness was a crucial part of the fans' message framing. Contrarily, the league followed a an exclusive approach. As mentioned earlier, no attempts were made by the NHL to initiate dialogue with the fans. Additionally, the league was formulaic in its message framing; announcements were used to communicate information in a consistent, pragmatic fashion, consequently prohibiting any invitation for feedback from the fans. Varying framing resulted in two competing

dialogues surrounding the lockout, which contributed to the growing frustrations of the engaged fans and perhaps contributed to their desire to rebel against the league.

Contrary to prescribed theories, the NHL was able to resume operations and return to the status quo without any trouble. It is evident, through this study, that newer communication models were inapplicable to the NHL due to its power and monopolization of this particular industry. However, though this was the result for this particular case, this does not suggest that status quo will always be the end result of such powerful organizations struck by crisis. Social media, as mentioned earlier, is a relatively new medium; its adoption amongst users has not reached its full potential. As was seen in this case, social media was a tool used to create an active public, which could have potentially caused damage to the league. It is possible, that had the lockout been prolonged, that the end result might have differed. This is especially true considering the evident shift in responsibility attribution; attributions towards the league increased as the lockout progressed, potentially as a result of persuasive efforts of engaged discussion forum users. Assuming that one's organization is untouchable in the wake of crises is dangerous. A perfect illustration of this is the FIFA scandal that saw the US government indict multiple FIFA executives on charges of corruption, as a result of claims made by the public. FIFA, like the NHL, is a major sports monopoly; the future of upcoming FIFA tournaments is uncertain (FIFA Corruption Crisis, 2015).

Though the NHL lockout does not present itself as a usual crisis, it is evident through the literature that this event does indeed fit the necessary requirements: threat to the organizational operations, time constraints, uncertainty and a failure to meet stakeholder expectations. As a result of being an atypical crisis, there is little research that

focuses on crisis communication in such circumstances. This study provided an opportunity to discover a gap in crisis communication literature; prescribed theories do not seem to include monopolies. According to the literature, the ignorance of crisis communication strategies should have led the NHL to organizational failure. Instead, the league seemed to present itself as the exception to the rule. Despite ignoring crisis communication theories, as a result of being a monopoly, the lack of competition permitted the league to return to the status quo without suffering any damage.

Engaged fans held very influential roles in the discourse surrounding the lockout, especially with regards to the direction and the topics discussed in the online forums. Their engagement related to their involvement, particularly their passion, towards the issue at hand. As mentioned earlier, hockey is engrained in the identities and culture of Canadians; such a large-scale removal caused them significant distress. Sports fans, in particular, are almost always highly involved in the sports they follow, an implication made in the term fan. Fan is the abbreviation of fanatic, which means, according to the Oxford American Dictionaries, "a person with an obsessive interest in and enthusiasm for something", explaining why this public was so active (Fanatic, 2015). Such enthusiasm is the perfect example of the passionate interests that fans show towards the sport, and consequently towards the issue at hand. Despite the fans' passion for the game and their ensuing comments and threats, the NHL was aware that business would resume as usual, following the announcement of the end of the lockout. Fans' passion for the game and their desire for hockey's return overruled all other concerns and interests. The league was aware of its power, and chose not to adjust or modify its communication to fit the needs of stakeholders.

Had certain communications been made, it could have affected the outcome of the negotiations with the NHLPA, suggesting that the NHL chose to withhold information in an attempt to achieve the best agreement possible for their business. And though the feedback provided by active fans, who participated in discussion forums, made little impact on message framing, it provided a great deal of insight into the development of an active public and its potential to influence organizational powers.

7.1 Limitations and future research

This study was limited to the analysis of comments made online discussion forums. Feedback was also only collected from social media adopters in Canadian markets within a particular sports industry. However, it still provides useful insight into the understanding of the formation of publics, the allocation of responsibility and the importance of proper risk management prior to the onset of a crisis. Though major sports organizations are not a common industry, this case still presented a unique and interesting situation. Future research could focus on a broader range of data; rather than only using comments from discussion forums, it would be interesting to see if conversations differed in themes and content across social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, and, if so, to understand the reasoning for this. Additionally, research into other organizational monopolies' crises could provide insight into outcomes, with regards to similarities, and into time's influence on said outcomes. For instance, in the case at hand, the lockout ended without any significant repercussions from the active public. However, what would have been the result had the lockout been prolonged? Would the active public have caused any damage to the league, had the lockout resulted in the loss of an entire season? These are all factors to be studied more exhaustively in future research.

As mentioned earlier, social media provides people with a platform in which they can congregate, share thoughts and lobby in order to implement change. Though it was not the case in the NHL Lockout, change was evident in the protests in Iran, Moldova and Mozambique (Ems, 2014; Iwilade, 2013). These were all cases in which the participants were involved and in which they held passionate interests. But, what happens when the issue cannot be clearly defined as a passionate interest? In Jon Ronson's book *So You've been Publicly Shamed* (2015), the author studies the phenomenon of public shaming, particularly regarding the reasoning for people jumping on the public shaming "bandwagon" despite not having any explicit ties to the issue (strange sexual conduct, poor judgment, lies, etc) or the person being shamed. It would be interesting to build on his research in order to understand what motivates this type of shaming through social media, and if the strategies that are used to protect organizational reputation are transferable to individuals.  If they are not applicable, research should aim to understand what strategies could be put in place to protect one's reputation, in the event of a social media public shaming.

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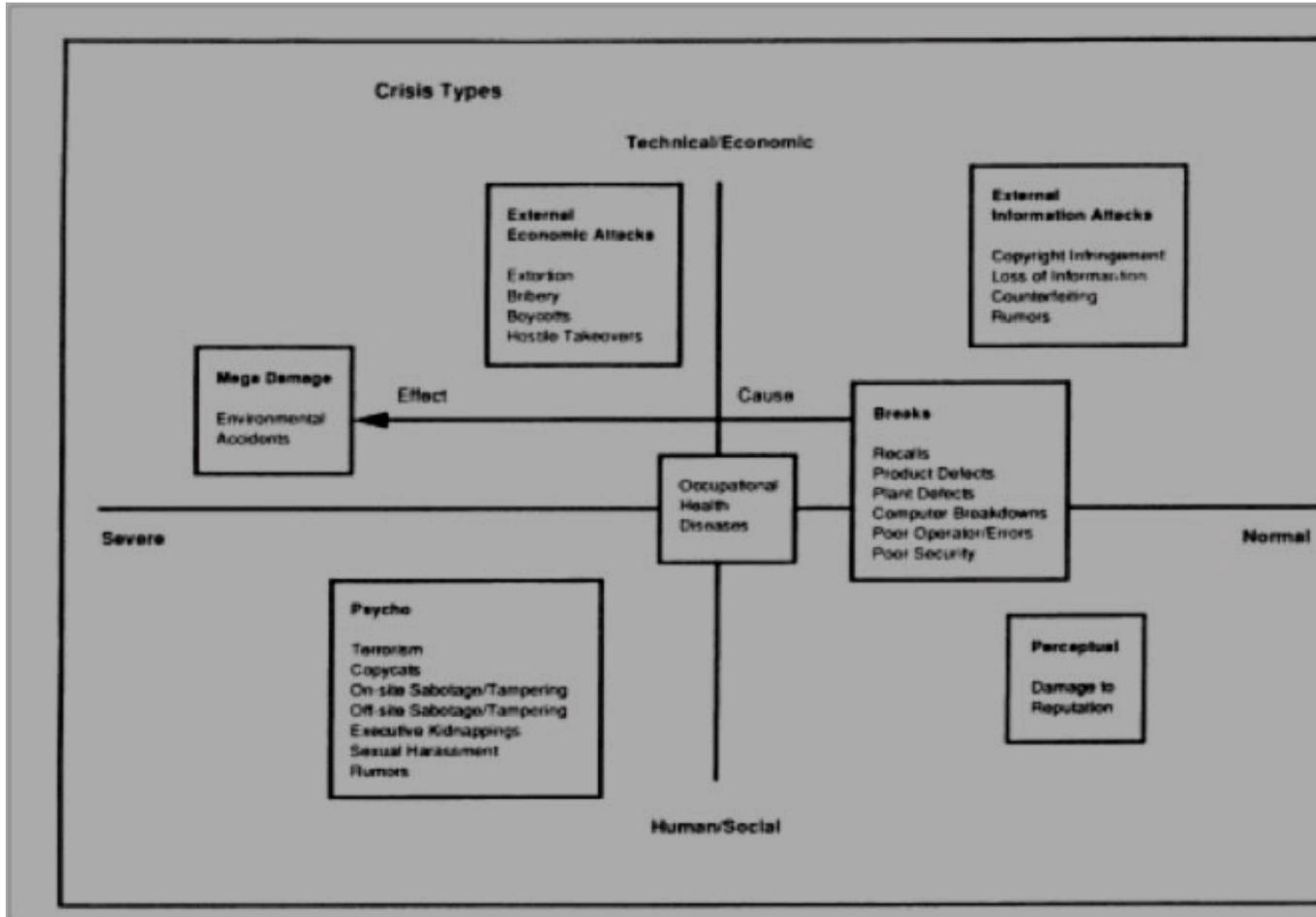
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**Appendix A - Crisis Type and Damage Levels**



**Crisis Types**

Technical/Economic

External
Economic Attacks

Extortion
Bribery
Boycotts
Hostile Takeovers

External
Information Attacks

Copyright Infringement
Loss of Information
Counterfeiting
Rumors

Mega Damage

Environmental
Accidents

Effect ← Cause

Breaks

Recalls
Product Defects
Plant Defects
Computer Breakdowns
Poor Operator/Errors
Poor Security

Occupational
Health
Diseases

Severe                                                     Normal

Psycho

Terrorism
Copycats
On-site Sabotage/Tampering
Off-site Sabotage/Tampering
Executive Kidnappings
Sexual Harassment
Rumors

Perceptual

Damage to
Reputation

Human/Social

(Pearson & Mitroff, 1993, p. 50)

**Appendix B: The Five Phases of Crisis Management**



The Five Phases of Crisis Management
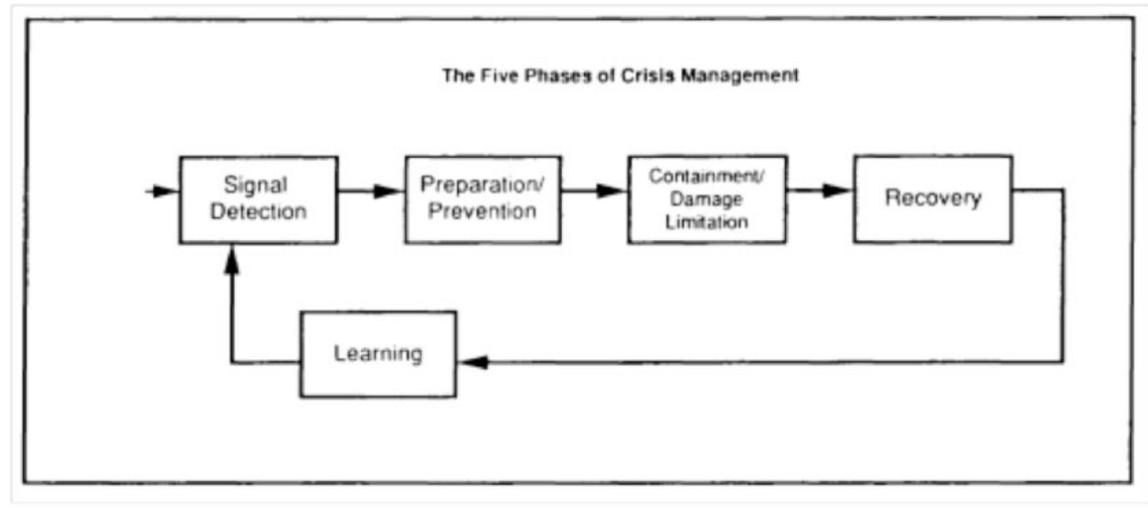
(Pearson & Mitroff, 1993, p.53)

## Appendix C - Crisis Types Definitions and Cues

*Victim Crisis Cluster*
    *Natural disaster:* Acts of nature that damage an organization such as an earthquake. Some environmental/weather event impacts the organization.
    *Rumors:* False and damaging information about an organization being circulated. Evidence that the information is false.
    *Workplace violence:* Current or former employee attacks current employees on site. An employee or former employee injures or attempts to injure current employees.
    *Product tampering/malevolence:* External agent causes damage to an organization. Some actor outside the organization has altered the product to make it dangerous.
*Accidental Crisis Cluster*
    *Challenges:* Stakeholders claim an organization is operating in an inappropriate manner. There is a public challenge based on moral or ethical, not legal, grounds.
    *Technical error accident:* a technology or equipment failure causes an industrial accident. The cause of the accident is technology/equipment related.
    *Technical error recall:* A technology or equipment failure causes a product to be recalled. A product is deemed harmful to stakeholders. The cause of the recall is technology/equipment related.
*Intentional Crisis Cluster*
    *Human error accidents:* Human error causes and industrial accident. The cause of the accident is a person or people not doing their job properly.
    *Human error recalls:* Human error causes a product to be recalled. A product is deemed harmful to stakeholders. The cause of the recall is a person or people not doing their job properly.
    *Organizational misdeed:* Laws or regulations are violated by management or stakeholders are placed at risk by management. Members of management knowingly violate laws/regulations or offer a product or service they know could injure stakeholders. (Coombs, 2004, p.270)

## **Appendix D – Crisis Categories**

| Intentional Crises | Unintentional Crises |
|---|---|
| Terrorism | Natural disasters: though unpredictable, measures exist to reduce impact |
| Sabotage: intentional damage of product or work procedures | Unforeseeable Technical Interactions: technical failures in equipment rendering it inoperable or inaccurate |
| Workplace Violence: Injuries or death originating within organization or from current or past employee | Product Failures: recalls due to defective products |
| Poor Employee Relationships: causes the potential for labor strikes | Economic Downturns:  Results are layoffs/plant closures |
| Poor Risk Management:  inability to take care of risk/prodromes increase crisis potential | |
| Hostile Takeovers: rival organization's purchase of the majority of shares | |
| Unethical Leadership: purposeful imposition of risk on stakeholders, by an organization | |

(Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2007)

**Appendix E – List of Themes Drawn from Analysis**

 

I. Continuous factors have contributed to the overall degradation of quality of the NHL resulting in fans loss. They have caused feelings of:
    i. Apathy
    ii. Frustration towards a flawed system
    iii. Loss of hope

II. Fans look to attribute the responsibility of the lockout on participating parties. Once responsibility attributed, they:
    i. Defame the character of the person/party responsible
    ii. Express ill wishes as a result of spite and anger towards the "responsible" party

III. Fans feel as though money is the only factor influencing business decisions made by the NHL. Fans feel:
    i. Complete disregard by the NHL and NHLPA towards themselves and stakeholders
    ii. Negative emotions towards the league
    iii. NHL has lost touch with its Canadian roots and has become too Americanized
    iv. Sarcasm, incredulity, disbelief because they regard the situation as a joke

IV. Fans feel as though they aren't being heard or considered in the negotiations. As a result, they suggest taking action through the following:
    i. Organizing a boycott
    ii. Turning to other alternatives
    iii. Fan loss
    iv. Voicing their displeasure with media reports; they see it as a contribution to the prolonged negotiations

V. Fans show their support for either party.

VI. Fans speculate on the causes, factors, consequences, and negotiation strategies surrounding the NHL lockout.
    i. Suggestions for solutions

VII. Evidence of segregation between varying groups which causes the feeling of us versus them.
    i. Rich versus poor
    ii. USA versus Canada

**Appendix F - 10 steps to follow for effective crisis communication.**

1. Determine your goals during the crisis. Ex. Reduce the impact of the crisis.
2. Partner with crisis audiences. Positives stakeholder relationships, that promote dialogue, should be in effect **prior** to crises. Stakeholders are the ultimate determinant of the degree and length of a crisis.
3. Understand the diversity of your audience; they are not homogenous and have varying impacts on the organization.
4. Understand the difference between Primary and Secondary stakeholders: **"Primary stakeholders** are those groups defined by an organization as most important to its success. **Secondary stakeholders** are key groups that do not play an active role in the day-to-day activities of the organization but are still important to its overall success" (p. 37). Positive relationships with both are crucial, however it is important to allocate priorities; regular communication with each allows for information gathering, permitting easy and effective relations with them in times of crisis.
5. Partnership & Listening: Knowing every side of the story is crucial to crisis communication, thus making listening a prime objective.
6. Follow proper information sharing steps (4) for effective crisis communication.
   a. Communicate often and early with both internal and external stakeholders.
   b. Identifying the cause of the crisis to help determine corrective action.
   c. Contact everyone affected by the crisis, and express concern and empathy.
   d. Determine current and future risks, in order to reduce uncertainty and anxiety of stakeholders
7. Use appropriate communication approaches to deliver the initial response. It should be delivered quickly; ambiguity is permitted in order to avoid delivering false information; "organizations [should] communicate what they know at the time" (p. 43)
8. Ensure caution when reassuring stakeholders. Contrary to popular belief, mass panic does not follow a crisis; panic is caused when conflicting messages are delivered by the same organization during a crisis.
9. Ensure the protection of stakeholders. Provide information that focuses on self-efficacy, rather than reassurance; messages should be valid, useful and instructive.
10. Promote positive thinking. The framing of a crisis is crucial to resolution of a crisis; rather than blame others, promote a message of resolution.

Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger, 2006

## Appendix G – Strategies and types of crisis response

| Nonexistence Strategies | Seeks to eliminate crisis |
|---|---|
| 1. Denial | Claims are made that the crisis never existed |
| 2. Clarification | Denial, with an explanation |
| 3. Attack | Confrontation towards those who initiated crisis claims |
| 4. Intimidation | Threats towards those who initiated crisis claims |
| Distance Strategies | Acknowledgement of the crisis, in an attempt to create acceptance of the crisis, by stressing external locus/lack of intentionality, while also weakening the link between the crisis and organization, to reduce negative impact |
| 1. Excuse | Attempts to reduce responsibility in crisis |
| a. Denial of Intention | Reject suggestions of motivation |
| b. Denial of volition | Shift blame scapegoat |
| 2. Justification | Seeks to minimize damage caused by crisis |
| a. Minimizing injury | Suggesting that there are worse possible outcomes |
| b. Victim deserving | Suggesting that the victims merited repercussions |
| c. Misrepresentation of the crisis event | Suggestion that event is misrepresented; reduces seriousness of repercussions |
| Ingratiation Strategies | Seeks public's approval |
| 1. Bolstering | Offsets outcomes by reminding of organizations positive past |
| 2. Transcendence | Convincing public that crisis is part of a larger goal that serves them Ex. "Apollo 1 was defined as part of |

| | the quest for space and knowledge" (p. 452) |
|---|---|
| 3. Praising Others | Attempt to gain public approval through their praise |
| Mortification Strategies | Attempt to gain forgiveness, while also seeking acceptance of crisis |
| 1. Remediation | Attempt to partake in charitable acts to offset crisis |
| 2. Repentance | Direct request for forgiveness |
| 3. Rectification | Taking corrective actions to prevent the recurrence of a crisis |
| Suffering Strategy | Approval seeking through victimization of organization |

(Coombs, 1995)

**Appendix H – Image Restoration Strategies**

## TABLE 1

### Image Restoration Strategies

| Strategy | Key Characteristic | Illustration |
|---|---|---|
| *Denial* | | |
| Simple Denial | Did Not Perform Act | Coke Does Not Charge McDonald's Less |
| Shift the Blame | Act Performed by Another | Exxon: Alaska and Caused Delay |
| *Evasion of Responsibility* | | |
| Provocation | Responded to Act of Another | Firm Moved Because of New State Laws |
| Defeasibility | Lack of Information or Ability | Executive Not Told Meeting Changed |
| Accident | Act Was a Mishap | Sears' Unneeded Repairs Inadvertent |
| Good Intentions | Meant Well in Act | Sears: No Willful Over-Charges |
| *Reducing Offensiveness of Event* | | |
| Bolstering | Stress Good Traits | Exxon's Swift and Competent Action |
| Minimization | Act Not Serious | Exxon: Few Animals Killed |
| Differentiation | Act Less Offensive | Sears: Preventative Maintenance |
| Transcendence | More Important Considerations | Helping Humans Justifies Tests |
| Attack Accuser | Reduce Credibility of Accuser | Pepsi: Coke Charges McDonald's Less |
| Compensation | Reimburse Victim | Disabled Movie-Goers Given Free Passes |
| *Corrective Action* | Plan to Solve or Prevent Problem | AT&T Promised to Improve Service |
| *Mortification* | Apologize for Act | AT&T Apologized |

(Benoit, 1997, p.179)

## Appendix I – Press Releases and Press Conference Transcripts

Commissioner Gary Bettman Media Availability Transcript
New York, September 13, 2012
Good afternoon, everyone. I'm here just to report on the recently concluded Board of Governors meeting. The Board met for two hours. As I predicted to those of you who met with me yesterday, there really is no news to report.
We gave the owners a complete and thorough update of everything that's transpired to date. We've reviewed all of the proposals, counterproposals and discussions. The Board had very little discussion, asked a couple of questions, and there was a complete show of support both for what we've been doing in bargaining, how the negotiations have been conducted, the positions we've taken, and the fact that, as we've been saying -- including to the union as far back as November -- we're not prepared to open another season until we have a new Collective Bargaining Agreement.
So that is the update I have for you.
I do want to clarify something from yesterday's media availability. Some of you have been suggesting that we gave the union a take-it-or-leave-it proposal. That is absolutely not true. What we said was the proposal that we made and the various things that we were prepared to do to try to avoid the damage to the business that is occurring and will continue to occur would not be on the table because of the damage, and those proposals no longer make any sense after the expiration of the Collective Bargaining Agreement. It wasn't a take-it-or-leave-it at all. It was, again, an invitation to try to continue negotiations in a timely fashion.
Interestingly enough, the proposals that we have received from the Players' Association have been couched in identical terms, namely that their proposal should be considered off the table once the Collective Bargaining Agreement expires.
To the extent people were suggesting we gave an ultimatum or take-it-or-leave-it, we didn't. What we did was perfectly consistent with what the negotiations have been on both sides.
With that, I'd be happy to take questions.
Was there any discussion whatsoever about the timeline that you're working on right now, what happens as of Saturday night?
There's no change in the timeline. The Board was given a thorough, soup-to-nuts, everything that's transpired in these negotiations. The conclusion remains, as it has been our position from the outset, we need a new Collective Bargaining Agreement to move forward with the season.
Today a number of players, Sidney Crosby among them, say they feel like the League has been using a potential lockout as a negotiating tactic. How do you react to that?
I'm not sure I understand it. That is a bit of a non sequitur because the fact of the matter is we have been clear that the Collective Bargaining Agreement, upon its expiration, needs to have a successor agreement for us to move forward because the league is not in a position, not willing to move forward with another season, under the status quo -- which is the Collective Bargaining Agreement that is expiring.
- 2 -
One thing we have heard from the players is there's nothing in any of the offers that they can grasp onto that is deemed as anything other than a retrenchment from where they are now. How would you respond to that? Do you think that has been an obstacle in negotiations?
Well, again, I'm not exactly sure that I understand the punch line of it being an obstacle in the negotiations, to quote them or quote you.
The fact is we believe 57% of HRR is too much. There are lots of reasons for that. At least – as we have discussed previously – two other leagues, the NFL and NBA, their players have recognized in these economic times there was a need to retrench. We're trying to have a negotiation over that. But in terms of getting your arms around it, and we discussed this

yesterday, under our most recent proposal, player share gets reduced in the first year in the 9% range, second year in the 7% range, third year in the 4% range. These are amounts out of escrow, not rollback, that are perfectly consistent with what the players have experienced during the seven years of this Collective Bargaining Agreement when there has been an escrow reduction to their contracts five out of seven times, once for as much as 12%.

Frankly, as I think I told you yesterday, if you used the Players' Association's projections of revenues going forward, the one projection that they've been using in their proposal, the impact in terms of reducing player share is 7.1% in the first year, 4% in the second year, and in the third year we're all caught up and we move forward.

In terms of what it all means if you're trying to get your arms around it, even a brief lockout will cost more in terms of lost salary and wages than what we're proposing to do to make a deal we think we need to make.

What, in your offer, would you deem is attractive to them? Going back to your original offer, it was a rollback, but also tightening up of contract rules and language. What I'm hearing from them is they don't see anything that is a trade-off, it's all something they'd have to concede.

We've had seven years of incredible competitive balance. Twenty-nine clubs have made the playoffs. We have had seven different Stanley Cup champions. The game on the ice has never been better. That's a function of this system.

The system, as originally negotiated, in our view, needs some adjustments. If it turned out to be too rich a deal for the first seven years, we lived with it, but I'm not going to apologize for saying, 'You know what? We need to adjust it.'

Also, one other point, I think it gets overlooked: When we agreed to a percentage of HRR for the players, we're paying out that amount of money. The rules that we're looking to correct relate to the allocation.

For example, if you compare what the Group Threes as a (free-agent) group got eight years ago, compared to the Group Twos, that amount of money has dropped by 12%. What we're focused on is, what is the right allocation. We're not looking to necessarily save money; we're looking to make sure the system is working the way it was intended.

The lockout will happen Saturday night at 11:59?

Unless we have a deal.

- 3 -

Eight years ago, three months went by between the lockout commencing and the next real negotiating between the two sides. What's your sense now what the timeline will be like?

I'm not really sure. We have been telling the Players' Association for more than a year that we are ready, willing and able to meet any time, anyplace for as long as they want.

The tenor in terms of scheduling and frequency of these negotiations has been dictated by the Players' Association. We'll continue, within reason, to let them do that. We will meet, as I said, any time and anyplace. If they choose not to have any reason to get together with us, we'll have to accept that.

As we demonstrated yesterday, when you get into a negotiation, it's good to be able to react quickly. We got a proposal, we understood it. We understood that it represented absolutely no movement of any significant nature. We decided it was time to craft another proposal, which we did in about an hour.

If you're dedicated to the negotiating process, you can move this along quickly. If for whatever reason you're not interested in making a deal, you drag it out.

Are the governors permitted to talk for themselves on their view of this Collective Bargaining?

We have By-Law 17.17 which doesn't enable anybody to speak on this subject except me or Bill Daly. We do that because we are the most able to address these issues. Frankly, in this era of

digital media, we will be responding to stories non-stop, most of which will not be accurate or will be out of context, and we're much more comfortable, as we've been throughout this process, taking a low-key approach to the public relations aspect of this. You know we haven't been out there campaigning or hammering or doing whatever. We think the negotiations have to take place across the table between the parties directly.

You said you want to have more control over the allocation, who gets what, how the funds are allocated to the players. Which group of players?

I think you're mischaracterizing it. My point is, however we ultimately negotiate the player contracting rules, it doesn't change ultimately, as it relates to that, how much is paid out in a given year because that's a function of the percentage we agreed to.

Was there any vote by the Board today?

Actually, it's interesting you should raise that. When we were all done, I asked for a show of hands as to whether or not the room was supportive of how we had been approaching negotiations: the positions we took, what we were doing, the fact that we -- and I didn't need additional authority for this -- but that we were not going to proceed without a new Collective Bargaining Agreement. When I asked for a show of hands, one of the clubs asked for a formal motion, which was made, seconded. A vote was taken and it was unanimous.

Will you contact and try to engage again before Saturday night?

I don't remember how we left it, as to whether or not he said he was going to call. Actually, we made the last offer. I guess, other than what we may be reading in the blogosphere, Twitter-sphere, what have you, we haven't gotten a formal response to our proposal. I'm hoping we get one and I'm hoping it is one that recognizes we made yet another meaningful move and we are trying to engage in a negotiation.

- 4 -

Yesterday you talked about your offer in terms of getting them to negotiate. You talked about their offer as not being what you wanted. Can you explain why you can't look at their offer and start negotiating off that? Today we sort of understand more fully at least it's a reduction.

It's only a reduction potentially in percentage moving forward. It's not a reduction in real dollars. In fact, it guarantees future dollars increasing.

When they talk about percentages, and I don't want to be too specific because you know I don't like to negotiate publicly, the percentages that they're referring to are assumptions and speculation based on their projections of league growth as against a guarantee -- which is a fundamental change from the system we have now, in dollars as opposed to percentage: a fundamental change in that regard.

So they're asking for a guarantee of dollars. They're giving you percentages that they think it might be. They use, as we discussed yesterday, a 7.1% assumption rate in terms of the growth of revenues, which far exceeds what is realistic.

As far as getting to a deal goes, is it harder to bridge the gap on those percentages or is it harder on the revenue-sharing issue at this point?

The consistent offer that they made, basically the same offer they've made three times in a row, is so complex and so -- I want to choose the right word – has so many machinations, that's why yesterday we decided to simplify it, keep it within the structure we have, go to a straight percentage. We hoped that that would cause everybody to understand better where we were and cause us to both engage in a more simplified fashion.

In other words, there's been a lot of discussion back and forth about 'not talking the same language.' We tried to simplify the language.

The players seem intent on doing the best they can to hold on to what they have, certainly in Year One, probably Year Two of whatever new deal. You want to reset right away to a new economic structure. Given that they seem willing to give up on the percentages later in the contract, isn't that kind of a win for you? How different are your

projections for league growth from theirs?

Enough that it makes a difference. And their offers are rather insignificant when you evaluate them in terms of both the percentages in realistic growth assumptions and in actual dollars. Again, they haven't budged, particularly on the first three years. What we have tried to do in our offers was reach to them in a way that doesn't have a rollback and that gives them the possibility of escrow in line with what they've been used to under this agreement.

As I've said before: five of the seven years, they've had escrow give-backs as much as 12%. We tried to stay within that framework and, in fact, be less than that framework.

When you spoke to us early June, did you have any expectation at that time for September 15th? Has it changed, your view, from then to now?

That's really an interesting question because I haven't been asked it before, so let me think about it.

We went to the union last summer, a year ago, and said, 'We're ready to begin negotiations.' We were told, 'We're not ready. All-Star.' All-Star we were told, 'We're not ready. Playoffs.' Playoffs we were told, 'No, Stanley Cup Final.'

- 5 -

We actually met, Bill and I, with Steve and Don on June 4th before Game 3 to give them a sense of where we thought we needed to go. Again, they said they weren't prepared to meet until June 29th.

Looking back in hindsight, it looks like there was no urgency on the part of the Players' Association to engage or get anything done. What's happened over the summer seems to be reinforcing that. I can't and I won't speculate as to why that might be their intention, but it is what it is.

If you look at the record, you look at it in hindsight, I think it's crystal clear.

It seems like what you're saying is you're comfortable with the cash payments that are going out at the level they are at this point.

No, no, we're looking to reduce them.

Not just in relation to the overall revenue?

I'm not sure I understand the question. What that translates to, in dollars and cents, is more than we're prepared to pay out. This goes back to the last question, as well. You know, the Players' Association has known since November that we weren't going to play without a new deal, and they've repeatedly offered to play another year under the same terms and conditions. This is the same union that had the option to and extended the Collective Bargaining Agreement for the '11 and '12 season.

It's clear there's a comfort level they have with the current Collective Bargaining Agreement, and I guess there's some notion that delaying it gives them more hope that they're going to hold onto it another year.

That's not something we're comfortable with. I think we've been clear; that's no surprise to anybody – certainly not the Players' Association.

Obviously there was a press conference earlier this afternoon with Don Fehr. He said the owners' proposal is less money and fewer rights. What is your assessment?

I didn't hear his press conference. I was in a Board meeting. I don't think it's really constructive for me to comment on somebody else's comment that I didn't hear myself. If that's what he said, that's what he said. Obviously we're going to disagree on lots of things.

Why would it be so hard for this upcoming year to arrive at a figure that would ensure players will get paid out in full, you wouldn't almost guarantee losing money to escrow?

Because that would result, in all probability, in us paying out more than we're prepared to.

It's an amount you paid already. Presumably revenues are going to grow alongside.

That would mitigate the impact of what we're seeking to accomplish. There seems to be this notion that because we agreed to 54 escalating to 57 seven years ago, that's a perpetual entitlement. There's a reason this Collective Bargaining Agreement had a term. The term was

originally six years. The players could have terminated it after four. They chose not to. The agreement could have ended after six, before the '11/'12 season. They chose to extend it by another year.

That doesn't mean that the league has to be prepared to continue to do the same thing. We honored what we were obligated to do. I don't expect any awards for that. That was our obligation both legally and morally. That doesn't mean we have any responsibility to do that going forward.

- 6 -

Other than the contracts having been signed. We can argue about the math, but it would seem you enter into a situation next year where a lot of those contracts would be reduced. When you sign a contract, you're morally obligated to pay what it says.

Except for the system that we agreed to contemplated escrow – specifically provided that contract amounts could be reduced – and the SPC (Standard Player Contract) exists by virtue of the Collective Bargaining Agreement. While we're not seeking a 24% rollback or anything close to it, that's hardly unprecedented based upon what the union proposed. That was a union proposal eight years ago to do the rollback. They did that in November or December if you check the history on that.

The reason why the league is not prepared to, as you say, pay out the 57% anymore, is that because there are clubs that are suffering, clubs that are losing money?

I'm not going to get into a public economic debate. That will cause all of us to get a headache. We believe as a league we are paying out too much money.

Why is it unrealistic for the union to project the continued annual growth rate you've experienced the last seven years?

The numbers they're using are inflated. 7.1 includes the increase in the Canadian dollar, it includes one-time special events such as the new United States television contract with NBC, and the move of Atlanta to Winnipeg, and it includes what we think is an unrealistic base year. Frankly, if they're prepared to use the 7.1%, they really believe it, then the offer we made should certainly be very palatable to the players because giving up possibly an escrow or players' share reduction, let me be more accurate, of 7.1%, then about 4% over two years, when compared to the losses that would be sustained in a work stoppage, it's not even a close debate.

As you mentioned yesterday, the longer this goes, some of the elements you offered yesterday may not be on the table. On the flipside, from the side of the Players' Association, so far they've been negotiating within the general context of a cap system. They've stayed within the system in their offers. Is there not a fear perhaps that if this goes long, that's something they come after as well?

Are you asking me if they put the cap back on the table? That certainly wouldn't be a positive development in these negotiations. The league and the players gave up an entire season to get a system that, as I mentioned before, has given unprecedented competitive balance with 29 teams making the playoffs in the last seven years, seven different Stanley Cup champions. It's enabled us to grow revenues from $2.1 to $3.3 billion. Not only would it not be constructive, I think it would defy logic as to why somebody would want to take that kind of system off the table.

It's potentially the second lockout, the last time was a full year long. What do you say to the fan who is possibly facing missing another big chunk of hockey?

Listen, nobody wants to make a deal and play hockey more than I do, okay? This (hockey) is what I do. This is what my life is about in terms of how I spend most of my waking hours. This is really hard. So you only get involved in this situation when you understand what the issues are and you know you're doing the right thing for the long-term ability of our game and our sport.

It's very hard and I feel terrible about it.

As long as the players insist on not taking a tangible reduction from $1.873 billion in player salaries, as long as the National Hockey League looks for a tangible decrease in that number, how do we solve this?

You know, that's a really good question, but it goes a lot deeper. If you look at the players' proposal, whatever they put across the table three times, there's really no change in it in any material way, particularly in the first three years.

We've moved fairly dramatically in an attempt to engage and get a negotiation going, and we've been rebuffed at every turn. I know there's a lot of spinning going on, characterization, mischaracterization.

That's all part of what goes on in this process. But if you look at the numbers, we've made very dramatic movement, and the response has been nothing.

You cited the 50% with the NBA and the NFL. Besides those two examples, can you explain why 57% is an inappropriate share for the players?

Because we believe 43% to the clubs and the league to pay all the expenses is not a fair balance. We believe as a league we're paying out too much.

My point is, and I didn't refer to the 50%, I referred to the fact that the players in two other leagues recognized that it was not inappropriate or unfair to reduce what they were getting. That's in a challenging, recent -- in terms of those negotiations -- economic climate.

Just as they talk about your initial offer, why are we talking about 57% when what they have on the table is 52%?

It's not. If you fully understand the proposal it's not 52 or anything close to it. That number, and based on how they put together the offer, you have to look at the dollars they want guaranteed. The dollars are an actual increase. They're projecting that down the road, at 7% plus revenue growth, which is a very high assumption, that you might get the 52%.

Their proposal is not a percent proposal, it's a guaranteed dollar proposal, which is very different. I think, for those of you who are getting lost in the numbers, we are happy to respond to your questions and show you in specifics what we're talking about. But they did not make a percentage-of-growth offer, which is why yesterday we decided it was time to simplify the language, stop the games playing, make it clear. This is about the percentage under the current system.

Is paying players less enough to get the balance that you're looking for and basically solve the problems you have identified in your industry?

We have discovered over the last seven years there are things about this system that haven't worked as well as we anticipated. We believe, with the adjustments that we think are appropriate, the league as a whole and our clubs will be healthy and stable and that we can continue to grow the game. That will, over time, make sure that the players continue to grow their salaries in a fair way. We haven't done a bad job of growing revenues over the last years. The average player's salary has gone $1.450 million to $2.550 million in seven years. There's so much revisionist history relative to what happened eight years ago in terms of either players not being unified -- they were completely unified; that's how we lost it (the season) – that somehow they got slammed in the negotiations last time. They didn't. We made at the time what we thought was a fair deal. It actually turned out to be more fair than perhaps it should have (been).

If you don't receive a counterproposal from the National Hockey League PA in the next hour, can you still go back and negotiate with them?

We haven't gotten a response on our proposal. Like I said, we're available 24/7. We spent last weekend in New York waiting for phone calls that never came, Bill and I. Like I say, the union has been dictating the pacing and scheduling, the way, from a timing standpoint, these negotiations have been going.

The players said they requested or asked the league if there were costs other than player

costs that the National Hockey League would consider reducing. How would you respond to that or how did you?

We've done a very good job of growing revenues, particularly at the top line, so that HRR has increased. I don't think it makes sense to be putting that limitation on how the clubs run their business.

A lot of the increases and costs over the last seven years have related to things that we've done with respect to the players. Whether or not it's trainers, massage therapists, coaches, the fact that jet fuel has increased in the last five years 175% for the chartered jets that we use to move the players around.

You know, the 43% that we've been keeping compared to the 57%, those costs have increased dramatically, but our clubs have been dealing with that and we've been growing revenues.

I don't think it's appropriate for us to be limiting such other costs. By the way, there are things I won't go into detail, that the players have asked for, that would result in increased cost, separate and apart from players' share of revenues for salaries.

You mentioned a couple of times that you've moved dramatically. Their response to that is that you're moving dramatically off an initial offer that they say was preposterous. The numbers they threw out, it was the equivalent of them asking for 71%, now moving to 68%. Could you respond to that?

Yes, I think I will as follows.

One, like any Collective Bargaining situation, it's an invitation to negotiate.

Two, I think if you check on this, I could be a little off, the NBA's first offer was 40.5%. The NFL coming off of 60%; I think their first offer was 45%.

We were clearly within the range of what other unions have bargained against and ultimately resolved.

The fact of the matter is if you think 43% is unfair, remember that we have been getting 43% to operate the league and pay all of the expenses.

As I started to say, hope to see you all soon. I hope it's with better news the next time. Thank you for coming.

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NEWS RELEASE

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N_E_W__Y_O_R_K__(_S_E_P_T_E_M_B_E_R__1_9_,__2_0_1_2_)__–_The

National Hockey League announced today the cancellation of the 2012 preseason

schedule through Sept. 30. In addition, the 2012 Kraft Hockeyville preseason game,

scheduled for Oct. 3 in Belleville, Ontario, has been postponed to 2013.

The cancellation of the schedule was necessary because of the absence of a Collective

Bargaining Agreement between the NHL Players' Association and the NHL.

While the Kraft Hockeyville game has been postponed, many of the scheduled

celebrations in the winning community of Stirling-Rawdon, Ontario, will proceed as

planned beginning on September 30.

### 9/19/2012

Commissioner Gary Bettman Media Availability Transcript
Toronto, October 16, 2012
Good afternoon, everyone. Bill Daly and I just spent the last hour with Don and Steve
Fehr, and I would like to briefly report to you on what was discussed. As I think all of you know
we have been extremely disappointed, and that's an understatement, that we've been unable to
get these negotiations on the essential elements moving forward. So, today, we began by
discussing with Don and Steve that if we were to drop the puck on November 2nd for the start of
the regular season, we could preserve an 82-game schedule for the regular season and play full
playoffs as we normally do and be done before the end of June.
We very much want to preserve a full 82-game season, and in that light, we made a
proposal, an offer, really that is our best shot at preserving an 82-game regular season and
playoffs, and this offer that we made obviously was contingent upon having an 82-game regular
season.
A lot of you know we don't negotiate publicly, and I'm not going to break that habit
because I don't think it's constructive. The fact of the matter is, we offered a 50-50 share of
HRR, hockey related revenues, and we believe we addressed the concern that players have
about what happens to their salaries as a result in this year of reducing the percentage from 57
to 50%.
Beyond that, I don't want to get into the substance other than to say we believe that this
was a fair offer for a long-term deal, and it's one that we hope gets a positive reaction so that we
can drop the puck on November 2nd -- which backing up, entails at least a one-week training
camp. So we have about nine or ten days to get this all put to bed, signed, sealed and

delivered, in order for this offer to be effective and for us to move forward.

We hope that this effort that we've undertaken today would be successful because we know how difficult this all has been for everybody associated with the game, particularly our fans.

How confident are you that this is going to go forward?

Well, we certainly hope it will. We've given it our best shot.

What was the reaction?

The reaction was that they obviously need to study it, and so we told them that we're available to them. But they're going to need some time to review it, and I respect that portion of the process. Obviously, they've got to understand the offer and get comfortable with it.

Was it just the core economic issues in terms of the offer?

We had a number of significant elements that we believe can and should serve as the basis of a deal to get us playing hockey.

Why do this today?

Because if we want to have an 82-game regular season, if we want to preserve an 82-game regular season and you back up the timetable in terms of the schedule, we needed to do it.

By the way, in terms of the schedule, so everybody understands, the compression that would be involved is one additional game every five weeks. Beyond that, we don't think it would be good for the players or for the game. But if you look at what our ability would be to schedule 82 games and you work back from November 2nd, if we didn't do it now, if we didn't put an effort on the table that we thought was fair and could get us playing hockey, if we didn't do it now, then it probably wasn't going to happen for a while. Because, again, it's done in the spirit of getting a full season in.

Is it 50-50 across the board?

It's 50-50 across board.

How long of a contract will this be?

I'm not going to get into the specifics. We proposed a long-term contract. We think that's in everybody's interest. We think that's what our fans want.

Can you explain how you address the roll back or the escrow?

There is no roll back, and I'm not going to get into the specifics. It would not be constructive at this point in time. The union has some work to do, and we respect the process. I probably have gone further than I usually have in terms of discussing what we've proposed than at any other time. But I'm not comfortable going any further. I'm more concerned about the process right now and getting us back on the ice.

How worried are you they might say no and more of the season will be lost?

I don't even want to go there.

Is the league amenable to playing an abbreviated schedule?

We're focused on getting the puck dropped on November 2nd and playing a full 82-game regular season and full playoffs. That's what this offer is all about.

Have you made plans to meet later in the week?

We're going to be on-call to them. They have some work to do internally. Obviously, we didn't put this proposal, this offer, together overnight, and they're going to need a little time to review it. I'm hoping that review will get us to a positive and constructive place.

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# NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE OCTOBER 18, 2012
DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BILL DALY STATEMENT
REGARDING THE THIRD UNION PROPOSAL
TORONTO (October 18, 2012) -- Bill Daly, Deputy Commissioner of the National
Hockey League, released the following statement regarding the third Union proposal:
"The so called 50-50 deal, plus honoring current contracts proposed by the NHL Players'
Association earlier today is being misrepresented. It is not a 50-50 deal. It is, most likely a 56- to
57-percent deal in Year One and never gets to 50 percent during the proposed five-year term of
the agreement. The proposal contemplates paying the Players approximately $650 million
outside of the Players' Share. In effect, the Union is proposing to change the accounting rules to
be able to say '50-50,' when in reality it is not. The Union told us that they had not yet 'run the
numbers.' We did."
### (10/18/12)

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# NEWS RELEASE

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N_E_W_ _Y_O_R_K_ _(_O_c_t_o_b_e_r_ _1_9_,_ _2_0_1_2_)_ _–_ _The National
Hockey League announced today the cancellation of the 2012-13 regular-season
schedule through November 1. A total of 135 regular-season games were scheduled for
Oct. 11 through Nov. 1.
The cancellation was necessary because of the absence of a Collective Bargaining
Agreement between the NHL Players' Association and the NHL.
###10/19/2012

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE NOVEMBER 2, 2012
NHL ANNOUNCES CANCELLATION OF 2013 BRIDGESTONE NHL WINTER
CLASSIC
& SiriusXM HOCKEYTOWN WINTER FESTIVAL
Red Wings And Maple Leafs Will Play Next Winter Classic At The University Of

Michigan

NEW YORK (Nov. 2, 2012) -- The National Hockey League today announced the cancellation of the 2013 Bridgestone NHL Winter Classic. The game was scheduled for Jan.
1 between the Detroit Red Wings and Toronto Maple Leafs at Michigan Stadium in Ann Arbor, Mich. In addition, the League announced all SiriusXM Hockeytown Winter Festival
events scheduled for Dec. 16-31 at Comerica Park in Detroit are cancelled.
The next NHL Winter Classic – featuring the Red Wings and Maple Leafs -- and Hockeytown Winter Festival will take place at the University of Michigan and Comerica Park,
respectively. Those who have purchased tickets for the 2012-13 events can either receive refunds or maintain their tickets for the future events. Ticket refund information for the 2013
Bridgestone NHL Winter Classic and SiriusXM Hockeytown Winter Festival can be found at:
nhl.com/winterclassicrefund.
The cancellation was necessary because, given the absence of a Collective
Bargaining Agreement between the NHL Players' Association and the NHL, the League was
not in a position to do all that is necessary to adequately stage events of this magnitude.
This year's Bridgestone NHL Winter Classic and the companion SiriusXM Hockeytown Winter Festival called for the construction of major outdoor rink facilities at both Comerica
Park and 'The Big House'. Multiple games involving teams from the NHL, NCAA, American
Hockey League, Ontario Hockey League, high school and local minor hockey leagues were
scheduled, requiring travel and hotel commitments. Beyond the construction of two major
outdoor rink facilities, the combined events were preparing to welcome nearly 400,000 guests to Detroit and Ann Arbor over the holiday period.
"The logistical demands for staging events of this magnitude made today's decision unavoidable. We simply are out of time," said NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly. "We are
extremely disappointed, for our fans and for all those affected, to have to cancel the Winter
Classic and Hockeytown Winter Festival events."
"We look forward to bringing the next Winter Classic and the Hockeytown Winter Festival to Michigan," Daly added.

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# NEWS RELEASE
NHL ANNOUNCES CANCELLATION OF 2012-13 REGULAR-SEASON SCHEDULE

THROUGH DECEMBER 14 AND 2013 NHL ALL-STAR WEEKEND
 NEW YORK (November 23, 2012)--The National Hockey League announced today the
cancellation of the 2012-13 regular-season schedule through December 14. The NHL also announced the
cancellation of the 2013 NHL All-Star Weekend scheduled for Jan. 26-27 in Columbus, Ohio. The
cancellations are necessary due to the absence of a new Collective Bargaining Agreement between the
NHL Players' Association and the NHL.
A total of 422 regular-season games – 34.3 percent of the season – were scheduled for Oct. 11
through Dec. 14.
"The reality of losing more regular-season games as well as the 2013 NHL All-Star Weekend in
Columbus is extremely disappointing," said NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly. "We feel badly for
NHL
fans and particularly those in Columbus, and we intend to work closely with the Blue Jackets organization

# NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE DECEMBER 14, 2012
NHL FILES CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT IN FEDERAL COURT
AND UNFAIR LABOR PRACTICE CHARGE WITH NLRB
NEW YORK (December 14, 2012) -- Today, in response to information indicating that
NHL Players have or will be asked to vote to authorize the National Hockey League Players'
Association's Executive Board to proceed to "disclaim interest" in continuing to represent the
Players in collective bargaining, the National Hockey League filed a Class Action Complaint in
Federal Court in New York seeking a Declaration confirming the ongoing legality of the lockout.
Simultaneously with the filing of its Complaint, the NHL also filed an Unfair Labor
Practice Charge with the National Labor Relations Board alleging that by threatening to
"disclaim interest," the NHLPA has engaged in an unlawful subversion of the collective
bargaining process and conduct that constitutes bad faith bargaining under the National Labor
Relations Act.
### (12/14/2012)

Bettman and Fehr - 1.6.13 $1$
Quotes From:

## NHL Commissioner
## GARY BETTMAN
## NHLPA Executive Director
## DONALD FEHR

GARY BETTMAN: Good morning,
everyone. Don Fehr and I are here to tell you that
we have reached an agreement on the framework
of a new collective bargaining agreement, the
details of which need to be put to paper. We've
got to dot a lot of I's, cross a lot of Ts. There's still
a lot of work to be done, but the basic framework of
the deal has been agreed upon.
We have to go through a ratification
process. The Board of Governors has to approve
it from the League side; obviously the players have
to approve it, as well. We're not in a position right
now to give you any information about schedule,

when we're starting. It's early in the morning and we've been at this all day and all night, obviously. But we will be back to you very shortly, hopefully later today, with more information in that regard. I would be remiss if we didn't thank Scot Beckenbaugh, the deputy director of the FMCS in the United States for his assistance in the mediation process, and I want to thank Don Fehr, because he and the Players' Association as well as the people that work with me at the League went through a long, tough period, and we still have more work to do, but it's good to be at this point.

DONALD FEHR: Just very briefly, any process like this in the system we have is difficult. It can be long. I've said repeatedly throughout this process that -- when somebody would say what do you see ahead, the answer is you get up tomorrow and you try to find a way to do it and you keep doing that until you find a way to succeed.

And as Gary as just indicated, we have the framework of a deal. We have to do the legal work. We have to do the constituent communication work. At least from my end, I'm pretty sure from Gary's, too, we need to let them know the details before we tell all of you.

But having said that, hopefully we're at a place where all those things will proceed fairly rapidly and with some dispatch, and we'll get back to what we used to call business as usual just as fast as we can.

Q. What are you going to do to encourage fans to forgive and forget?

GARY BETTMAN: We'll be back to you after we go through the processes we have to go through. We'll be talking to the fans, most importantly, but at this point in time, we still have some work to do, and so you were here all day and all night, and we wanted to at least let you and everybody who follows the game know where we were in the process. Thanks, and we'll see you later.

DONALD FEHR: And hopefully within just a very few days, the fans can get back to watching people who are skating, not the two of us.

GARY BETTMAN: Absolutely.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

# January 6, 2013

An interview with:

# JEREMY JACOBS, COMMISSIONER BETTMAN

JEREMY JACOBS: On behalf of the

National Hockey League's Board of Governors, I am pleased to report that today we unanimously voted to ratify a new Collective Bargaining Agreement with the National Hockey League Players' Association -- which means, to our fans all around the globe, hockey is back. This great game has been gone for far too long, and for that, we are truly sorry.

The Board today also expressed its appreciation for the professionalism and commitment to our clubs and the sport that Commissioner Bettman and Deputy Commissioner Daly displayed throughout this difficult period. Gary, Bill, and their staff worked tirelessly from long before the lockout began in an effort to reach a constructive conclusion. Gary and Bill have the complete and unconditional support of the Board -- as well as our gratitude.

As our League moves towards what we know will be a period of growth for the sport and a time of great excitement and entertainment for our fans, I would add the appreciation of the Board for the dedication the players showed during the negotiating process and for their role in securing an agreement that will move the National Hockey League forward in the years ahead.

There is no doubt we all love this game. Together, our collective future is extremely bright. Our only interest now is to look ahead and focus on what this great game can provide to the best sports fans in the world. Thank you, all.

COMMISSIONER BETTMAN: Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you, Jerry. As Jerry reported to you, the Board of Governors reviewed the terms of the proposed new Collective Bargaining Agreement and unanimously ratified it. I am sure that you are going to have lots of questions about the new collective bargaining agreement and the process that took place in reaching it. Out of respect for the players' ratification process, which is ongoing, I'm probably not going to be able to answer any of them, but we can try.

However, I do have a personal statement to make.

To the players, who were very clear they wanted to be on the ice and not negotiating labor contracts . . . to our partners, who support the League financially and personally . . . and, most importantly, to our fans who love and have missed NHL hockey: I am sorry. I know that an explanation or an apology will not erase the hard feelings that have built up over the past few months, but I owe you apology, nevertheless.

As Commissioner of the National Hockey League, it sometimes falls upon me to make tough

decisions that disappoint and occasionally anger players and fans. This was a long and extremely difficult negotiation -- one that took a lot longer than anybody wanted. I know it caused frustration, disappointment, and even suffering to a lot of people who have supported the National Hockey League in many different ways.

In the end, neither side got everything it wanted, and everyone lost in the short-term. But the NHL gained a long-term agreement that's good for the players and good for the teams, and should guarantee the future success of NHL hockey for many years to come. It will help the game to grow, ensuring greater economic stability for all of our teams.

Second, it's a 10-year agreement, one that will stand the test of time, with a system where all teams can be competitive and have a chance to make the playoffs and even win the Stanley Cup.

Third, it guarantees that our attention from now on will stay where it belongs: on the ice.

I thank the National Hockey League Players' Association, Don Fehr, and particularly the players on the negotiating committee, for their efforts in helping to secure the stability and success of NHL hockey for seasons to come. They fought hard for what they believed in, and represented their fellow players extraordinarily well.

Once the players ratify the agreement, all the things that you love most about NHL hockey -- the speed, the intensity, the skill, the teamwork, and the incredible passion -- will greet you once again. As I said, we know that no words of apology or explanation will soften the disappointment. I read the letters. I followed the tweets. I read the blogs. We have a lot of work to do. The National Hockey League has a responsibility to earn back your trust and support, whether you watch one game or every game, and that effort begins today.

The players are ready to play their hearts out for you. The teams are preparing to welcome you back with open arms. The wait is just about over. Like all of you, we can't wait to drop the puck.

Q. Is there any aspect of this deal or perhaps the process that led to signing it which makes you believe it won't happen again, meaning another lockout, the next time you have to negotiate one?

COMMISSIONER BETTMAN: Well, first of all, without getting too specific, the fact is it's a 10-year deal. The Union, I believe, under the framework and leadership that Don has provided, will now have greater stability.

We've had five different (NHLPA) executive directors in the last eight years. We believe that with this agreement and the length of this agreement and what it provides and the way the Union has reconstituted itself and the players have come together, I think that bodes well for the future relationship.

Q. You guys addressed a lot of issues in the CBA, but two you did not are realignment and Olympic participation. Do you have a time scheduled for when you'll get at those?

COMMISSIONER BETTMAN: We'll get to that. Both issues are important to both the players and the League and the clubs, and we need to get to that.

And I believe, as we've said all along, neither are bargaining chips. They're really working together as partners and problem-solving to get to the right place.

Q. As you said off the top, the apology probably isn't enough for fans who suffered through this thing. What tangible steps will the league take to make good with its fans?

COMMISSIONER BETTMAN: That is in the process of being worked on, and it will be announced at the appropriate time. Obviously, this is still subject to ratification from the players. But there will be outreaches, campaigns, and efforts that will be made clear as we get closer to dropping the puck.

Q. Gary, there's been some speculation about your own future. Can you address what your plans are in terms of the future?

COMMISSIONER BETTMAN: It's nothing more than speculation, and it's nothing more than unfounded speculation. I'm looking forward to continuing to grow this game both on and off the ice, as we have over the last 20 years. I think the opportunities are great, and I'm excited to be a part of them.

Q. Gary, certain sponsors came out during the lockout and said they'd ask for refunds. What are your plans to satisfy their needs?

COMMISSIONER BETTMAN: Well, with a number of partners there are contractual provisions in the event of what they call a 'force majeure.' But we've been in constant communication with our partners. They have been very supportive throughout this process, and we will be working with them to make sure that everybody's comfortable going forward.

Q. You mentioned that you read the blogs and the tweets. What was the prevailing thing that came through to you from the fan base?

COMMISSIONER BETTMAN: I think the prevailing thing is that our fans are incredibly passionate about our game, and were frustrated and disappointed about the fact that we weren't playing. And frankly, they didn't care who was at fault. They wanted hockey back, and I completely understand that.

As Commissioner of the League, no matter what my view of the world is in terms of how and why and wherever, it's my responsibility to them to try and make it right.

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Q. There have been some pointed comments coming from Russia and the KHL. How concerned are you that some prominent players don't return?

COMMISSIONER BETTMAN: The NHL represents the highest level of hockey in the world. We expect that the best players in the world will want to play here.

Q. With the Islanders moving to Brooklyn in 2015, are the teams locked into their lotions now with the new CBA? Especially with a lot of the smaller market teams discussing being a big part of the CBA was cutting down to a 50-50 split? Are there any teams that are stuck for now?

COMMISSIONER BETTMAN: Franchise relocation isn't covered by the Collective Bargaining Agreement. That (relocation) is something that the League does. As everybody knows, we don't like franchise relocation and we try to avoid it. But in the final analysis, if we find ourselves in the situation -- and we hope not to, and we're not anticipating being in the situation where a franchise has to be relocated -- that is something that the Board of Governors ultimately decides.

Q. What do you do and the Union do together over the next eight to 10 years to make sure this doesn't happen again?

COMMISSIONER BETTMAN: We build a relationship. As I said before, we have, we think for the first time in almost eight years, a stable Union with strong leadership, and that gives us an opportunity to work together as partners and build the relationship and build trust, which can only happen over time.

Q. If the PA approves everything by Saturday, do you anticipate releasing all or part of the schedule on Sunday?

COMMISSIONER BETTMAN: Well, actually, as soon as the ratification process is complete and we sign the CBA, we will release the schedule instantaneously – assuming it's done, and it should be. It's going through a lot of drafts

and changes. The timing and how quickly this has
come upon us, we've had some building issues
and date issues we've had to address. But our
expectation is that we want to get the schedule out
as fast as humanly possible. But we're not going
to do it until the ratification process is complete
because that would be presumptuous.
You sound like the people in the room I
just came from -- all of whom want the schedule.
Q. The fact that it was unanimous vote
as you've said, what's that tell you about the
feeling in that room? There have been some
different report that's maybe some owners
weren't totally satisfied with the deal. But what
is your sense of the feeling in there?
COMMISSIONER BETTMAN: What I said
to the owners, although in many more words than
I'm about to use, is: this is a good deal. This is a
fair deal. And in collective bargaining, not
everybody gets everything they want. I even said
within the room there is probably at least one or
two issues that everybody doesn't agree on and
doesn't like. The problem is, they're not the same
issues. But on balance, I believe that ownership
was quite comfortable, extraordinarily so, as Jerry
Jacobs indicated, with the process we went
through and the result that we reached.
Collective bargaining is not perfect, and
not everybody gets what they want on either side.
So, you know, the Players Association has to
balance the needs and interests of 700-plus
constituents. I have to balance it for 30. So it's not
science; it's more art form.
Q. Just a follow up. If you can't settle
this issue and it's cleared up with the KHL,
does it threaten Olympic participation?
COMMISSIONER BETTMAN: I don't want
to get into a 'what if.' We'll see what happens, and
then we'll deal with it in an appropriate fashion. I'm
not issuing any threats. I'm not going to make any
intemperate statements. I'm hoping the players,
who are supposed to come back and honor their
contracts, do it. I can't imagine why they wouldn't
want to.
Q. What is your explanation for why
this took so long? Why it took 113 days and a
federal mediator to bring the two sides to a
deal?
COMMISSIONER BETTMAN: The fact is,
as I indicated in my opening remarks, I'm not going
to get into a debate or discussion or a historical
recount from our perspective as to what may or
may not have happened and why. The fact of the
matter is it did because we didn't have an
agreement. When we made an agreement, we
came together very quickly. It wouldn't serve any

useful purpose to get into that now. Because, quite frankly, putting aside the fact that the players are going through the ratification process, my own view is: I think it's time to turn a page and look forward as quickly as possible. Going back and revisiting the last hundred or so days isn't going to serve any constructive purpose.

Q. You don't think fans are owed that explanation?

COMMISSIONER BETTMAN: At the appropriate time, if enough are interested in it, we can do that. But this isn't the appropriate time.

Q. There are reports that Seattle may be closing in on an NBA team, which would mean a new arena in Seattle. What would that mean for the possibility of an NHL franchise?

COMMISSIONER BETTMAN: It's not something we're focused on or considering right now.

Q. If camps open on Sunday, as anticipated, and the player plays in the KHL All-Star Game, is he in violation of his NHL contract?

COMMISSIONER BETTMAN: I'm not going to get into the specifics of that right now. We'll deal with it if it happens.

Q. Commissioner, Bill Daly said in a radio interview a couple weeks ago that there are things if he could go back that he might change about this whole process. Is there anything that you would change?

COMMISSIONER BETTMAN: I'm not going to review the process now. This isn't the right time to do it, out of respect for the players' process of ratification. Again, I think this is a day we look forward. Listen: there is no doubt that everybody will have, and has, a view and strong feelings about what transpired – as I do. But I'm not sure now it's constructive for anybody to go through that.

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# NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE JANUARY 9, 2013
STATEMENT FROM JEREMY JACOBS, OWNER OF THE BOSTON BRUINS AND CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIONAL HOCKEY LEAGUE BOARD OF GOVERNORS
NEW YORK (January 9, 2013) -- Jeremy Jacobs, owner of the Boston Bruins and Chairman of the National Hockey League Board of Governors, today made the following statement announcing ratification of the new Collective Bargaining Agreement with the

National Hockey League Players' Association:
"On behalf of the National Hockey League's Board of Governors, I am pleased to report that today we unanimously voted to ratify a new Collective Bargaining Agreement with the National Hockey League Players' Association. Which means, to our fans all around the globe, hockey is back.
"This great game has been gone for far too long, and for that we are truly sorry.
"The Board today also expressed its appreciation for the professionalism and commitment, to our clubs and to the sport, that Commissioner Bettman and Deputy Commissioner Daly displayed throughout this difficult period. Gary, Bill and their staff worked tirelessly from long before the lockout began in an effort to reach a constructive conclusion. Gary and Bill have the complete and unconditional support of the Board – and our gratitude.
"As our League moves toward what we know will be a period of growth for the sport, and a time of great excitement and entertainment for our fans, I would add the appreciation of the Board for the dedication the players showed during the negotiating process – and for their role in securing an agreement that will move the National Hockey League forward in the years ahead. There's no doubt we all love this game.
"Together our collective future is extremely bright.
"Our only interest now is to look ahead and to focus on what this great game can provide to the best sports fans in the world."

# NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE JANUARY 9, 2013
BOARD OF GOVERNORS RATIFIES NEW COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENT
NEW YORK (January 9, 2013) -- The National Hockey League's Board of Governors today ratified the terms of a new Collective Bargaining Agreement with the National Hockey League Players' Association.
Details of the new Agreement will be made available following completion of the formal ratification process by the members of the NHLPA.
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