

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Methodology	5
2.1 Research design	6
2.2 Netnography	6
2.3 Thematic analysis.....	7
2.4 Philosophy of science	8
2.5 Empirical data	8
2.6 Literature review	9
3. Theory	11
3.1 Schwartz and Carroll’s Pyramid and Three-Domain Model of CSR.	11
3.2 Crisis Communication – A theory of image restoration by Coombs & Benoit.	15
3.2.1 Denial.....	16
3.2.2 Evading Responsibility	16
3.2.3 Reducing offensiveness	17
3.2.4 Corrective Action.....	18
3.2.5 Mortification.....	18
3.3 Modes of persuasion.....	18
4. Analysis	19
4.1 Colin Kaepernick’s speech (Modes of persuasion)	19
4.1.1 Findings	24
4.2 Analysis of the NFL’s 2018 Health & Safety report - CSR.....	25
4.2.1 Leadership	25
4.2.2 Innovation.....	26
4.2.3 Data	28
4.2.4 Teamwork.....	31
4.2.5 Research	33
4.2.6 Community	35
4.2.7 Findings	36
5. Discussion	37
6. Conclusion.....	41
7. References.....	43

1. Introduction

When an organization reaches a point where it has to face a crisis, the situation often becomes worse before it becomes better. Public relations departments will rarely admit that their company is the root cause of a crisis and will often maintain total deniability in order to preserve its image. However, previous cases may suggest that denying a wrongful act in order to restore an organisation's image, can make the situation even more dire than initially thought.

Previous cases from multibillion dollar organisations such as *Boeing, Dolce & Gabbana, Dove, Monsanto, Volkswagen and Toyota* (cf. literature review) illustrate that denying a crisis sabotages the organisation's crisis communication efforts and creates an even bigger challenge in restoring the organisation's image.

This thesis will focus on the impact that initial deniability has on an organisation's crisis communication strategies and how an image can be restored more effectively while causing minimal damage. This will be examined through a specific case relating to the American National Football League also known as the NFL. Since the beginning of this century the NFL has struggled with a crisis in relation to protecting its athletes from head injuries and concussions. Initially, the organisation denied the allegations that many former NFL athletes were suffering from mental issues after playing in the league, which in some cases caused the athletes to commit suicide and even murder (Telegraph UK, 2017).

On September 24, 2002 former NFL player and hall of famer Mike Webster dies tragically of a heart attack at the age of 50 (NY Times, 2002). Webster was known for his toughness and his ability to block and tackle with force which earned him the nickname 'Iron Mike'.

After Mike Webster's retirement from the NFL in 1988, he was diagnosed with amnesia, dementia, depression and acute bone and muscle pain. According to friends and family, he lived in his car or in train stations around the Pittsburgh area where he played most of his professional career.

Even though friends and former teammates offered to care for Mike Webster, he continued to disappear for weeks without explanation. Webster did see psychiatrists and other medical doctors, however after x-ray scans showed no signs of any brain defects, all concluded that the root of Mike Webster's illness was mental issues (NY Times, 2002).

After his death, an autopsy was performed by Dr. Bennet Omalu who is a neuropathologist with specialization in the brain. Dr. Omalu is a Nigerian born doctor with no apparent connection to American football. However, Mike Webster's case intrigued him and Dr. Omalu began to research deeper into the health effects of playing American Football (Telegraph UK, 2017).

During Mike Webster's autopsy, Dr. Omalu discovered that the patient's brain did not look like the normal brain of a 50-year-old man. Dr. Omalu had the suspicion that playing American football was the root cause of Mike Webster's mental illness and premature death and initiated a thorough investigation.

Dr. Omalu consulted previous studies that showed how patients develop long-lasting and even permanent brain damage from just a single concussion and after months of research into Mike Webster's case, Dr. Omalu concluded that Webster's cause of death was chronic traumatic encephalopathy, also known as CTE. The condition is associated with having repeated blows to the head and was discovered and named by Dr. Omalu himself. However, the main concern of the newly discovered condition was that a patient cannot be diagnosed with CTE without an autopsy where the brain is examined. Thereby, current and former NFL players who are still alive cannot officially be diagnosed with the condition. However, symptoms of having CTE can be determined through signs such as problems paying attention, memory loss, confusion, and erratic behaviour (Jama Neurology, 2019). In the aftermath of Mike Webster's death and the discovery of CTE, a long legal battle between the NFL and Dr. Omalu began. The NFL initially denied having any correlation with CTE. However, it was later discovered that the NFL was already dealing with similar issues regarding former athletes. In the NFL's defence Dr. Omalu's studies were criticised as being speculative and unscientific and illustrated contradicting evidence from healthy NFL players. However, Dr. Omalu was legally deemed to have sufficient scientific evidence to make CTE an officially known condition (Telegraph UK, 2017).

In 2015 the Hollywood motion picture "Concussion" was released and the impacts of CTE came to the attention of the broader public. The film concerns the death of Mike Webster and how Dr. Bennet Omalu discovered the condition. Since 2015, the number of spectators for NFL games has declined and due to this negative publicity, the NFL has taken every action possible to counteract this decline and continue to run a profitable business (Statista, 2018).

As Hollywood is a big part of the entertainment industry in the western world, so is sports. Before 2015 the NFL averaged just under 18 million viewers per game, today that number has dropped to 15 million and shows no signs of increasing in the near future (Statista, 2018). The NFL commissioner Roger Goodell has addressed this issue and has been determined to make the sport safer by applying rules and regulations to prevent injuries around the head and neck area. However, as the new rules may protect the athlete's mental health, the entertainment value seemed to drop as there are fewer big hits and tackles.

Although the league has taken actions to attempt to solve the CTE issue, the bad publicity does not end there. Before the start of a game in 2016, San Francisco Quarterback Colin Kaepernick kneels down or 'takes a knee' during the American national anthem as opposed to the tradition of standing. This triggered nationwide attention as many Americans saw this as a disrespectful act towards Americans in general. During a post-game interview, Kaepernick stated the following: *'I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of colour. To me, this is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way. There are bodies in the street and people are getting paid leave and getting away with murder.'* (NFL, 2016).

Kaepernick's statement was a reference to a series of African-American deaths caused by law enforcement that led to the Black Lives Matter movement and added that he would continue to protest until he feels that the American flag represents what it's supposed to represent (NFL, 2016). This caused a chain reaction and players from all around the league started to kneel during the playing of *The Star-Spangled Banner* before NFL games.

Kaepernick's actions provoked the attention of a vast number of American citizens who in protest boycotted the NFL by not watching its games as players were not seen to honour the American flag.

In the aftermath of Colin Kaepernick's actions, the NFL debarred him from the league as the organization is not interested in including political matters into the sport (CNN, 2018). Since these incidents, the organisation revenue has declined as viewers have been lost which ultimately led to sponsors paying less as it has become a smaller media market.

Today, the league is working on various CSR initiatives in an attempt to make the sport safer and regain the public's trust. Since the discovery of CTE, the league has established health and safety committees, a concussion protocol and even changed some fundamental rules to the game so that

the risk of head injury is less frequent.

However, how does the NFL through its corporate social responsibilities attempt to display a positive corporate image while responding to external scientific evidence critically claiming that athletes develop CTE by playing in the league? Furthermore, can the NFL recover from further negative publicity as players are using the league as a platform to counter racial degradation?

The abovementioned issues create a clear example of the problem that this thesis will highlight and how it is possible to find a solution to denying a crisis and eventually restore an organisation's image. The problem statement will not be case specific as its purpose is to be applied to other organisations/cases as well.

This has led to the following problem statement:

How can an organisation restore its image and regain stakeholder relations through CSR and crisis communication, after denying a crisis?

The following sub-question will be examined to elaborate on the problem statement:

- What are the consequences if an organisation initiates its crisis communication strategy by denying a situation even though it is the main culprit?

- What may be a possible solution/replacement to denying a wrongful a wrongful act?

2. Methodology

In this section, the project will account for the methodological considerations.

The following segment will present the project's research design in order to create an overview of the scientific approach that has been taken. The first part of this section will outline the choice and content of the case. Moreover, the following section will outline the project's methodological approach: This includes a presentation of netnography, which in this project will be utilised for establishing criteria for online data gathering. Furthermore, the thematic analysis tools of the project

will be described. Lastly, the section will present the ontological and epistemological positions that this project draws and aspires from.

2.1 Research design

The design of this specific project is taking the characteristics of a case design. A case design is typically applied and utilised in a detailed manner, to investigate a certain location, organisation or community (Bryman, 2016, p. 60). The case design concerns the complexity and the nature of a particular setting. The case in this project is complex and more exactly specified as a question or a wonder rather than a specific organisation or community. There are two separate cases in this project where one of them regards how values presented through CSR initiatives can be utilised in order to strengthen the image of an organisation such as the NFL. The other case concerns cultural diversities in relation to the organisation in question and how a corporate image can be restored through crisis communication strategies. When dealing with more complex and detailed areas, a qualitative approach is considered most useful as this project does not intend to generalize and create deterministic conclusions that are applicable in several or all cases. This project is focused on a specific case which will be analysed using a qualitative approach.

2.2 Netnography

Netnography is an approach articulated by Robert V. Kozinets and is a form of ethnography tailored to the study of online communities (Kozinets, 2002, p. 61). This project will apply parts of Kozinets approach in the form of gathering data on an online platform. This method will thereby be utilised to outline the criteria that have been established when selecting the empirical data.

The first step in Kozinets' method of netnography is *entrée*. This initial step regards the identification of relevant online resources that are able to contribute to answering the project's research question (Kozinets, 2002, p. 63). Derived from this project's research question, the focus is on how an organisation such as the NFL can strengthen its image and regain viewers by utilising communicative strategies inspired by CSR derived values. Thereby, the initial criteria for the selected data is to utilise a CSR report from the NFL in relation to reducing the impacts of CTE in athletes. Furthermore, a rhetorical content analysis of former athlete Colin Kaepernick's statements of racial profiling in the United States will be conducted. Kaepernick's speech will be utilised to

examine the uses of argument and how he speaks to persuade the recipient to concur with his political views. The speech is selected as it initiated an additional unfavourable situation for the NFL in the midst of dealing with its issues relating to CTE. Moreover, the search criteria for data were determined to be an independent scientific report stating that playing American football can cause severe impairment to the athlete's mental health. Even though the NFL has its own medical research team that studies the impacts of CTE in the sport, it is imperative for the validity of this thesis that an independent medical report is utilised. The NFL sponsors a team of highly qualified doctors, however their conclusions on medical research may be biased based on its source of funds. The independent scientific report will be utilised as a comparative tool to confirm or dismiss the corporate social actions taken by the NFL.

In terms of *data collection*, the data used in this project consists of the aforementioned initiatives and studies. Having access to the full reports that explicitly states plans and values that the NFL is reflecting, results in the data collection becoming less complicated as the criteria set by the CSR perspective is fulfilled with the NFL's official report.

The independent medical report provides access to knowledge regarding the impacts of CTE and will aid to determine the conclusion of the thesis.

2.3 Thematic analysis

In this project thematic analysis is utilised as guiding principles for the processing of data and the analysis structure. Coding is a central part of the approach when conducting a thematic analysis. Coding concerns the classification and categorisation of empirical data. The approach to coding is not restricted to a specific formula, but should fit and be compatible with the purpose of the research (Bryman, 2016, pp. 584-585). In this project categorisation is themes based upon theoretical concepts from Carroll's domains in the analysis regarding CSR initiatives taken by the NFL in order to reduce the impact of CTE. These categories create guidelines and an approach to how the empirical data are to be analysed and how the analysis will be structured. In terms of Colin Kaepernick's statements, modes of persuasion will be utilised as the thematic guideline in order to structurally classify and categorise the data.

2.4 Philosophy of science

The scientific and philosophical paradigms that this project draws from are social constructivism and the hermeneutic tradition. The ontological perspective that this project will reflect is that reality is constructed in a social context and that reality can be found in interaction between actors (Collin, 2015, p. 335). The data for this project is a one-way communication in a sense that official documents released by an organization or a medical journal is written by employees of these organizations. Thereby, it is not explicitly a communicative exchange between the consumer and the company. However, it is a message that the consumer can actively seek and is publicly available. The values and the messages that each party wants to send are perceived to be based on social constitutions created in a social and universal context, which only has a meaning depending on the social setting. The epistemological position that this project draws from is from a hermeneutic standpoint in the interpretation of meaning regarding the empirical data (Andersen & Koch, 2015, p. 205). The data may explicitly state values and intentions, but in order to achieve a more detailed analytical level, interpretation is vital to uncover implicit intentions and motivations behind the written statements. Moreover, modes of persuasion can be of a subjective and contextual nature and it is necessary to be aware of implicit elements that are shown or presented in the empirical data. Thereby, interpretation constitutes a necessary element when analysing this type of data.

2.5 Empirical data

The empirical data for this project will consist of a CSR report from the NFL which relates to player safety titled: *Play Smart Play Safe – 2018 Health and Safety Report*. The report is structured in six categories: Leadership, Innovation, Data, Teamwork, Research and Community. All categories relate to how concussions impact the game and how they can be reduced by various initiatives that are explained in the report. Furthermore, a medical report by Dr. Bennet Omalu and independent forensic neurologists will be analysed to compare conclusions of CTE between the NFL and independent sources while highlighting the respective parties' social realities. The medical report by Dr. Omalu and associates is publically available on the US National Library of Medicine – National Institutes of Health on pubmed.gov. The medical report will be utilised as comparative data to confirm or dismiss the CSR actions taken by the NFL.

The CSR initiative by the NFL is sourced playsmartplaysafe.com which is an extension of the NFL's main website, but is primarily for illustrating its engagement in keeping the sport safe and protecting its players from various injuries. The NFL's CSR initiatives are chosen as they provide data which should illustrate what the NFL is currently doing to reduce the risk of CTE in NFL athletes. This should aid to provide adequate evidence in order to answer the thesis research question and specify a possible outcome to how the NFL can restore its image and ultimately regain viewers.

Apart from the abovementioned sources of data, the project will consist of former NFL player Colin Kaepernick's speech about police brutality and oppression against African Americans in the US, which ultimately increased the unwanted publicity on the NFL. It is a post-game speech after the first kneeling protest occurred on September 28, 2016. The speech is available on usatoday.com and is transcribed in this project (usatoday, 2016).

All documents are listed in the appendix.

2.6 Literature review

In this section the thesis literature review will be conducted. The purpose of the literature review section is to establish an overview of the thesis' applied literature. Furthermore, the literature review has been useful to determine which theories are applicable for this specific thesis.

Also, the purpose of the literature review is to evaluate the studies and data that has already been written and analysed in relation to the subject (Bryman, 2012). This specific case is focused on crisis communication and how to restore a corporate image after a crisis. Additionally, by drawing on pre-existing knowledge on a topic and from this deducting a hypothesis, the deductive approach is applied.

Some scholars argue that an effective crisis communication strategy built from Benoit's theory of image restoration will help a company in crisis. One of which is from a scholar at Valdosta State University in Georgia. In this case the scholar conducted a research study that analysed Toyota's image repair strategies following the company's recall and product malfunction crisis in 2010 (Ashley Cooper, 2010). The report esteems how crisis communication research studies identify effective ways for organisations to manage a crisis, as well as how strategies affect the public's

perception of the brand. Furthermore, the research study examines consumer perceptions and attitudes of Toyota's image repair strategies and crisis communication efforts. A series of publically available blogs and forum conversations were analysed by means of content analysis. Similar to this particular thesis, the coding for the analyses emerged from the data, using the guidelines set forth by thematic analysis. Conclusively, a comparative analysis was conducted to provide a comprehensive analysis of Toyota's overall crisis communication efforts and image repair effectiveness. The overall conclusion was that Toyota destroyed much of the evidence acknowledging that they were aware of the accelerator problems that caused the massive recall. Thereby, Toyota utilised *simple denial* and list innocence as a defensive option to its crisis communication strategy. However, after these actions were discovered and confirmed Toyota was forced to recall all cars with the error and pay compensation to unsatisfied customers in order to restore its image.

Continuously, a local study from Aalborg University examined the CSR and image restoration efforts in the Danish building industry regarding sustainable disposal of waste. During the last couple of years, the construction industry has had a significant impact on the total amount of garbage produced in Denmark. This issue has now come to the attention of the press and the stakeholders of the industry. The study investigates how a CSR strategy can be implemented to the specific case in order to implement a successful crisis communication strategy. The study utilises Benoit's theory of image restoration rhetorically to examine the communication between each of the accused parties in order to determine the main culprit and examine their image restoration efforts. In this case, it is concluded that the guilty parties do not utilise simple denial, but shift the blame on others. Furthermore, the study emphasises the need to engage in CSR activities in order to restore an organisation's image and regain stakeholder relations (Welin & Pedersen, AAU).

The studies illustrate a consistent gap with crisis communication theories, which is that it encourages organisations to take either a defensive or offensive approach to crisis communication. However, there may likewise be a third possibility which will be analysed and elaborated upon in this thesis. Toyota's crisis communication efforts only lead to an even bigger image restoration process where more time and money was wasted to regain the trust of its customers. A vast number of corporations may initiate its crisis by simply denying the fact that any undesirable act occurred.

However, as it shows in most studies related to Benoit's theory of image restoration, the situation only gets worse before it gets better.

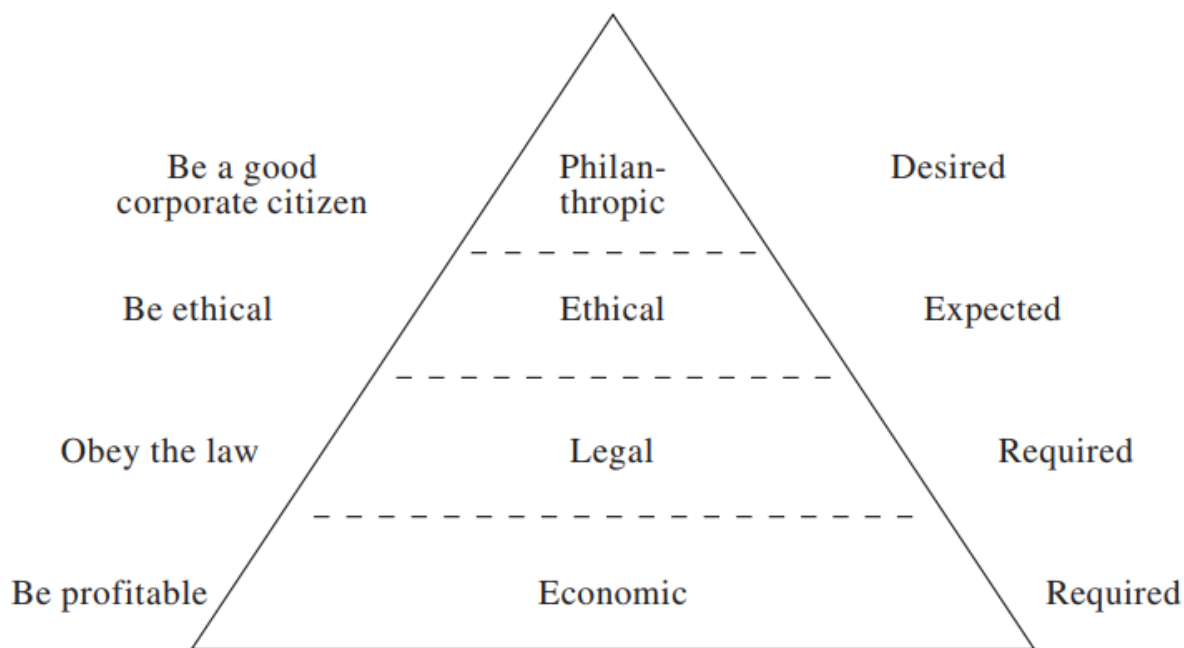
3. Theory

The theoretical section of the thesis is initiated by describing how the selected theories have been utilised in different contexts by other scholars. Furthermore, the section will include a delimitation to account for various reflections regarding the chosen theories. Lastly, the theoretical section will describe the selected theories of the thesis.

3.1 Schwartz and Carroll's Pyramid and Three-Domain Model of CSR.

Schwartz and Carroll's theory of CSR has been selected to analyse the CSR initiatives taken by the NFL in its annual health and safety report. The theory will aid in identifying specific CSR strategies and examine how these strategies can benefit the organisation's crisis communication efforts.

Carroll implemented his four-part definition of CSR into his new model of CSR in 1991 (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003, p. 503). The simplified model is shaped as a pyramid and consists of four sections: *economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic* responsibilities. By many scholars, the pyramid is misinterpreted to portray that the summit is the most important aspect of the model, namely the philanthropic activities. However, a hierarchical interpretation of the pyramid is not Carroll's intention. The base of the pyramid should emphasise the most valuable and fundamental aspects of CSR (Schwartz & Carroll 2003, p. 504). Furthermore, these categories may overlap, and should not always be analysed separately. Thereby, this project has included aspects of Mark. S Swartz and Archie B. Carroll's three domain model to conduct a comprehensive analysis as possible.

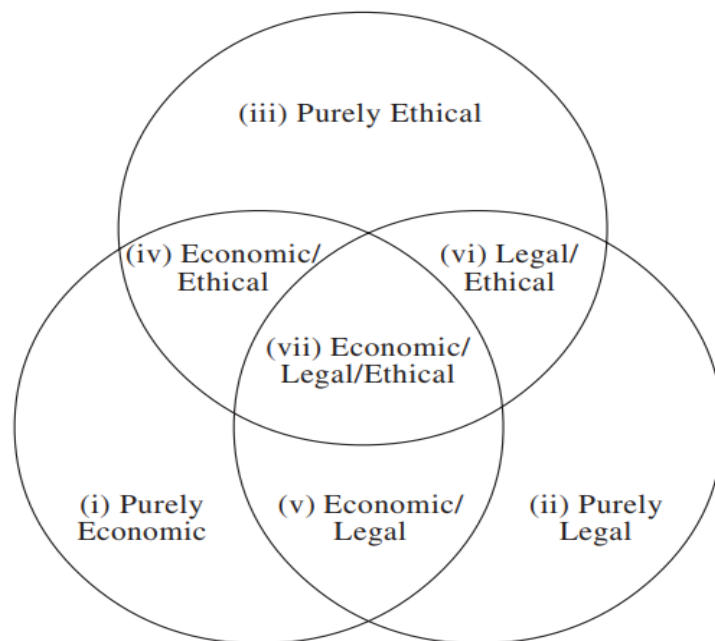


In Carroll's pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility, the economic responsibility is placed at the base of the model, and concerns how companies have economic responsibilities to society.

According to the model, a business is required by society to sustain itself which is accomplished by being profitable and secure investments from shareholders to assure future operations. The legal responsibility is the next level of the pyramid, and requires companies to follow laws and regulations. All corporations are expected and required by society to obey laws and regulations as a condition for functioning. In terms of ethical responsibility, corporations are expected to operate ethically. In accordance with Carroll, companies are expected to respect and embrace activities, norms and standards that even though are not upheld by law, are expected by society (Carroll, 2016, p. 3). Additionally, companies are expected to conduct business in a fair and objective fashion to avoid harm.

Finally, the philanthropic responsibility is placed at the top of the pyramid and includes all forms of business giving. Philanthropic responsibility embraces voluntariness and discretionary activities, which is normally expected in today's society. The public expects the company to give something back and this constitutes the expectation aspect of the responsibility. Moreover, philanthropic responsibility is an expected/desired aspect by society (Carroll, 2016, p. 4).

Schwartz and Carroll's Three-Domain model of CSR is similar to Carroll's CSR pyramid in the initial three levels; namely economic, legal, and ethical. The summit of Carroll's pyramid, philanthropy is excluded as a category and moved under the ethical and/or economic domains, which should clarify some of the underlying motives behind an organizations philanthropic activities (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003, p. 508). As illustrated below, the three domains are placed in a Venn diagram to illustrate how economic, legal and ethical factors may overlap and are all of similar importance, showing a total of seven categories. The category that organisations should strive for is at the centre of the model, as it fulfils all three domains simultaneously, which can be observed in the following illustration (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003, p. 513).



The goal of the *economic domain* is to maximise profits and/or share value (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003, p. 508). This can be achieved through activities which have either direct or indirect economic benefits to an organisation. Direct economic activities consist of hard data, which can be measured and can be observed in the form of elements such as increased sales or activities shaped to avoid legal consequences (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003, p. 508). Conclusively, if specific actions of an organisation are not designed to maximise profit and minimise loss, it cannot be categorised as part of the economic domain (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003, p. 509). The *legal domain* concerns the state, federal, and local jurisdictions of the country that the organisation is operating in (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003, p. 509). An organisation's legal responsibility can be divided into three categories:

Compliance, avoidance of civil litigation and anticipation of the law (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003, p. 509).

Compliance can moreover be divided into three additional categories: *Passive, restrictive and opportunistic* (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003, p. 509). **Passive compliance** shows cases where employees abide the law by nature as they are convinced that it is the right thing to do. **Restrictive compliance** is when an organisation is forced to reluctantly abide the law. This may include factors such as paying taxes or tariffs which does not benefit the organisation financially. The term **restrictive** reflects the idea that an organisation's actions may be prohibited or restricted by the legal system in the operational country (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003, p. 510). There are two forms of *Opportunistic compliance*. The first form is when organisations actively aim to utilise loopholes in legislations to the benefit of its self-interest. In the second form, opportunistic compliance involves organisations which may base their operations in nations where legislation or legal systems are not limiting the organisation's economic interests (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003, p. 510). For example, in developing countries where safety regulations and salaries are not as extensive as in the developed countries. Conclusively, both forms operate within the law, however not always in an ethical manner. The second category within the legal domain is *Avoidance of civil litigation*, which concerns organisations becoming aware of a possible criminal offence and acts by ceasing all activities in conflict with the law (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003, p. 511). The final category within the legal domain is *Anticipating changes to legislation*. For instance, predicting future legislation based on changes in other jurisdictions may act as an advantage to organisations which may presently operate in accordance with the law. Anticipating future legislations may potentially spare the organisation from imminent civil litigation (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003, p. 511).

The *ethical domain* of CSR concerns the acknowledged moral standards or principles that an individual or organisation identifies with and additionally concerns customary law differing from the jurisdictions in which the organisation operates (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003, p. 511). This particular domain is further divided into three types of ethical behaviour: *Conventional standard, Consequentialist standard, and the Deontological standard*. The *conventional standard* corresponds with the ethical relativists' point of view where situationally accepted moral rights and justice are in focus (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003, pp. 511-512). For instance, in some cultures the use of animal testing is considered acceptable whereas it is frowned upon or illegal in others. The *consequentialist standard* concerns endings or consequences. *Egoism* and *utilitarianism* are the two

types of consequentialism. Egoism promotes the positives of an individual while utilitarianism promotes the positives of society. While both terms are applicable, only utilitarianism is relevant for the consequentialist standard, as CSR mainly concerns the societal repercussions of organisational behaviour (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003, p. 512). The *deontological standard* is driven by two of Carroll's principles of ethics, namely moral rights and justice (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003, p. 512). Deontology originates from the greek term: '*deon*' which means duty (Stanford Encyclopedia). Thus, deontological ethics is differentiated from consequentialism as the terminology is proactive rather than reactive.

3.2 Crisis Communication – A theory of image restoration by Coombs & Benoit.

The following theory will be utilised to examine the identified crisis communication efforts by the NFL. Furthermore, the identified strategies will be categorized and analysed in order to ascertain the applied image restoration strategies.

Timothy Coombs book of crisis communication, includes William L. Benoit's theory of image restoration. According to Benoit, there is a list of image restoration strategies that is organized into five broad categories: *denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action and mortification*. These categories all have subcategories or strategies to identify its key characteristics (Coombs, 2014, p. 127).

Benoit exemplifies that there are two key assumptions that provide the foundation for this theory of image restoration strategies. First, communication is best conceptualized as a goal directed activity. Second, maintaining a positive reputation is one of the central goals of communication (Coombs, 2014, p. 129).

According to Benoit, image repair messages are needed whenever an image is threatened. One must determine what accusations or suspicions threaten the image, and who is or are the most important audience. An accusation cannot be successfully counteracted unless the nature of the accusation is identified. Furthermore, Benoit states that if the audience is not aware of an accusation, then that accusation can be safely ignored. In fact, the act of responding to an accusation will inform the audience of a potential problem (Coombs, 2014, pp. 125-126).

3.2.1 Denial

The first category of image restoration is denial. There is *simple denial* where the accused party denies performing an act and there is *shift the blame* where another performed the act (Coombs, 2014, p. 127). Other scholars also list innocence and mistaken identity as a defensive option. Coombs & Benoit explain that it is possible to reinforce one's denial through the abovementioned strategies by utilizing the correct tools of argument. For example, after a tape was used to prove that PLO (The Palestine Liberation Organization) leader Yasser Arafat made derogatory comments about the Jews, he claimed that the recording was fabricated. Arafat denied the charge while explaining the apparently incriminating evidence (Coombs, 2014, p. 139). Denial is a frequently utilised tool in politics, but also on an organizational level.

3.2.2 Evading Responsibility

Parties that are unable to deny performing the act in question may be able to evade or reduce the apparent responsibility for their actions. Four variants of this strategy can be identified: *provocation, defeasibility, accident, and good intentions*.

Provocation or scapegoating as it is also referred, regards that an actor may claim that the act in question was performed in response to another wrongful act, which naturally provoked the offensive act in question. Thereby, if the other person agrees that the actor was justifiably provoked, the provocateur may be held responsible instead of the actor (Coombs, 2014, p. 140).

The second strategy for evading responsibility is *defeasibility*. Rather than denying that the act occurred, the actor attempts to suggest that lack of information, volition or ability means that the accused party should not be held fully responsible for the act. If this strategy is executed correctly, then it should reduce the perceived responsibility of the accused for the failure event.

The third factor suggests that the actor may make an excuse based on *accidents*. The theory suggests that we tend to hold others responsible only for factors they can reasonably be expected to control. For example, when a person is late to a meeting, we may not hold them completely responsible if unforeseeable traffic congestion caused their tardiness. Rather than deny that the offensive act occurred, the accused will attempt to provide information that may reduce his or her apparent responsibility for the act.

A fourth possibility is for the actor to suggest that performance of the action in question may be justified on the basis of motives or intentions. In this case, the wrongful act is not denied, yet the

audience is asked not to hold the actor fully responsible because the act was done with good, rather than bad, intentions (Coombs, 2014, p. 140).

3.2.3 Reducing offensiveness

A person accused of misconduct may attempt to reduce the degree of ill feeling experienced by the audience. This approach to image repair has six variants: *bolstering*, *minimization*, *differentiation*, *transcendence*, *attacking one's accuser*, and *compensation*.

Bolstering can be utilised to mitigate the negative impacts of the act on the actor by strengthening the recipient's positive affect for the rhetor. Here those accused of misbehaviour might relate positive attributes they possess or positive actions they have performed in the past. This strategy may help offset the negative feelings towards the act, yielding a relative improvement in the actor's reputation (Coombs, 2014, p. 141).

Continuously, it is possible for the accused to attempt to *minimize* the amount of negative affect associated with the offensive act. If the rhetor can convince the recipient that the negative act isn't as bad as it might first appear, then the amount of ill feeling related to the act is reduced. If the strategy is successful the person's reputation will be restored.

The third possible strategy for reducing the offensiveness of an action is to engage in *differentiation*. Here the actor attempts to distinguish the act performed from other similar but less desirable actions. When the two actions are then compared, the act may appear less offensive. This may have the effect of lessening the recipient's negative emotions towards the act as their attention may shift to the compared act (Coombs, 2014, p. 141).

Furthermore, the actor can utilise *transcendence*. This strategy for image restoration functions by placing the act in a different context. For example, Robin Hood might suggest that his actions be viewed not as theft but as assistance to the poor and unfortunate. Thereby, an actor accused of misconduct might direct the recipient's attention to other, higher values to justify the behaviour in question.

The fifth potential strategy is *attacking one's accuser*. Those who are accused of wrong-doing may attack their accusers as a form of defence mechanism which is disputed among scholars. If the credibility of the source of accusations can be reduced the damage to the actor's image from those accusations may be lessened.

Compensation is the final potential strategy for diminishing the offensiveness of an action. In this case, the actor offers to remunerate the victim to help offset the negative emotion arising from the wrongful act. In effect, compensation functions as a bribe. If the victim accepts the proffered inducement, and if it has sufficient value, the negative affect from the undesirable act can be outweighed, thereby restoring reputation (Coombs, 2014, pp. 141-142).

3.2.4 Corrective Action

In this strategy of image restoration, the accused actor vows to correct the issue. This can be done in two forms: restoring the situation to the state of affairs before the action in question occurs or promising to “mend one’s ways” and make changes to prevent the recurrence of the undesirable act. Thereby, this strategy makes the actor assure the recipient that changes will prevent the undesired situation from happening again.

For example, Tylenol (American pharmaceutical company) appropriately introduced tamper-resistant bottles after their customers were poisoned (Coombs, 2014, p. 142).

3.2.5 Mortification

The last strategy in Benoit’s theory of image restoration concerns that the accused may admit responsibility for the wrongful act and ask for forgiveness, thus engaging in mortification. If the recipients are persuaded to believe that the apology is sincere then they may choose to pardon the wrongful act.

For example, AT&T (American mobile operator) promised its customers to spend a billion dollars on upgrading and improving its long-distance services. However, the connection was still inadequate and AT&T apologized for the interruption (Coombs, 2014, p. 127).

3.3 Modes of persuasion

In this thesis modes of persuasion will be utilised to rhetorically analyse the narrative of former NFL player and activist Colin Kaepernick’s speech about why he chose to kneel during the American national anthem, which caused a public outrage in the US.

Modes of persuasion was a result of Aristotle’s (384-322 bc) attempt to formulate a systematic approach to rhetoric (Gabrielsen & Christiansen, 2010, p. 18). The word *Rhetoric* from 330 b.c was one of Aristotle’s contributions and contained three concepts of persuasion: *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*.

Ethos esteems the senders image and how the sender attempts to persuade the recipient to believe that the sender is trustworthy, sympathetic and wise (Gabrielsen & Christiansen, 2010, p. 109). *Pathos* is categorised by emotional persuasion where the sender attempts to persuade the recipient through emotion and emotional factors (Gabrielsen & Christiansen, 2010, p. 109). For example, *pathos* addresses the feelings of the recipient and can be identified when observing certain words or phrases that the sender expresses. *Logos* concerns the use of argument or persuasion by illustrating knowledge and logically constructed propositions in order to affect the recipient. In this thesis, modes of persuasion will be utilised as a rhetorical tool in order to identify the uses of argument in Colin Kaepernick's speech and find answers to why viewership for NFL games declined.

4. Analysis

The analysis will initiate by examining the rhetorical aspects of Colin Kaepernick's speech in order to identify the reasons for why the NFL chose to expel him from the league. Furthermore, the rhetorical analysis will help to determine if Colin Kaepernick has in fact encouraged his cause regarding minorities in America.

4.1 Colin Kaepernick's speech (Modes of persuasion)

This part of the analysis will focus on the speech by Kaepernick at his post-game press conference in 2016 when he started to kneel during the American national anthem. The content of the speech will be explained and examined by applying hermeneutic layers in order to reflectively identify the purpose of the speech and its impact on the NFL as an organisation. Furthermore, modes of persuasion will be utilised in order to identify the rhetoric means that are used to argue for Colin Kaepernick's case of racial degradation in the US.

The speech is initiated with an explicit statement from Colin Kaepernick about African Americans in the US. This can be observed in the following statement:

“There are a lot of things that are going on that are unjust. People aren't being accountable for. And that's something that needs to change. That's something that this country stands for freedom, liberty and justice for all. And it's not happening for all right now” (Appendix 1, ll. 1-4).

This was Kaepernick's first public appearance since he started to kneel three weeks prior to the interview on August 28, 2016. Even though this was a post-game media session, neither Colin Kaepernick nor the media addressed anything except why he chose to kneel for the national anthem. Kaepernick initiates his speech by stating that what's going on in America today is *unjust*. This exact use of wording can appeal to the recipients' emotions, and thereby the opening phrase is expressed utilising *pathos* in order to persuade the recipient. Kaepernick may do so as pathos is often utilised to make people understand a message, as pathos makes it possible for the recipient to be acquainted with the problem (Aristotle). The use of pathos in this context is to capture the attention of the recipient and primarily engenders their recognition and sympathy with the problem. Kaepernick continues his opening remarks by stating that the United States of America stand for *freedom, liberty and justice for all*, but that is not happening right now. The phrase is from the Pledge of Allegiance and is an expression to the allegiance to the flag of the United States and the republic of the United States of America. It was originally composed by Captain George Thatcher Balch, a Union Army officer during the American civil war who later became a teacher of patriotism (ushistory.org). By referring to the roots of what the US flag initially stood for and what was really intended by previous generations, the validity or credibility of the speech can be increased. Thereby, the last part of the opening remark contains *ethos* as it is not necessarily emotions related to a given situation but is an emotion which has previously existed (Aristotle). This can increase the sender's credibility and provide a form of authority as it reinforces the image of the argument and can thereby be considered as a high use of ethos (Aristotle).

The following phrase is in relation to what Colin Kaepernick thinks needs to change in order to for him to stand for the national anthem. He expresses that there are a lot of things that need to change in relation to racial inequality, but specifically addresses police brutality as a culprit of his demonstration. This can be observed in the following statement: "*There's a lot of things that need to change. One specifically? Police brutality. There's people being murdered unjustly and not being held accountable. People are being given paid leave for killing people. That's not right, That's not right by anyone's standards*" (Appendix 1, ll. 17-20).

As mentioned in the introduction, this statement is a reference to the killing of the unarmed African American teenager Trayvon Martin by law enforcement in February 2012, which initiated the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States. George Zimmerman who was the main suspect in the

case was on neighbourhood watch patrol in a gated community in Florida when the incident took place. He was later released as the State of Florida determined that Zimmerman acted under the Stand Your Ground state law, and had the right to defend himself with lethal force (NY Times, 2015). The Black Lives Matter movement did not excel until 2014 where the deaths of two African Americans caused protests and unrest in Ferguson Missouri (CBS, 2015).

Colin Kaepernick is referring to these incidents as he may feel compelled to take action just like the civil rights activist that initially caused the awareness. It can be determined that the phrase utilises *logos* as it provides evidence to his argument. This can be considered a strong use of *logos* as it refers to specific events and does not focus on what could be considered insignificant details (Aristotle). If Kaepernick were to express that he kneels because he feels that African Americans are being treated unjustly without providing logical and circumstantial evidence, it may weaken the argument and thereby his credibility. However, it can likewise be argued that the speech is not explicitly referring to the shootings, which can make Kaepernick's motives seem unclear and thereby lower the recipient's trust in the sender.

In the succeeding quotation the media asks the following: *“So many people see the flag as a symbol of the military. How do you view it and what do you say to those people?”* (Appendix 1, ll. 21-22). Kaepernick replies with examples of family members who are in the US military and how much respect he has for those who fight for the United States. However, he also replies with the following quote:

“(...) I've seen circumstances where men and women that have been in the military have come back and been treated unjustly by the country they have fought for, and have been murdered by the country they fought for, on our land. That's not right” (Appendix 1, ll. 28-31).

Here Kaepernick provides circumstantial evidence of his first-hand experience with veterans being treated unjustly and thereby attempts to increase his credibility. However, as in the previous statement, Kaepernick does not provide any specific details of how, why or who he has witnessed being oppressed even though they served their country and should have earned their fellow countrymen's respect. Moreover, Kaepernick may be speaking in general terms while referring to activism in relation to the United States military. More specifically the Black Panthers, which was a civil rights movement established in 1966 in the wake of the assassination of African American nationalist Malcolm X. The organisation's initial goal was to challenge police brutality against the African American community, but during the 1960's, in the middle of America's war in Vietnam,

the Black Panthers main focus was to bring home African American GI's from the front lines. The Black Panthers argued that African American people should not be sent to fight and then return to a country that hates them (History, Black Panthers). Colin Kaepernick's argument may show similarities as he argues that people who served in the military come back and are treated unjustly by the country they were representing. This can be considered a strong use of ethos as the emotions that ethos develops are not necessarily emotions related to a given situation, but are typically emotions which have previously existed (Aristotle). Thereby, the modes of persuasion utilised in this context is addressed to the recipient's long-term emotions which may help increase the sender's validity and use of argument. However, it can continuously be argued that Kaepernick does not refer to any specific examples or events which may also lower his credibility and thereby indicate a negative ethos.

In the subsequent quotation Kaepernick addresses the support from his fellow athletes and their families: *"I think a lot of my teammates come from areas where this might be the situation. Their families might be put in this situation. It's something that I've had a lot of people come up to me and say, 'I really respect you for what you're doing and what you're standing for' (...)"* (Appendix 1, ll).

In this quote, Kaepernick highlights that many of his teammates *'come from areas where this might be the situation'*. Meaning that they are in a certain type of community and a certain type of class that are being oppressed by a majority. The reference to his teammates background and social stigma implies a use of *pathos* as he utilised emotional factors as a mode of persuasion. The recipient may feel sympathy towards the athletes and their families and may thereby strengthen his case. However, once again no specific examples are provided, which can decrease the validity of the argument. If Kaepernick provided the names and the stories of teammates who came from a meagre environment and made it into the National Football League it may have strengthened his use of pathos and additionally persuade the recipient. Furthermore, it can be argued that the issue is not racism, but more about the social stigma as it can be challenging to break the pattern of families' social status even though America is known as the land of opportunity.

In the next quotation, the media asks the following: *"Are you concerned that this can be seen as a blanket indictment of law enforcement in general?"* (Appendix 1, ll. 57-58). The discourse of which the question is asked suggests that the media is attempting to provoke a conflict between

Colin Kaepernick and law enforcement. This may be to increase the ratings and the intensity of the story, and to create a friction between the two parties. Kaepernick's reply cannot be considered evasive and provides examples of logos which can be observed in the following:

“You have people that practice law and are lawyers and go to school for eight years, but you can become a cop in six months and don't have to have the same amount of training as a cosmetologist. That's insane. Someone that's holding a curling Iron has more education and more training than people that have a gun and are going out on the street to protect us.” (Appendix 1, ll. 59-66).

In this quote, logos is applied as Kaepernick expresses how few requirements are necessary to fulfil in order to become a police officer. The claim is supported by the fact that lawyers go through an eight-year education while police officers go through six months in the police academy. By making this comparison, it may appeal to the recipient's common sense and intellect as lawyers and police officers both practice law, but there is a vast gap between the duration of their educations. Logos especially focuses on argumentation, but for an argument to be well substantiated it needs to illustrate research such as statistics, numerics and academic references. Kaepernick does not utilise any statistics regarding African Americans in his speech, which can weaken his arguments.

However, in the abovementioned quote he does state facts about the American education system to prove his point and thereby solidify the use of logos in his argument. The quote continues with a comparison of police officers and dermatologists. This quote may be to rationalise the argument that police officers are undereducated and can be a hazard for the public rather than protecting it.

To further increase the validity of his argument, Kaepernick mentions a personal encounter with law enforcement where he was treated unjustly. This can be observed in the following quotation: *“I've had times where one of my roommates was moving out of the house in college and because we were the only black people in that neighbourhood the cops got called and we had guns drawn on us.”* (Appendix 1, ll. 87-90). This argument may be used to increase the recipients' confidence in the sender (Aristotle). Trust and credibility have a crucial significance if the recipient is to believe what is said. Thereby, Kaepernick mentions personal experience to substantiate his argument and ultimately persuade the recipient of his point of view. In relation to ethos, the sender's credibility provides a form of authority which can help to persuade the recipient. In this case, a first-hand unjustly encounter with law enforcement can increase the credibility of the argument and result in a high use of ethos. However, Kaepernick promptly concludes that law enforcement was called on

him and his friend as they were *'the only black people in that neighborhood'* this may also have the opposite effect of lowering the ethos as the argument is not substantiated by any rational explanation other than his own presumptions of being the only African American people in that particular neighbourhood.

4.1.1 Findings

This section will address some of the arguments by Colin Kaepernick and summarise the selection of arguments and how he attempts to persuade the recipient of his point of view.

Initially, Colin Kaepernick takes a meta perspective to the issue of police brutality and racial degradation in America. He does not provide any specific evidence to his arguments and mainly utilises pathos to connect with the recipient on an emotional level. Furthermore, Kaepernick does not provide any specific examples to most of his arguments which can decrease their credibility. The recipient may be further persuaded if he provides examples and circumstantial evidence to prove his point of view. Moreover, the use of logos is minimal and may further decrease the validity of his argument. If Kaepernick provided clear examples, statistics and academic research studies stating that there is a problem with inequality and African Americans are being oppressed and treated unjustly, then it could help strengthen his arguments. Continuously, it can be argued that Kaepernick chose not to provide any specific examples of cases as he may receive counter-arguments from the media where he does not have a prepared response. If the media would counter-argue an example where Kaepernick has no intelligent response it will decrease his argument and use of persuasion even further.

Overall Kaepernick's actions can be considered the ethically correct thing to do, but the NFL did not support his point of view and Kaepernick was barred from the NFL later that season.

Historically, political demonstrations of racial injustice in sports have been ineffective. Athletes were stripped from their titles and discharged from the leagues and sports they were competing in. The last known case of athletic political demonstrations that caught the media's attention was at the 1968 Olympic games in Mexico City. US sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos protested against racial inequality from the medal stand as they were receiving their Olympic medals for finishing 1st and 3rd. Each man held their gloved fist aloft in the black power salute as the US

national anthem played. After the incident, the men were punished by the Olympics and their country as they were suspended from the US team and eventually expelled from the games (Time, 2014).

4.2 Analysis of the NFL's 2018 Health & Safety report - CSR

This part of the thesis will analyse the annual health and safety report from the NFL. The aim of this analysis is to identify CSR-related values presented by the NFL in order to reduce the impacts of CTE and how these initiatives are utilised as a crisis communication platform. For this purpose, Carroll's pyramid and three domain model will function as structural guidelines in order to identify the themes of the analysis. Furthermore, Benoit's theory of image restoration will be utilised to analyse the crisis communication efforts made by the NFL. The analysis is segmented into the six categories provided in the report, namely: *Leadership, Innovation, Data, Teamwork, Research and Community*. Conclusively, the findings will be conferred in the following discussion section.

4.2.1 Leadership

The report is initiated with a statement from NFL commissioner Roger Goodell, which can be observed in the following:

“Using what we have learned from engineering and biomechanics experts, we made important rules changes that aim to reduce the risk of injury. We continue to support the world's leading researchers, in pursuit of advancing head health research, as well as work to champion new innovations around protective equipment.” (2018 health report, p. 1).

The initial tone of the report can be determined to comply with the *ethical domain* of CSR. The NFL has no legal obligation to make the sport safer, thereby their efforts may be portrayed as an ethical obligation in relation to the safety of its athletes. Moreover, the statement can be related to the *consequentialist standard* of the ethical domain as the initiative is reactive rather than proactive (Cf. Schwartz & Carroll). It is reactive as it is a result of the public and media scrutiny of athletes who suffer from CTE. Continuously, the statement illustrates a use of utilitarianism as it attempts to promote the positives of society rather than an individual (Cf. Schwartz & Carroll). It promotes the positives of society as the quote emphasises its support for the 'world's leading researchers' as it is not an individual task but a collective goal that must be reached in order to reduce the risk of CTE. Consequently, only utilitarianism is relevant for the consequentialist standard, as CSR mainly

concerns the societal repercussions of organisational behaviour.

Furthermore, it can be contested that the abovementioned argument by the commissioner does not solely have ethical intentions, but may additionally be to avoid legal consequences in relation to *anticipation of the law* (Cf. Schwartz & Carroll). The effects of CTE and its diagnostics are still being studied and it is still only possible to confirm that a patient is suffering from CTE by performing an autopsy (Omalu, 2008). With advances in medical science, it is only a matter of time before a swift convenient way of measuring CTE is available. Thereby, the NFL may already apply rules changes to make the sport safer now, rather than at a later point in time when more players will be suffering from the condition.

In relation to the NFL's crisis communication efforts, it is evident that *simple denial* was utilised when CTE and its consequences were first discovered (Cf. introduction). The league argued that Dr. Omalu and his team of forensics did not have sufficient evidence to prove their point. However, over a decade has passed since its discovery and the NFL is no longer able to deny its existence. Thereby, the initial quote by the NFL commissioner can be related to *corrective action* as the accused actor vows to correct the issue (Cf. Benoit). There is only one strategy that the organisation is able to utilise, which is to make changes to prevent the recurrence of the undesirable act. According to Benoit, the other solution is to restore the situation to the state of affairs before the action in question occurs. However, due to the circumstances of the situation it cannot be undone and needs to be mended. Thus, it can be argued that the commissioner utilises corrective action in his opening remarks of the report to assure the recipient that changes will help prevent CTE in the future. However, the commissioner does not provide a direct solution to the problem of athletes struggling with CTE. In technical terms the quote may thereby not have substantial evidence to be categorised as corrective action but a mere postulate to express corporate social initiatives.

4.2.2 Innovation

In this category of the annual health and safety report, all ongoing initiatives to reduce the impact of CTE are expressed and further details are provided through videos and links to the NFL website. In the following quotation, an initiative to help achieve the goal of reducing the impact of CTE is conveyed:

“(...) the NFL pledged \$60 million toward the creation and funding of a five-year project called the Engineering Roadmap. It's a comprehensive effort to improve the understanding of the

biomechanics of head injuries in professional football and to create incentives for helmet manufacturers, small businesses, entrepreneurs, and universities to develop and commercialize new and improved protective equipment.'' (2018 health report, p. 3).

In this quote, the NFL mentions its ethical/economic initiatives through philanthropic activities. The organisation has created a project titled the Engineering Roadmap and clarifies that \$60 million dollars have been pledged to improve the understanding of head injuries through collaborations with various businesses. The incentive can be viewed to have indirect economic benefits to the organisation as the donation's purpose is to minimise the impact of CTE in the future and thereby safe the corporation money in the future. If the donation can help in finding a solution to the problem of CTE in American football, the organisation can restore its image and possibly regain its lost viewers, which will ultimately increase profits. If this would occur, the sponsors will be willing to pay more as it will become a bigger media market. Thereby, it can be determined as an investment and an economic initiative rather than a purely philanthropic activity. Moreover, the quote can also correlate with having an ethical aim in mind as it concerns the acknowledgement of moral standards or principles that the organisation is attempting to identify with (Cf. Schwartz & Carroll). This can again be related to the consequentialist standard of the ethical domain as it concerns consequences. If the NFL did not actively engage in philanthropic activities to reduce the risk of CTE it may have a substantial effect on society's repercussions of the organisation's behaviour. Furthermore, the quotation is reactive rather than proactive, as it is a reaction to the knowledge of CTE it cannot be compared to the deontological standard of the ethical domain. If these philanthropic activities were initiated before the broader public was aware of the issue it would have been related to deontology and its impacts may have been more effective as it is not a reaction to the public scrutiny of the league.

In relation to image restoration, the quotation can be determined to correlate with *evading responsibility*. Paraphrased, the claim states that it will donate \$60 million dollars to organisations that can help resolve the issue of CTE. Thereby, it can be categorised as evading responsibility through good intentions (Cf. Benoit). The quote suggests that the action of donating \$60 Million may be justified on the basis of motives and intentions. The NFL is making the charitable contribution to employ other companies and organisations to provide a solution to the issue. Thus, the recipient is asked not to hold the actor fully responsible for the problem of athletes suffering from CTE, as the responsibility is shifted with good intentions due to the philanthropic initiative (Cf. Benoit). This should reduce the perceived responsibility of the NFL's health and safety

measures. However, if a solution is not found, the public may still hold the league accountable and the philanthropic donation will be wasted.

In the subsequent quotation, the NFL mentions another collaborative effort, through a competitive platform called *Ist & Future*:

‘‘Ist & Future is one of the NFL’s many partnerships and innovation challenges designed to stimulate industry-disrupting advancements in athlete safety and performance. This year, nine tech entrepreneurial teams presented to a panel of expert judges in an effort to convince them that their cutting-edge product would positively impact the future of sports.’’ (2018 health report - innovation Page 5).

It can be observed that the innovation category of the report is more of a philanthropic initiative to stimulate innovation and results through third party organisations. Furthermore, the quotation can be determined to have indirect economic intentions as the NFL will not be spending its own time and money on developing new health and safety related equipment. The league encourages external companies to spend their resources on finding a solution to make the sport safer. Thereby, it can be determined to correlate with the *economic domain* of Schwartz & Carroll’s three domain model as the initiative is indirectly designed to minimise a loss in profits for the organisation.

Continuously, the quote mentions that the partnerships and challenges are designed to stimulate industry-disrupting advancements in athlete safety and performance. As the previous quote, it can be argued that the NFL is attempting to evade its responsibility of finding a solution to the issue of CTE by organising a competition between third party entrepreneurial teams. Furthermore, the header of the page is titled: *Inspiring innovation through healthy competition*, which can also be categorised as evading responsibility, but with good intentions (Cf. Coombs & Benoit). The league may be attempting to justify that it is giving someone else the responsibility of reducing CTE based on the motives that it will create results and further help to find a solution to the issue.

4.2.3 Data

In this part of the annual report, information about how the NFL collects and utilises its data in relation to the athlete’s health and safety can be observed.

In the following quotation, the NFL is addressing its collaboration with an independent organisation that can assist in analysing data of injured athletes: *‘‘An independent third-party company, IQVIA,*

complies and analyses injury data collected throughout the year and shares it with the NFL, the NFL Players Association and the NFL medical and football communities.''(2018 health report, Data p. 2).

It can be confirmed that IQVIA is indeed an independent third-party company with no direct ties to the NFL (IQVA, About). However, it is a private, not government owned company which means that increasing revenues may be a higher priority than providing crucial information to help counter the impacts of CTE. IQVIA is an American multinational company, serving industries such as health and information technologies and clinical research. The company employs over 55,000 people and in 2017 the company's revenue was over \$9,74 billion, which makes it one of the largest corporations in the industry (IQVA, about). Even though it is mentioned that IQVIA will be analysing and gathering data to share with the NFL, it is not mentioned of whether the NFL will share it with the public or specifically use it to counter the impacts of CTE. The abovementioned quote continues as follows: *“Leveraging annual data helps the NFL better understand trends in injuries and serves as a guide for ongoing health and safety efforts.”* (data p. 2). The NFL does not mention that the gathered data will be directly utilised to increase health and safety of its athletes, but mentions that it will serve as a guide for ongoing health and safety efforts. Thereby, the independent third-party company is only applied as a consultant and provides information which may or may not be used by the NFL Players Association and the NFL medical and football communities. The quotation can be determined to correlate with the *legal/ethical domain* of Schwartz & Carroll's model of CSR. The NFL may feel that it has a legal obligation to include an independent organisation to appear objective and show that it is in compliance with laws and regulations. However, it can also be determined that the NFL takes advantage of utilising an external company to analyse its medical research as the information may not be used or shared with the public.

In relation to the NFL's crisis communication efforts in the abovementioned quote, it can be claimed that the NFL is attempting to *reduce offensiveness* through the use of *bolstering* (Cf. Coombs & Benoit). The NFL can be viewed to relate to positive attributes that they now possess by utilising independent experts to analyse their data. This may add transparency and reinforce its commitment to reducing the impacts of CTE. In this case the strategy can be utilised to mitigate the negative impacts of what the NFL has been doing to the positive attributions they are engaging in now. Thereby, this may help offset the negative emotions towards the fact that athletes suffer from

concussions and other mental issues by playing in the league, as the opposition will tend to focus on the NFL's current collaboration with the IQVIA.

In the succeeding quote, the report introduces its Injury Reduction Plan, which is initiated to minimise concussions in the upcoming season: ‘*This year the NFL launched an Injury Reduction Plan with the goal to reduce concussions in the 2018 season. Following a 16% increase in concussions during the 2017 season, NFL Chief Medical Officer Dr. Allen Sills issued a call-to-action to reduce concussions.*’ (2018 health report, Data p. 3).

This quote can be viewed to reflect the NFL's ethical and economic responsibilities. The organisation has a moral obligation and responsibility to protect its players and reduce the impacts of concussions. Thereby, the injury reduction plan may have been implemented to illustrate that the organisation is actively engaging in reducing the impacts of CTE and protecting its athletes. Furthermore, the initiative may correlate with the *conventional standard* of the ethical domain. The act of launching an injury reduction plan can correspond with the ethical relativists' point of view where situationally accepted moral rights and justice are in focus (Cf. Schwartz & Carroll). Thus, it can be argued that as a result of an increase in concussions the organisation establishes an injury reduction plan as it is the morally and ethically correct action. Moreover, the quote may have indirect economic benefits for the organisation as well. For example, if the NFL did not actively engage in reducing the number of concussions it may deteriorate its CSR and crisis communication efforts, which may ultimately result in a loss of viewers. Continuously, it should be noted that the NFL only mentions the introduction of an injury reduction plan with no specific facts or data about what it will contain and how it will minimise the risk of injury. Thereby, it may weaken the arguments of CSR related values as the recipient may not trust in the statements lack of transparency.

In regard to the NFL's crisis communication efforts, it can be argued that *corrective action* is utilised as a strategy in the abovementioned quote. It is claimed that there was a 16% increase in concussions during the 2017 season and the organisation then vows to correct the issue by implementing an injury reduction plan. Thereby, the organisation has made changes to prevent the recurrence of the undesirable act. This strategy may convince the opposition that these changes can prevent an increase in concussions in the upcoming season. However, the league does not mention how and why the injury reduction plan will prevent concussions in the future. This may reduce the

transparency of the argument and may decrease the effect of its crisis communication efforts as the opposition may be less convinced that the NFL is performing a corrective action (Cf. Coombs & Benoit).

4.2.4 Teamwork

In this category of the annual health and safety report, the organisation presents its medical staff and cooperation with external medical professionals to help solve the problem of head injuries in athletes. This can be observed in the first page of the category: *“There’s a special squad of medical professionals, including team physicians, unaffiliated medical staff and physicians from the local area, who watch the field for potential injuries and are available to provide immediate care at every NFL game.”* (2018 health report, teamwork p. 2).

This quote may illustrate *ethical utilitarianism* as it reflects the positives of society by implementing external individuals to assist on the field during gameday. Furthermore, by regarding them as a squad it may promote unity as an additional attribute to encourage the positives of society. The recipient may interpret the situation as the NFL will need all the aid it can get and have thereby assembled some of society’s most professional and brightest minds to assist on the field. Thus, this may improve society’s repercussions of the organisation’s behaviour as it utilises utilitarianism rather than egoism to address the issue of concussions (Cf. Schwartz & Carroll). Furthermore, the NFL explains in more detail how these external professionals will operate, which can be observed in the following: *“For the 2018 season, the NFL added a third Unaffiliated Neurotrauma Consultant (UNC) for each game to monitor the broadcast video and audio feeds of each game and notify on-field UNC’s or the athletic trainer spotters of possible head, neck or spine injuries.”* (Teamwork p. 2). This may strengthen the overall argument of applying external medical assistance as it may increase player safety and reduce the risk of worsening head injuries. The professionals can act in time and exclude a player from the field if there are clear signs of a concussion.

In the medical report from Dr. Omalu and his team of forensics it is mentioned that the athletes would tend to carry on playing after suffering an apparent concussion, which can significantly increase the risk of permanent damage to the brain. (Omalu et al.). Thereby, it can be seen as an imperative initiative to address and attend to players who show signs of a concussion. From a societal standpoint, this may then be seen as a significant improvement in reinforcing the athlete’s health and safety. Continuously, the abovementioned quotation may also help restore the NFL’s

image in relation to its crisis communication efforts. It can be determined that the NFL is utilising *corrective action* as a strategy to improve and restore its overall image. The NFL has actively engaged in correcting the issue of not treating head injuries immediately, by implementing external medical assistance on game day. This type of action may help to assure the recipient that these changes will help prevent long-term neurological damage in players, and ultimately regain the public's trust.

In the following quote the report shows further initiatives of philanthropy and gives examples of how on-field assistance from neurological experts can reduce the impacts of CTE: “*Specialists in a wide variety of disciplines relevant to player health and safety volunteer their time to explore ground-breaking research and make recommendations for how the League can continually improve the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of injuries (...)*” (2018 health report, teamwork p. 3). As previously mentioned in the analysis, independent external experts have been included to show signs of ethical behaviour and may have economic incentives as well due to the fact that the experts are volunteers. With this initiative, the NFL will not have to increase its investments of finding a solution to the problem and it may increase its ethical standards as the specialists are working independently and are excluded from the organisation's payroll. Thereby, it can eliminate any possible bias towards favouring the NFL by simply reducing the number of observed concussions. Moreover, the quotation may also reflect utilitarianism as it promotes the positives of society by mentioning that the specialists are ‘volunteering their time’ for the benefit of the athletes’ health and safety. The quote may reflect the positives of society rather than an individual as it also mentions that the specialists are engaging in a wide variety of disciplines related to the player safety. Thereby, it reflects that there is a need for a number of experts each with their own specialisation to optimise the research to make the necessary recommendations. However, the quotes use of *specialists* may be observed as a vague term as no names, titles or examples are provided. The reader may have various opinions to what defines a specialist. When clicking on ‘view all the committees’ it can be observed that the experts and scientific researches are all employed by the NFL, which may compromise their judgement. The independent specialists and volunteers are not listed, which may decrease the reliability of the statement as no further information is provided.

In relation to the organisation's image restoration efforts, it can be argued that *reducing offensiveness* through the use of *bolstering* (Cf. Coombs & Benoit). The NFL may attempt to reduce the degree of ill feeling by relating to positive attributes they possess by illustrating its use of external volunteering specialists. The public may view it as a positive attribute that the NFL are utilising volunteers who may be able to assist in reducing the impacts of CTE. By relating to the positive attributes they possess or positive actions they have performed in the past, it may help offset the negative feeling and yield a relative improvement in the organisation's reputation. *Reducing offensiveness* by the use of *bolstering* may be an effective solution in this context as the aim is to reduce the degree of ill feeling experienced by the audience. If the audience's negative feelings can be reduced, they may be more likely to agree with the organisation's use of argumentation and crisis communication efforts.

4.2.5 Research

In the subsequent section, the report demonstrates its commitment to research in medical neurology. In the following quotation, the organisation highlights investments in its Play Smart Play Safe initiative: *'As part of the Play Smart. Play Safe. Initiative, the National Football League allotted \$100 million for medical research and engineering advancements'* (2018 health report, research p 1). In relation to the organisation's CSR proposals it can be determined that the quote contains *economic/ethical/legal* activities (Cf. Schwartz & Carroll). The economic incentives are expressed through the use of ethical behaviour. The act of donating \$100 million is a potential investment which may pay off later if a solution is found to CTE. If a solution is found, the organisation may regain viewers and sponsors. Thereby, it can be determined to have direct economic benefits for the organisation as there is a direct investment towards improving the safety of players and potentially shaped to avoid legal consequences (Cf. Schwartz & Carroll). If the organisation does not find a solution to the problem, athletes may resort to legal action and sue the league for not sufficiently protecting them. Since the discovery of CTE as a condition, the organisation did have 4800 lawsuits regarding former players and their mental health (Brant et al, 2014). Continuously, both current and former athletes have signed a petition to make the NFL responsible of sufficiently protecting their athletes and reducing the number of concussions. Thereby, the act of donating over \$100 million to medical research may benefit the organisation both in relation to avoiding civil litigation and restoring its image.

In regard to the organisation's image restoration efforts, the quote emphasises that the NFL 'allotted \$100 million' which may relate to *transcendence* in order to *reduce offensiveness* (Cf. Coombs & Benoit). The term 'allotted' may place the act in a different context as it may suggest that the donation was given out of pure ethical kindness rather than an obligation to invest in neurological research. This strategy of image restoration may further improve the organisation's image towards the sender as it directs the attention to other higher values to justify the behaviour in question. Thus, this strategy may be an additional attempt to reduce the degree of ill feeling experienced by the recipient, which may change their point of view on the NFL's corporate social efforts and regain viewers.

In the following quotation, the organisation emphasises that it has assembled a scientific advisory board to help identify which proposals should be funded: "*The NFL assembled a scientific Advisory Board (SAB) – chaired by Peter Chiarelli, U.S Army General (Retired) – comprising leading independent researchers, experts, doctors scientists and clinicians to develop and lead a clear process to identify and support compelling proposals for scientific research to be funded.*" (2018 health report, Research p. 2). In the abovementioned quote, it can be determined that the NFL makes use of *ethical/economic* incentives to illustrate its corporate social behaviour. Initially, the quote can be categorized in the ethical domain as the quote concerns the acknowledged moral standards that the organisation identifies with. The organisation may seek to get the recipient's approval of having a retired U.S army general as the chair of the scientific advisory board even though there is no apparent connection between him and medical research. The NFL may have applied this form of *utilitarianism* to promote the positives of society and illustrate its ethical behaviour by hiring a U.S army veteran as the chairman of its medical advisory board. The initiative reflects the positives of society as it shows that an apparent war hero can continue to contribute to society and help protect the athlete's mental health as well as his country.

In correspondence with the organisation's image restoration strategy it can be determined that the abovementioned quotation shows signs of *evading responsibility* (Cf. Coombs & Benoit). The NFL attempts to evade responsibility as it encourages independent researchers to assemble and find a solution to reducing the number of concussions and CTE. This may save the organisation resources and the recipient may likewise hold the league less accountable if the medical advisory board is unable to produce results. Furthermore, the quotation is portrayed to have *good intentions* as the act of evading responsibility is based on having good intentions. The quotation states that the scientific

advisory board is comprised of leading independent experts and its goal is to identify which proposals of reducing head injuries should be funded. Thereby, it can be argued that the recipient cannot hold the NFL fully responsible as the act was initiated with good intentions (Cf. Coombs & Benoit).

4.2.6 Community

In this section of the annual health and safety report, the NFL highlights its ethical responsibilities by expressing its engagement in local communities around the US. As previously mentioned in the analysis, the league emphasises its non-profit organisation 'The NFL Foundation'. In the community section of the report it further explains how the organisation is dedicated to improving the lives of those touched by the game of football, which can be observed in the following:

'Financial realities for schools often mean that many schools unfortunately don't have sufficient funding to afford athletic trainers. The NFL Foundation is working to change this thorough grant programs designed to increase access to athletic trainers for young athletes in the community.'

(2018 health report, community p. 2).

The abovementioned quote may not have a direct connection to improving its athletes' health and safety, but it does show philanthropic behaviour which is a vital part of CSR. The quote may show signs of purely ethical behaviour through philanthropy as the financial donations by the organisation can potentially help the students to realise their dreams of becoming professional athletes. This form of ethical behaviour shows that the organisation is attempting to identify with these moral standards, which may further increase the recipient's acknowledgement of the organisation. The quote does not illustrate any signs of hidden motives e.g. economic or legal incentives. Thereby, it may help the company reach its desired level of philanthropy as there can be no counterarguments from the opposition for performing the act. However, it can be argued that the NFL may make these donations to secure future athletes although it may seem unlikely as only 1 percent of the highest-ranking college players gets drafted into the NFL (NCAA, 2019).

Continuously, the signs of purely ethical behaviour in the abovementioned quote can likewise be a benefit for the organisation image restoration strategy. According to the quotation, it can be determined that the NFL makes use of *reducing offensiveness* through *bolstering*. The organisation may mention the abovementioned philanthropic activities as an attempt to reduce the degree of ill feeling experienced by the recipient.

The recipient may be obliged to rethink that the NFL is not an organisation with poor standards in morals and values the communities in which it operates. The utilisation of bolstering is conducted as the organisation relates to its positive attributes through its positive actions, even though it has no connection to the athletes' health and safety. This may help offset the negative feelings towards the organisation's other actions while yielding a relative improvement in the NFL's reputation.

However, it can also be argued that there are only few examples of philanthropic activities and mainly concerns The NFL Foundation and no other incentives. The NFL organisation's revenue was over \$14.2 billion in 2017 and the report states that: *“since 2014 the NFL foundation along with these clubs have provided more than \$3.25 million to expand access to athletic trainers.”* (Community p. 3). Thereby the donation may seem like a finite amount compared to the annual revenue of the NFL and reduce the philanthropic image towards the recipient.

4.2.7 Findings

Based on the NFL's annual health and safety report, it can be determined that the organisation utilise all domains of Schwartz & Carroll's model of CSR although some domains are more extensive than others. It can be argued that the organisation takes a substantial amount of ethical/philanthropic responsibilities compared to the other responsibilities in Carroll's CSR model.

In relation to the economic domain it seems as if the NFL is portraying many as ethical initiatives. Numerous donations and philanthropic activities observed in the report can all be traced back to having economic benefits for the league as it may help find a solution to the devastating impact of CTE. Most donations are for scientific research into CTE and how athletes can stay protected by launching competitive events for companies to increase player safety. These initiatives may have indirect benefits for the company as the donations may be seen as an investment rather than a purely philanthropic initiative. This suggests that the goal of reducing the impact of CTE must be reached without investing large amounts of both time and capital from the NFL organisation.

Continuously, it can be argued that the legal domain is the least utilised in the NFL's report. There are no current laws or regulations directly stating that the athletes' mental health should be at a specific level or that they should be sufficiently protected physically. Thereby, it is not necessary for the league to engage in such activities. However, when the impacts of CTE are fully understood

and documented, there may be issued new laws and regulations in all contact sports as it may be seen as an issue that is contradicting human rights laws.

In relation to the organisation's image restoration efforts, it can be established that the report mainly utilised *evading responsibility* and *reducing offensiveness* to promote its agenda and ultimately regain stakeholder relations. The organisation's attempts to evade responsibility by forcing the issue on third party companies and experts. The league hosts competitions and invites unaffiliated experts to help solve the issue of CTE. This initiative may seem to work in two ways as it first of all shifts the responsibility of finding a solution to another party and it may show transparency, which may also help restore the organisation's image. Transparency is utilised as the report highlights the assistance of unaffiliated independent experts to render a solution for CTE. This may help the recipient to determine that there are no biased conclusions to the NFL's studies, which can further help to restore the organisation's image.

In regard to reducing offensiveness, the most commonly utilised strategy observed in the report is *bolstering*. The main reason why the organisation is utilising this strategy may be due to the fact that the other strategies are inapplicable in this particular case. Thereby, the NFL continuously attempts to highlight the positive attributes they possess and the good deeds they have performed to reduce the negative impact experienced by the recipient.

5. Discussion

In the following section, the thesis will discuss the findings of the NFL's crisis communication and image restoration efforts. Furthermore, it will be discussed if Dr. Omalu's studies and findings correlate with the NFL's efforts to reduce the impact of CTE. This is imperative for the conclusion of the thesis as it may ultimately benefit the organisation in regaining stakeholder relations.

Continuously, Colin Kaepernick's political acts and how the NFL organisation assessed the situation will be discussed. It will be debated if Kaepernick's actions helped raise awareness for his cause and ultimately the impact it had on the NFL's image.

In relation to Colin Kaepernick and his acts of kneeling during the U.S national anthem before games, it can be argued that the NFL shot themselves in the foot as its image deteriorated even

further. As analysed in his speech, it can be determined that the athlete had legitimate reasons for his peaceful demonstration, but the NFL received much scrutiny from the public and may have been forced to debar him from the league. However, after Colin Kaepernick's departure from the NFL, the sports manufacturer Nike signed him to do an advertisement with the slogan '*Believe in something even if it means sacrificing everything*'. The advertisement became an instant success and boosted Nike's revenues by 31% just days after it was published (Guardian, 2018). Thus, it can be discussed whether the NFL organisation made the right decision in debarring him for image restoration purposes, as a vast majority of the public seemed to favour Colin Kaepernick's case. According to the analysis of Kaepernick's speech it can be argued that he did indeed raise awareness, but the issue is considered a broad cultural and political matter which doesn't change overnight. It can be argued that African-Americans have more rights today compared to the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. era. However, there are still signs of inequality in relation to wage gaps, education and incarceration. Overall, it can be argued that Colin Kaepernick used the power of the media to his advantage and to promote his agenda even though he ultimately had to sacrifice his career.

In relation to the analysis of the NFL's player health and safety report, it does not seem to follow or correlate with any of the recommendations made in the medical research report of Doctor Omalu and his medical team. One of the most significant recommendations mentioned in the medical report is that autopsies are imperative to identify the severity of CTE on every retired NFL player who dies with a history of the syndromic components mentioned in the medical report.

Furthermore, the study states as follows: '*This emphasizes the need to perform full autopsies and comprehensive neuropathologic experimentations of the brain on deceased NFL players to confirm the presence or absence of CTE for forensic epidemiological purposes (...)*' (Omalu et al.).

The medical report continues to elaborate by mentioning that with the performance of autopsies of as many professional athletes as possible it will elucidate the full epidemiological and pathologic spectrum of CTE in football players (Omalu et al.). However, the NFL does not mention this as a method to help further understand the impacts of CTE, which may raise the question of whether the organisation follows the recommendations of its independent sources. The actions taken by the NFL of including external independent sources to assist with increasing player health and safety may have solely been for image restoration purposes rather than a determination to find a solution to the issue. The reason why the NFL did not choose to mention these initiatives may be that it would

have been bad for publicity and its image restoration methods. The tone of the NFL's health and safety initiatives in its report would have been on a soberer level as it would include death, suicide and disquieting statistics of CTE. However, it may also be imperative that the NFL actively engages in these recommended initiatives to finally render a solution to the problem of CTE in order to regain stakeholder relations. It can ultimately restore the NFL's image, but it can also further illuminate the scale of the problem. Thus, the organisation may now be proceeding with caution and would not share many statistics or facts publicly as it is evident in the health and safety report.

Through the evaluation of the analysis and the literature review of other scholars it can be discussed if there is likewise a gap in the theory of crisis communication and image restoration. The theory mentions what most corporations should do or are doing, but does not mention another critical aspect which may aid many corporations in restoring its image. According to this case and previous cases examined in the literature review, an aspect of *collaboration* could have been implemented. This strategy should have been implemented as soon as doctor Bennet Omalu first discovered the condition. If the organisation cooperated and stated that they in fact did have this problem and needed assistance in order to solve it, the negative impact on the crisis may have been limited compared to today. As determined through the literature review and the examination of this thesis, corporation's initial response to image restoration is *denial*. However, when denial no longer becomes an option for companies, the issue of restoring its image is even greater than initially planned. Thereby, it may have been beneficial to avoid a responsive and evasive approach to crisis communication and in other words embrace a collaborative effort in order to solve the issue. Furthermore, another relevant factor to image restoration which is not mentioned is timing. Timing can be considered a relevant factor when there is a need to minimise the impact of a crisis and restore an organisation's image. It is now over 17 years ago that the CTE condition was first discovered and there is still no solution or evidence that the condition is declining. It can be debated that the organisation spent more time on concealing the issue from the public rather than finding a solution to decrease the risk of head injury. Moreover, it can be argued that if an appropriate image restoration strategy is implemented sooner it may ultimately minimise its negative impacts. For example, in comparison to this case - Formula 1 is likewise a popular spectator sport, but there is also a risk of permanent injury and even death to the drivers. In 1994 one of the most popular drivers of the time Ayrton Senna died during a race by crashing into a concrete wall during the Italian Grand Prix. This was not the first time that a driver died during a race, but fortunately no

Formula 1 driver has died during a race since. After Senna's death, the FiA increased safety standards and collaborative efforts by engineers made the cars more stable and less likely to have steering and breaking issues. The FiA sought advice from engineers and carmakers to improve its safety standards and avoid another PR disaster.

Contrarily, the NFL did not make immediate changes to its rules or safety standards after it was discovered that former athlete Mike Webster died from playing American Football. The organisation had another approach which included denial. The NFL denied that it had anything to do with Mike Webster's death and accused Dr. Omalu of lacking sufficient evidence to categorise it as a known condition. Since these actions by the NFL took place, the viewership for games has been in decline. Thereby, it should really be questioned whether denial as a strategy to crisis communication and image restoration is a justifiable solution.

6. Conclusion

In this thesis possible strategies and outcomes of crisis communication have been analysed. It was questioned whether the approach to crisis communication is still relevant in today's society and how denial plays an essential role in the deterioration of an organisation's crisis communication efforts. The NFL has been exemplified and studied as a case in order to identify a possible solution to unsuccessful crisis communication efforts.

Although the NFL case is complex, it is far from unique and a universal type of crisis communication strategy can be implemented. Theoretically, Coombs and Benoit's theory of crisis communication may be viewed as a defence strategy to counteract a crisis. However, a defensive approach can likewise have a negative impact on an organisation's crisis communication strategy, as analysed in this thesis. Today, the organisation is in a situation where it is attempting to mend the failed crisis communication efforts, which was the organisation's initial strategy. This is evident in the organisation's annual health and safety report as it is repeatedly mentioned that it engages in collaborative efforts with external medical advisors to counteract the impact of CTE. However, if this was an initial approach to its crisis communication in 2002, the situation may have looked very different today.

By comparing the findings in the analysis, the medical report by Dr. Omalu et al. solely states facts and shows test results of athletes impacted by CTE. On the basis of their data analysis, the report illustrates conclusions and recommendations on how to increase the athletes' safety and how to gain further knowledge of CTE as a medical condition. Contrarily, the NFL's health and safety report mainly highlights its corporate social responsibilities through its ethical and philanthropic efforts. No specific evidence or data is provided which may limit its image restoration efforts as the organisation's image may illustrate a lack of transparency.

The reason for this may be that until recently the NFL refused to take external advice from experts as its main purpose was to deny any correlation with the CTE condition. Thereby, legal battles may have delayed the NFL's efforts of finding a solution to the issue.

Similarly, with Colin Kaepernick, the NFL utilised *denial* and *evading responsibility* by debarring him from the league for expressing his political beliefs. This only resulted in more viewers boycotting the broadcast and increased the pressure on the NFL's crisis communication efforts.

However, there is likewise a right-wing population who would as well have boycotted the NFL if Colin Kaepernick continued to play and kneel down during the national anthem. Thereby, it would be complex to avoid a crisis that would satisfy all parties. However, by engaging in collaborative efforts the NFL may have decreased the negative impact of Colin Kaepernick's departure, by assisting his purpose off the field. If the organisation would e.g. engage in philanthropic efforts to support Kaepernick's purpose, the impact of his departure may not have been as extensive as it was.

In the introduction to this thesis it is mentioned that the NFL lost a few million viewers the same year that the Hollywood movie "Concussion" was released. This exemplifies the power of the media and today with social media it would be almost impossible to deny a wrongful act as more information is publically available compared to 10-20 years ago. Thereby, it can be questioned whether the theoretical foundation of denying a crisis is sustainable or even outdated as information today is transmitted instantaneously and reaches a broader segment.

As mentioned in the discussion, the NFL initially denied Dr. Bennett Omalu's findings on CTE and subsequently continued to ignore his recommendations. This may show a sign of a clear gap in both the academic references and what organisations are doing in order to restore an image. If the NFL initially would have collaborated with Dr. Omalu and his team of forensics and admitted that there is a problem regarding the athletes' mental health, it may have helped to avoid or decrease the impact of the crisis. Thereby, both *timing* and *collaboration* could be a relevant addition to avoiding or decreasing the impact of an organisation's public relations crisis.

7. References

Alvarez Lisette, Feb 24 – 2015. U.S won't File Charges in Trayvon Martin Killing'' Accessed: 28/05/2019.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/25/us/justice-dept-wont-charge-george-zimmerman-in-trayvon-martin-killing.html>

Andersen, H. & Koch, L., *Hermeneutik og Fænomenologi*. 2015, In Jacobsen, M. H. & Lippert-Rasmussen, K. & Nedergaard, P., (eds.), *Videnskabsteori*, (p. 205), Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag, Accessed: 02/05/2019.

Aristoteles, 1996, 7th Edition, Retorik Museum Tusculanum. ISBN-13:9788772891415

Associated Press. May 1, 2014. 'Formula One's safety reforms since Ayrton Senna and Roland Ratzenberger deaths'' The National – United Arab Emirates. Accessed: 20/05/2019.

<https://www.thenational.ae/sport/formula-one-s-safety-reforms-since-ayrton-senna-and-roland-ratzenberger-deaths-1.241502>

Asken M. Breton et al. Oct. 2017. 'Research Gaps and Controversies in Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy.' Jama Neurology. Accessed: 03/05/2019.

<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamaneurology/article-abstract/2654232>

Bellamy, Francis. 1892. "The pledge of Allegiance". Independence Hall Association. Accessed 05/05/2019.

<http://www.ushistory.org/documents/pledge.htm>

Biderman, Cris. Aug. 28, 2016. "Transcript: Colin Kaepernick addresses sitting during national anthem'' USA Today. Accessed: 13/05/2019.

<https://ninerswire.usatoday.com/2016/08/28/transcript-colin-kaepernick-addresses-sitting-during-national-anthem/>

Brant, J Larry et al. Aug. 28, 2014. ‘‘Analysis of The NFL Concussion Lawsuits’’ Garvey Schubert Barer Law. Accessed: 29/05/2019

<https://www.gsblaw.com/sports-entertainment-beat/a-legal-analysis-of-the-nfl-concussion-lawsuits>

Bryman, A., *Social Research Methods*. 2016, (Fifth edition), Oxford: Oxford University Press, Accessed 04/04/2019.

Carroll, B. Archie, *Carroll’s pyramid of CSR: taking another look*. 2016, Carroll International Journal of Corporate Social Responsibility, Accessed 10/05/2019

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Archie_Carroll/publication/304662992_Carroll%27s_pyramid_of_CSR_taking_another_look/links/5797ce1108aed51475e6a5cb/

Coombs W. Timothy, Benoit L. William. 2014. *Crisis Communication Volume 1. Image Restoration Theory Chapter 9*. SAGE Publications.

Cooper, Ashley. 2010. *Crisis Communication and Image Repair Strategies: Audience Attitude and Perceptions of Toyota in an Online Environment*.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281627113_Crisis_Communication_and_Image_Repair_Strategies_Audience_Attitude_and_Perceptions_of_Toyota_in_an_Online_Environment

Crosgrave, Ben. Sep 27, 2014. ‘‘The Black Power Salute That Rocked the 1968 Olympics’’. Accessed: 18/05/2019.

<http://time.com/3880999/black-power-salute-tommie-smith-and-john-carlos-at-the-1968-olympics/>

Feldman, Sarah. Sep. 6, 2018. ‘‘NFL Viewership Has Taken a Hit’’ Statista. Accessed: 10/05/2019

<https://www.statista.com/chart/15369/nfl-viewership-has-taken-a-hit/>

Gabrielsen, J. & Christiansen, T. J., *Talens Magt*. 2010, Denmark: Hans Reitzels Forlag, Accessed: 10/04 2019.

IQVIA. 2018-2019. *Quintiles and IMS Health, Inc*. Accessed: 25/05/2019

<https://www.iqvia.com/about-us>

Kozinets, Robert V., *The Field behind the Screen: Using Netnography for Marketing Research in Online Communities*. 2002, *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol.39 (1), pp. 61-72, Accessed 22/04, 2019.

Litsky, Frank. Sep. 25, 2002. “*Mike Webster, 50, Dies; Troubled Football Hall of Famer.*” *New York Times*. Accessed: 20/04/2019.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/25/sports/mike-webster-50-dies-troubled-football-hall-of-famer.html>

Luibrand, Shannon. Aug. 7, 2015. “*How a death in Ferguson sparked a movement in America*” *CBS News*. Accessed: 28/05/2019.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/how-the-black-lives-matter-movement-changed-america-one-year-later/>

Moreno, A & Capriotti, P., *Communicating CSR, citizenship and sustainability on the web*. 2009, *Journal of Communication Management*, Vol. 13 Issue: 2, pp.157-175, Accessed May 12, 2018, from <https://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/abs/10.1108/13632540910951768>

NCAA Research. Apr. 03 2019. “*Estimated probability of competing in professional athletics.*” *National Collegiate Athletic Association*. Accessed: 03/04/2019.

<http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/research/estimated-probability-competing-professional-athletics>

Omalu, Bennett et al. Sep. 27, 2008. “*Chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) in a National Football League Player: Case report and emerging medicolegal practice questions.*” *Journal of Forensic Nursing*. Accessed 04/05/2019.

https://journals.lww.com/forensicnursing/fulltext/2010/03000/Chronic_traumatic_encephalopathy_CTE_in_a.5.aspx

Pengelly, Martin. 8 Sep 2018. “*Nike sales surge 31% in days after Colin Kaepernick ad unveiled, analyst says*” *The Guardian*. Accessed 20/4/2019.

<https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2018/sep/08/colin-kaepernick-nike-ad-sales-up>

Play Smart Play Safe. “2018 Player Health & Safety Report.” NFL. Accessed: 28/05/2019.

<https://annualreport.playsmartplaysafe.com/#teamwork>

Play Smart Play Safe. Oct. 18, 2018. “Coaching For Change: Rules Changes Designed to Improve Health and Safety.” NFL. Accessed: 15/3/2019.

<https://www.playsmartplaysafe.com/newsroom/videos/coaching-change-rules-changes-designed-improve-health-safety/>

Schwartz, Mark S. & Carroll, Archie B. 2003. “Corporate Social Responsibility”: A three domain approach.”. Business Ethics Quarterly pp. 503-530, Volume 13, Issue 4. ISSN 1052. Accessed May 11, 2018, from

http://www.jstor.org.zorac.aub.aau.dk/stable/3857969?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

Stanford Encyclopedia, *Deontological Ethics*. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. October 17, 2016, Accessed May 9, 2018, from

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-deontological/>

Vera, Amir. Sep 4, 2018. “How National Anthem protests took Colin Kaepernick from star QB to unemployment to a bold Nike ad.” CNN. Accessed: 25/05/2019.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2018/09/04/us/colin-kaepernick-controversy-q-and-a/index.html>

Ward, Joe. Jul 25, 2017. “110 N.F.L Brains” New York Times. Accessed: 14/5/2019.

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/07/25/sports/football/nfl-cte.html>

Welin, Tobias & Petersen, Mathias. Oct 18, 2018. “CSR – Og hvad så!?” Aalborg University Project Library. Accessed: 05/04/2019.

<https://projekter.aau.dk/projekter/files/290228381/Speciale.pdf>

Wilson, Jeremy. Aug. 9, 2017. “Who Is Bennet Omalu and why did his concussion discovery send shock waves through sport?” The Telegraph UK. Accessed: 03/04/2019.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/football/2017/08/09/bennet-omalu-did-concussion-discovery-send-shock-waves-sport/>

Wire Reports, NFL.com. Jul 26. 2017. “NFL issues response to CTE research report. Accessed: 25/5/2019.

<http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap3000000822159/article/nfl-issues-response-to-cte-research-report>

Wyche, Steve. Aug 27, 2016. “*Colin Kaepernick explains why he sat during national anthem.*” NFL. Accessed: 10/05/2019.

<http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap3000000691077/article/colin-kaepernick-explains-why-he-sat-during-national-anthem>