

After the storm comes the sun: A rhetorical analysis of Melbourne Storm's advertising campaigns after the 2010 salary cap scandal.

Abstract:

One of the most common motifs surrounding sports, sports teams, and sports stars is 'the scandal'. One typifying feature of mediated scandals is the ease with which they can be presented as, or massaged into, an unfolding narrative. While some research has been conducted into the initial stages of these narratives, there is significantly less that focusses on the ways in which the 'transgressor' can be rehabilitated in a separate but linked part of that overarching story. This article addresses that gap by analysing two television commercials that significantly assisted the Melbourne Storm rugby league franchise in encouraging and maintaining identification and, coterminously, overcoming disidentification with its membership. Furthermore, we contend that the Melbourne Storm purposively used rhetorical strategies to emphasise the socially desirable aspects of its identity to repair damage done to its organisational image. Using rhetorical analysis, the article explicates the various techniques through which this was accomplished.

Key words:

identification; public scandal; Melbourne Storm; Rugby League; reputation; rhetorical analysis

Introduction

According to Turner (1974), a public scandal is akin to a social drama: it entails a breach of group or societal norms, which can develop into a public crisis¹, where conflicts and tensions become obvious and people start to choose sides. In overcoming the scandal/crisis, an organisation inevitably engages in redressive action, which, according to Sims (2009), is necessary in both the short and long-term in order to rebuild a tarnished reputation. Benoit (1997), Coombs (1998, 2007), Coombs and Holladay (2008), and De Maria, (2010) have suggested that when organisations are involved in scandals or crises their immediate response is to deny and diminish the situation, followed by the secondary response of rebuilding². However, the secondary response of rebuilding, as Gaines-Ross (2008) argues, can take up to three and a half years, and according to Sims (2009), long-term efforts at rebuilding need to be multifaceted. The purpose of this paper is to explore how an organisation, in the wake of a public scandal, attempts to overcome the disidentification of its members and, simultaneously, encourages and maintains existing identification.

Background

By the close of business on the 22nd of April 2010, National Rugby League (NRL) CEO David Gallop had announced that the Melbourne Storm had systematically "rorted" the salary cap from 2007-2009. The club stood accused of making undeclared payments to players totalling in excess of \$3.17 million. Consequently, the Melbourne

¹ To clarify, scandals and crises are not synonymous in the scholarship. According to De Maria (2010, p. 69), "an organization can be in crisis but not scandalized and an organization can be scandalized without (any longer) being in crisis". For the purpose of this paper, we believe the Melbourne Storm to have been scandalized, which produced a crisis and threat to the organization's survival.

² There are variations throughout the scholarship on what these strategies entail and their likelihood of success. For example, Benoit (1997) refers to five strategies including denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action and mortification. However, Coombs (2007), as part of his situational crisis communication theory, identifies seven primary crisis response strategies (attack the accuser, denial, scapegoat, excuse, justify, compensate & apologise) and three secondary crisis response strategies (reminder, ingratiation & victimage).

Storm was sanctioned by the NRL: the club was forced to play the remainder of the season for no competition points and they lost any points already won. Additionally, the club was required to pay \$1.689 million in fines and its minor premiership and premiership achievements were stripped from the record (Andon & Free, 2012; Hale, 2010; Hunter, 2010; Jackson, 2010; Jackson & Barrett, 2010). The impacts of the scandal on the Melbourne Storm did not end there. Mass media branded the club nationally and internationally as ‘salary cheats’ and the breach was considered ‘the biggest scandal in Australian sports history’. Major sponsors, such as ME Bank and HOSTPLUS broke off their relationship, citing their shock and devastation over the club’s actions (Hunter, 2010). Furthermore, the board of the directors was removed as part of a number of sweeping changes to the club’s personnel (Paxinos, 2010).

Literature Review

Disidentification and Identification

In essence, the Melbourne Storm suffered a major loss of reputation and status, which damaged the quality of the relationships it had established with stakeholders and the regard in which the company and brand were held (Cowden & Sellnow, 2002; Sims, 2009). Benoit (1997) argues that an unfavourable view of an organisation emerges where an organisation is believed to be responsible for the scandal or crisis. Extending this thought, Claeys, Cauberghe and Vyncke (2010) add that organisations will suffer more if the scandal is perceived as preventable rather than if the scandal was caused by accident or victimisation. Therefore, because the Melbourne Storm was found responsible for making undeclared payments, their reputation was likely to have been more marred than if the club had been a victim of someone else’s wrongdoing³. For instance, some club members, obviously expressing shock, sadness, anger and betrayal (Hunter, 2010), dumped their supporter gear at the club headquarters in a sign of serious disidentification with the club.

Disidentification is a cognitive state entered by individuals who, having compared and contrasted the social situation, become disaffected from a previously valued in-group and begin to perceive it as an out-group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Ashforth, Harrison & Corley, 2008; Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004; Parekh, 2009; Hornsey, 2008; Shinnar, 2008; Spears, 2011). Those who disidentify will overlook any perceived similarities they may previously have had with the organisation and will instead focus on the negative defining characteristics of the organisation, such as conflicting values, visions and cultures. When disidentification occurs, individuals lose the sense of self-enhancement that adhered to belonging to an in-group they evaluated positively, and to not belonging to negatively evaluated out-groups (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Brewer & Gardner, 2004; Chen & Xin Li, 2009; Scott, 2007; Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986; Shinnar, 2008). As the “dumping” of supporter gear showed, individuals feeling disidentification will actively separate their identities from that organisation (Elsbach, 1999; Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001; Hollinshead & Butler, 1996; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004; Williams & Connaughton, 2012) and may discredit the organisation to maintain feelings of self-esteem (Coombs, 1998; Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001).

³ Although Brian Waldron was considered the orchestrator of the Melbourne Storm’s breaches and had since left the club, he was CEO of the Storm at the time that the ‘cheating’ was taking place.

Despite backlash from some sections of the public and former club members, others chose to rally around the Melbourne Storm in what can be understood as a sign of support and identification. Identification occurs when individuals define their self-concepts in-line with their memberships of particular social categories, such as sports clubs. Accordingly, when people perceive commonalities with a social category, they will internalise aspects of the organisation into their self-definition (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994; Scott, Corman & Cheney, 1998), such as the ethical and value-laden premises (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985), often to experience feelings of belonging and esteem (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007). By identifying with the club, individuals adapted their behaviour to the needs of the club, including publically defending the organisation's behaviour (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Pfeffer & Fong, 2005).

The obvious polarised reactions of the public and members can be explained by the work of Dawar and Pillutla (2000) and Dean (2004), who argue that, when consumers have pre-existing favourable views of an organisation, they will discount negative information relayed to them in a crisis situation. In direct contrast, the uncommitted and neutral public are likely to be more receptive to the negative publicity emerging during a scandal or crisis. Nevertheless, negative publicity, and particularly prolonged negative reactions to an organisation, can pose a threat to an organisation's legitimacy⁴, requiring corporate image-makers to engage in impression management.

Impression management

During an organisational scandal or crisis, the negative publicity that emerges can tarnish an organisation's reputation, posing threats to an organisation's survival. Impression management, or as Elsbach (2003, p. 298) calls it, 'perception management', refers to actions which are 'designed and carried out by organizational spokespersons to influence audiences' perceptions of the organization'. It entails offering sanitised accounts of untoward behaviour (Caillouet & Allen, 1996) and then consciously and unconsciously (Schlenker, 1986) projecting socially desirable aspects of an organisation (Gioia, Schultz & Corely, 2000; Hearit, 1994) to both internal and external audiences so as to preserve the organisation's legitimacy (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990; Dean, 2004). However, when legitimacy is questioned by audiences, organisations experience a loss consistency and trustworthiness (Elsbach, 2003), which requires corporate image makers to construct organisational identities and images that are likely to give positive opinions of the organisation to both insiders and outsiders (Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Dutton, et al, 1994). Organisations need to maintain legitimacy because they will gain support and resources from committed and identifying members (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990; Elsbach, 2003).

Cheney and McMillian (1990), and Elsbach and Sutton (1992) list apologies, justifications and excuses among the strategies of impression management. We, however, are concerned with the way advertising is used to create favourable views of the organisation in crisis. Advertisements released after a scandal or crisis are often designed to convince audiences that organisational behaviour has been modified in favour of positive 'socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions' (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). Essentially, by selectively promoting itself

⁴ Organisational legitimacy is conceptualised here as "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (Suchman, 1995, p. 574).

positively, an organisation engages in ingratiation (Jones, 1964; Allen & Caillouet, 1994), which is a technique of impression management ‘designed to gain audience approval by conveying conformity to the normative institutional environment’s rules’ (Allen & Caillouet, 1994, p. 48). Ingratiation allows an organisation to ‘re-establish congruency between the values implied by its actions and accepted societal norms’ (Dean, 2004, p. 193).

A strongly construed external image can positively effect outsiders’ identification with the organisation (Dukerich et al, 2003). If corporate image-makers, therefore, can project a positive identity and image of the organisation to outsiders, outsiders can validate the identities of members, and enhance the self-esteem they feel in belonging. Such strong identification is worthwhile for an organisation as members can enact citizenship behaviours (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000; Podasakoff, Mackenzie, Paine & Bachrach, 2000), defend the organisation (loyalty) (Ashforth & Mael, 1998; Treadwell & Harrison, 1994), assist in an organisation’s survival (Cheney & McMillian, 1990) and act in the best interests of the organisation (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985).

Method

According to Cheney, Christensen, Conrad and Lair, (2004, p. 83) organisations use rhetoric ‘[T]o persuade members to identify with organizational goals and to adopt organizationally desired decision premises.’ Essentially, organisational rhetoric aims to prolong an organisation’s survival (Cheney & McMillian, 1990), but such a task is not straightforward given that those targeted by organisational rhetoric hold numerous and potentially contradicting organisational identities (Cralle, 1990). To overcome this limitation, organisations will engage in the use of explicit and implicit communication strategies that gain potency by being simultaneously expressed and which target a diverse audience (Cheney, 1991; Cheney, et al., 2004). Should the organisational rhetoric prove successful, the organisation can potentially influence its members, encouraging them to adopt organisationally preferred attitudes and behaviours (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985). Therefore, the use of organisational rhetoric can give an organisation power, because the communications originating from the organisation can become the ‘individual’s voice, source of authority, and resource for identity’ (Cheney, & McMillian, 1990, p. 97). By responding to the organisation as they would to any other rhetorician, members are left open to the influences of organisational hierarchies because the ethos of the organisation is difficult to question (Cheney & McMillian, 1990).

To engage with the organisational rhetoric emerging from the Melbourne Storm rugby league club we selected two years of advertisements released by the organisation following the salary rort scandal and analysed them using Cheney’s (1983) rhetorical identification typology. Cheney’s (1983) typology borrowed heavily from Burke (1969), and shows that identification is developed by the deployment of four strategies: *the common ground technique, identification through antithesis, the transcendent we and unifying symbols.*

The common ground technique is the first of Cheney's (1983) rhetorical identification typology strategies and refers to the overt attempts of rhetoricians to create links between themselves and the audience. The technique is made up of six tactics: expression of concern for individuals, recognition of individual contributions, espousal of shared values, advocacy of benefits and activities, praise by outsiders and testimonials. These tactics are found in use through close textual analysis and signal an attempt to create consubstantiality (communication and cooperation) with the audience (Burke, 1969; Cheney, 1983). By establishing common ground, the rhetorician encourages the audience to feel part of an in-group, which can produce feelings of identification and can lead audience members to internalise 'prototypical characteristics' (Hogg & Terry, 2000, p. 129) approved and advocated for by the organisation. The second of Cheney's (1983) identification strategies is identification through antithesis, which is a discursive effort by the organisation to unite members against a common enemy. The focus on a common enemy affirms members' association with the organisation, while simultaneously dissociating them from the unfavourably-perceived "other".

The third identification strategy is the use of the 'transcendent we' (Cheney, 1983, p. 154): the assumption contained in the first person plural pronoun and its surrogate forms that members are alike and can be treated as a homogenous group. In fact, the parties subsumed into the transcendent we may have few commonalities. As Cheney (1983, p. 154) explains 'the assumed "we" and the corresponding "they" are found in statements where a common bond amongst members of an organisation is taken for granted, but the nature of the relationship is not well defined'. By not clearly defining the relationship between the disparate parties, the rhetorician can prevent groups from recognising their differences and choosing to act upon them. Of the various strategies, the transcendent we is considered the most powerful because it is subtle and therefore may not be noticed by the audience.

Cheney's (1983) fourth strategy is unifying symbols. In this strategy symbols of the organisation are promoted to members and potential members as revered carriers of the organisation's identity. Unsurprisingly, organisations' names, logos, trademarks, and in the case of this research uniforms, colours and all forms of branding are among the items offered as unifying symbols.

Texts

The "War Cry" advertisements were broadcast in 2011 after the scandal. Organised around the slogan 'playing for everything', the five advertisements formed the backbone of the Melbourne Storm's membership drive and the club's ability to accrue competition points. The design of the advertisements is reminiscent of footage from war reporting in world wars. The advertisements comprise game footage in black and white, and offer only one colour by way of emphasis: the purple of the players' uniforms. The sound track for each advertisement is an arguably overstated orchestral accompaniment that picks up tempo and rises in volume to heighten the emotional message. The colour and music assist in creating a war trope, but it is the voiceover that solidifies the 'war cry' theme by emulating an American army drill sergeant in an 'impassioned motivational call to action' encouraging club supporters to join their team in the battle to move past the scandal that had previously tarnished the club's image.

Insert Figure 4.1

The second set of texts analysed were created as part of the “No Ordinary Team” campaign and were released in 2012, although they were still used during the 2013 season. The ‘no ordinary team’ campaign responded to consumers’ needs for a better understanding of the uniqueness of the Melbourne Storm (Hicks, 2012). Accordingly, the advertisements consist of interviews with the team’s elite players (Cameron Smith, Billy Slater, Cooper Cronk or Ryan Hoffman) and the coach (Craig Bellamy). The advertisements in the second set of texts create an intimate tone because they offer the audience personal recollections of important insiders. Gabriel (2004a, 2004b) argues that such stories are powerfully persuasive because they infuse bald facts with particularised personal meanings and thus are difficult to discredit. The narrative provided by the players and the coach must be taken as authentic and credible because they draw on first hand experiences, but what accentuates the advertisements as convincing and accurate accounts of Melbourne Storm are the “raw” edges of the narrations: there are misused words, pronunciation errors and hesitations have not been edited out.

The interview material is broken with moments of field action as, for example, the enthusiasm of fans, the strain of training sessions and the “fun” of players goofing around, all of which support the validity of the claim that this is ‘no ordinary team’. The advertisements have been edited to produce a particular affect (Meyrowitz, 1986) in the audience and by generating excitement and engagement are likely to create a positive interpretation (Bless, Bohner, Schwarz & Strack, 1990; Petty & Cacioppo, 1984), which in turn is prone to produce identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

Insert Figure 4.2

Data Analysis

Expression of concern

Cheney (1983, p.150) defines ‘expressions of concern’ as those instances when ‘people’ are emphasised as integral and important to the function and being of the organisation rather than (for instance) profit or competitive advantage. The emphasis on the value of “the people” subtly includes organisational members in an in-group and lays the groundwork for building their identification with, and commitment to, the organisation (Cheney, 1983). For example, in the ‘war cry’ advertisement where the Storm’s number nine breaks the tackles of the opposition’s players numbered thirteen and one, the voice-over asserts that, ‘the world ain’t always filled with sunshine... No one in the world can hit as hard as life, but it ain’t about how hard you hit. It’s about how hard you can take a hit, get back up and keep going’” This expression of concern operates on two levels in its effort to build identification with the club. The first level is thinly disguised flattery: the advertisement aligns the viewer with the club, which, it is understood but not directly stated, is heroically fighting its way back from disgrace. By extension, those who identify with the message are situated alongside the heroes in the club as “dinkum Aussie battlers” who can ‘take a hit, get back up and keep going’. At the same time, the club shows itself as understanding ‘ordinary blokes’ whose perseverance (and other admirable qualities) enable them to overcome adversity. These motivational words are designed to produce positive feelings of self-esteem that will manifest in identification with a club perceived to understand the common man.

Of course, although belonging to an in-group benefits members by increasing their feelings of esteem and prestige (Pfeffer & Fong, 2005), the organisation similarly benefits, because members might be willing to make decisions that favour and support

the needs of the organisation (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985). For example, when a ‘war cry’ advertisement states that, “We have been through and have before us many months of struggle. You ask what is our purpose? In triumph no matter how long the road may be, for without triumph, there is no survival’, not only is the advertisement uniting members around their shared struggle and concerns, it is advancing organisational motivations: committing members to rebuilding and restoring the organisation’s image. We argue that *expression of concern* is particularly necessary to the Melbourne Storm, because it is based in a city where competition between the sporting codes is fierce (Kerr, 2016; Windley, 2009). Although the club had initially been gaining support in Melbourne (‘Why Melbourne can’t make money’, 2010), in the wake of salary cap scandal the club needed to reassert its legitimacy and could only achieve this with the support of its ‘integral’ members.

Expressions of concern stressing struggle and eventual triumph construct positive identities for the club and its affiliates as strong in the face of adversity with the intention of strengthening identification with the Melbourne Storm through the self-enhancement of association with the organisation (Pfeffer & Fong, 2005).

Recognition of individual contributions

Recognition of individual contributions highlight particular values that might accompany identification with the organisation. Thus, communication will emphasise desirable ‘prototypical characteristics’ (Hogg & Terry, 2000, p. 129) that set standards of behaviour for “true” members who seek to fit in with the in-group by adjusting elements of their personal identity to the needs of the organisation. For example, the voice-over in the ‘war cry’ advertisement where the number nine is in the process of taking a goal kick, proclaims that ‘... all I have to offer is blood, toil, tears and sweat’, and shows that true membership goes beyond mere financial investment and includes actively attending games and visibly barracking for the club, or, in the case of players, investing more time and energy in training. *Recognition of individual contributions* is used here to urge commitment to the club, which fortifies the salience of members’ fan identities and further, contributes to its survival at a time when its legitimacy has foundered.

In this case, both the people doing the recognising and the people recognised are purposeful choices aimed at increasing the persuasiveness of the communication and ensuring that approved organisational expectations are met. In the “no ordinary team” advertisements, both Cronk and Smith laud fans’ exertions in screaming and cheering their support during games. Their words position fans within the Melbourne Storm in-group, which alone could develop identification. In general terms, potential for identification is increased if the source of persuasive messages is highly credible (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). In this particular instance, the *recognition of individual contribution* originates from elite players, and there is no source more credible than the leading players of the club.

Another of the ‘no ordinary team’ advertisements shows Craig Bellamy singling out his family for their part in his success. He simultaneously recognises his own contributions and those of his players. This tactic is a means of creating consubstantiality with the target audience (Burke, 1969; Cheney, 1983) by finding common ground with the viewers. Bellamy reflects that, ‘...like any other job, sometimes you have your good days, sometimes your bad days’. In essence,

Bellamy's status as an elite coach with a million dollar pay packet is rendered unimportant: instead, the message is that he, like other "good Aussie blokes", has his problems. Bellamy's words could, at the very least, mean that members are persuaded to view the organisation and its people, not as salary cap cheats, but as people going about their business.

According to Cheney (1983b), people can identify with aspects of an organisation, while simultaneously disidentifying with others. With the words '...the player makes a jumper what it is', Bellamy's 'story' focuses on the contributions of the players. If members still held unfavourable views of the club after the scandal, they could use his story to identify with the players rather than the organisation. Disgruntled members and fans who perceive players as points of identification then have the freedom to support the team without necessarily feeling the same allegiance to the club. Whatever the focus of the identification, the club will benefit, because supporters will still attend games to support the team, or purchase merchandise that expresses their identification with their favourite players.

For all its usefulness as a tactic for setting standards of behaviour and potentially creating ideal members, *the recognition of individual contributions* can have adverse consequences (Cheney, 1983). For example, Slater, Cronk and Bellamy all tell personal stories about contributions players make to the Melbourne Storm, and while peers might identify with the message (Gabriel, 2004a), other players might be led to disidentify with the club and its expectations. Cronk and Slater are not just ordinary players: they are in the top tier of the National Rugby League. If membership of the club in-group were dependent on emulating these elite players, it might simply be too hard. Additionally, expecting members (fans and players) to conform to the prototypes approved by the club could lead to over-identification with the organisation and a depersonalised sense of self (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Brewer & Gardner, 2004; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004; Pratt, 2000), which is not sustainable, given the people's diverse affiliations (Parkeh, 2009). Therefore, dissatisfied members may eventually resent the organisation and disidentify with its attempts to construct identities and identifications (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004).

Espoused values

The *espousal of shared values* occurs when organisations suggest that their values are similar to those of their members (Cheney, 1983). Implying that the organisation's values are aligned with the target audience creates common ground around shared perceptions and at the same time allows the organisation to establish an identity that comprises central, enduring and distinctive characteristics (Albert & Whetten, 2004) that meet member expectations. Accordingly, organisations trying to reverse the consequences of negative publicity are likely to espouse values that are socially desirable (Gioia, et al. 2000), which may, perhaps, account for the prevalence of values deriving from struggle and triumph, perseverance and survival in the 'war cry' advertisements. The establishment of these values is assisted by a military-style voice-over and black and white footage connotative of early battle footage. Although the Melbourne Storm is not literally facing mass casualties, the emphasis on the particular values in the advertisements speaks of the resistance of their brand and more specifically, the siege mentality in which they operated as they rebuilt their image. In other words, the emphasis on these values conceptualises the club as battlers as

opposed to salary cap cheats. Although rebranding the club in a positive light might not change everyone's predisposed opinions of the club, espousing values that connect to struggle, triumph, perseverance and survival could create positive identification for current and potential members if they attribute those same distinctive characteristics to themselves. Therefore, if the advertisements are sufficiently persuasive, the audience will see the future success of the Melbourne Storm rather than its present problems.

Although espoused values might reveal what is unique and appealing about the organisation (Albert & Whetten, 2004; Cheney, 1983), we contend that inevitably any values promulgated by organisations are typically not obviously distinct from what any other organisation might advocate. For instance, in the 'no ordinary team' campaign, the espoused values included hard work, preparation, family, mateship, support and perseverance. Such 'values' are universally positive, and are likely to be shared by the other fifteen clubs in the NRL competition. In the case of the Melbourne Storm, perceived similarity to other clubs is desirable, because the perception supports the club's continued membership of the NRL in-group. Additionally, such overwhelmingly positive values will boost the identification experienced by former, current and potential members who use the club's espoused values as personal defining characteristics that generate esteem and self-enhancement (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Pfeffer & Fong, 2005). However, if the values espoused in the advertisements are taken as entirely commonplace, they contradict the campaign slogan "No ordinary team" and the inherent contradictions might reduce the advertisements persuasive potential as viewers consider the validity of the message and assess whether they correspond with their personal preferences and whether they should be believed (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Discrepancies in the message could lead to unfavourable readings and produce ambivalent audience reactions (Krenier & Ashforth, 2004).

Advocacy of benefits and activities

Cheney (1983) describes the *advocacy of benefits and activities* as an overt attempt by the rhetorician to create identification by promoting the organisation's good works in such a way that members will anticipate a "psychic" return on their investment of time and money. The slogan of the 'war cry' campaign is 'playing for everything', which suggests that despite the club's tumultuous past, the team is so passionate about the game that its play will enable it to recoup both its reputation and its standing in the League. By association, members too will benefit when the team "plays for everything". 'Playing for everything' encompasses more than a scoreboard win, and in fact, the subtext of the slogan refers subtly to the club's disgrace and its determination to return to respectability, but the primary message is certainly one in which "everything" is winning the game. On both levels, the slogan offers 'playing' as an activity that will advantage 'everyone': the club will reassert its place in the NRL competition with a new image and identity, and sponsors and fans will enjoy the flow-on benefits of association with a winning team, one, moreover, that has triumphed over adversity.

Testimonials

Testimonials express the dedication, commitment and affection of organisational insiders (Cheney, 1983), and much like the *recognition of individual contributions* tactic, reflect the ideals of the organisation, or perhaps more properly, the *ideal* organisation. Presented as authentic assessments of the organisation from credible sources (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984), the stories in the "no ordinary team" campaign are

testimonials designed to persuade audiences that the club is worthy of support, especially since the stories are told by “honest” insiders – players and coach – separated by purpose and degree from management who “fiddled the books”. *Testimonials* from credible sources can make audiences more receptive to messages (Cheney, 1983) although in this case, the audience would have to believe the players and coach are innocent. The audience might identify with the aspects of the organisation presented in the testimonials while simultaneously disidentifying with those parts they reserve ill will towards. Additionally, testimonials demonstrate Dutton and Dukerich’s (1991) assertion that those who identify with an organisation will do what they can to defend its legitimacy. Thus, looking beyond the fact that the club pays the players and coach for their compliance (including participating in advertisements), Cronk, Slater, Smith, Hoffman and Bellamy demonstrated their personal investment in the club by offering their stories of dedication to inspire similar reactions and create wider identification.

Transcendent we

The ‘assumed or transcendent we’ (Cheney, 1983, p. 154) is a persuasive strategy and potent way of seeming to marry divergent groups through the use of the first person plural pronouns. In other words, the organisation can use ‘we’ or its surrogate forms to ‘speak’ on behalf of everyone, creating an impression of conformity and limiting the possibility of perspectives that are contrary to the “official party line”. For example, when the ‘war cry’ advertisements exhort members that ‘Now is the time we take them on and triumph’ and ‘We have before us a great challenge’, responsibility for the club’s troubles and recovery are devolved to all members, although the problems were clearly caused by only a few. ‘We’ speaks with the authoritative voice of the in-group, and it is difficult to oppose the prevailing opinion for fear of being ostracised (Cheney, 1983). The *transcendent we* is a strategy that invokes feelings of belonging to an organisation and can produce the identification that will assist the organisation’s survival.

Unifying symbols

Unifying symbols offer insights into the defining features of the organisation’s identity, and often combine spoken and visual elements that can powerfully unite members (Cheney & McMillian, 1990), particularly if they are publically displayed. The *unifying symbols* heavily featured in the advertisements were the team colour (purple), the uniform and supporter gear, and the team logo. These symbols brand the players and fans as associates of the Melbourne Storm and encourage other displays of allegiance to the club. Wearing the unifying symbols of belonging demonstrates strong identification with the club and indicates that these members have been socialised into the organisation, and to a degree have been ‘branded’ by it (Cheney, 1983).

Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to show an organisation attempting to overcome disidentification and maintain identification after a scandal. The Melbourne Storm faced a public crisis in confidence, and used the ‘war cry’ and ‘no ordinary team’ campaigns to recast the club from a “cheating” organisation to one driven towards success and triumph and, crucially, one that relied on its membership to achieve these

goals. The rhetorical techniques in the advertisements were an important part of the re-positioning of the club in public opinion.

In its efforts to alter public perceptions, the club avoided mention of the besetting scandal, and instead emphasised the club's wholly laudable desire to rebuild. Coombs (2007, p. 168) argues that audiences are unlikely to respond favourably to communication that attempts to generate sympathy for a 'preventable crisis'. The advertisements maintained silence on the scandal, while in fact, dealing with nothing else, and relied on "heroes" as metonymic substitutions for the whole club. When the players told their stories, they became the club, and although the stories were certainly edited and choreographed into a shape that met organisational needs, they nevertheless lent the club needful and desired credibility because the chosen spokespeople were highly respected in rugby league. In essence, the club used controlled communication to tell a new story. The club, having been scrutinised and criticised in the mass media (Hale, 2010; Hunter, 2010; Jackson, 2010), used rhetorical techniques to re-align itself with the socially desirable characteristics (Gioia, et al., 2000) of 'battlers' and 'regular Aussie blokes'. These characteristics not only have broad appeal, they are also difficult values to oppose.

The war trope perhaps made the audience receptive to the messages by conjuring nostalgia for Australia's war efforts (Bendle, 2009; Seal, 2004), but it seems more likely that it was employed to present the team and club as underdogs, who, having been beaten down, managed to get back up. The 'war cry' advertisements established an identity for the club as determined fighters and heroes, and this respectable image portrays the club in a favourable new light. Similarly, by presenting the players and coach of the "no ordinary team campaign" as "regular Aussie blokes", the advertisements reconstruct the identity of the Melbourne Storm and its people by drawing on a particular facet of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) to create a collective understanding of what a "worthy" team might look like. Therefore, as part of its membership drive, the organisation could begin to undo some of the damage of the scandal by establishing common ground with the audience, and if it was successful in creating the conditions of consubstantiality, potential, current, and previous members might be inclined to identify and commit to the organisation.

A range of rhetorical strategies was deployed to create an overwhelmingly positive view of the club, from *expressions of concern* to the *transcendent we* (Cheney, 1983), but the ultimate objective seemed to be to establish common ground. Common ground is an effective tool of persuasion, because it encourages members to see beyond the differences and reservations they might hold about the organisation, to the defining characteristics they share (Burke, 1969). In emphasising the interrelationship of the organisation and its members, members are made to feel part of the club in-group, which feeds into a desire to identify with the organisation to experience a sense of belonging (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hogg & Terry, 2000). Additionally, given the positive images the club was projecting, members might also have chosen to identify with the club to experience self-validation and self-esteem. The club would benefit from successfully created and maintained member identification because identifying members more reliably make decisions that favour the organisation (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985), to defend the organisation against criticism (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991) and to contribute to the organisation's survival.

To clarify, we are not suggesting that the campaign guaranteed renewed identification, because oppositional readings of texts are always possible (Hall, 1980). In fact, as we mentioned earlier, negative publicity often carries more weight with the public than positive information, so people holding unfavourable views of the Melbourne Storm would possibly not be susceptible to the club's attempts at impression management. However, what we do contend is that in their attempt to reassert their organisational legitimacy, the Melbourne Storm has used persuasive tools to assist their membership drive and to develop an organisational identity and image that could potentially offset negative perspectives of the club.

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Figure Legends

Figure 4.1 Screenshots from the “War Cry” advertisements

The screenshots capture moments in the War Cry advertisements. Of particular note is the fact that the advertisements were black and white with only the purple team colour emphasised.

Figure 4.2 Screenshots from the “No Ordinary Team” advertisements

The screenshots capture moments in the No Ordinary Team advertisements, specifically close-up shots of the key players and coach that feature in each of the advertisements.