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## **Managing organizational reputation in response to a public shaming campaign**

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## **Highlights**

- We conduct a case study of a public, online shaming campaign on discrimination in sport
- Public shaming and Online Reputation Management (ORM) provide the theoretical lens
- When issues pre-exist but are not acted upon, online shaming can risk reputations
- Implications for organizational communications in sport and ORM are provided

## **Managing organizational reputation in response to a public shaming campaign**

P. J. Kitchin, Juan L. Paramio-Salcines and Geoff Walters

### **Abstract**

Sport has embraced social media, intensifying the (online) coverage of sport organizations and athletes. Until now, the role that social media has played in the renaissance of public shaming in sport has received little attention. To address this gap, the authors present a novel case study of a public, online shaming campaign against an English Premier League football club by one of their own supporters. Data were collected from multiple sources, including online sources and organizational documents that informed both the creation of semi-structured interviews and the development of a process model of public, online shaming. Findings reveal how a supporter query was mishandled by the club. In response, the supporter turned-activist launched a low-scale online shaming campaign about disability discrimination. The campaign escalated in profile to gain national media attention. Within the framework of Online Reputation Management, the authors present the organizational response that sought to bolster the club's reputation by deploying a series of internal and external responses. The authors conclude that to minimize the potentially negative effects of public shaming in sport, sports organizations should implement specific reputation management practices but ones that monitor online sources for potential issues and crises.

**Keywords:** Social media, public shaming, online reputation management, fan-activism, discrimination, accessibility.

## **1 Introduction**

Sport has embraced social media intensifying the (online) coverage of sport organizations and athletes. Much of the extant literature on social media in sport is underpinned by a relationship marketing perspective and has been categorized as either strategic, operational, or user-focused (Abeza, O'Reilly, & Reid, 2013; Filo, Lock, & Karg, 2015). Across these categories, research has emphasized how the increase in scope and penetration of social media has enabled sport organizations to reach a large number of supporters, both locally and globally (Abeza, O'Reilly, Séguin, & Nzindukiyimana, 2015), who are known as digital fans (Pegoraro, 2010, 2014). Twitter, in particular, has gained prominence as an ideal, direct, cheap, and instantaneous interactive platform, and is valued as a “disruptive innovation in sport communication” (Pegoraro, 2014, p. 133); for its “ability to ‘bring down walls’ between clubs and their fans” (Price, Farrington, & Hall, 2013, p. 452); and as “a quick source of information that does not require much effort from an individual” (Witkemper, Lim, & Waldburger, 2012, p. 171). Consequently, scholars have remarked that Twitter has changed the way supporters engage and interact with clubs, players, and staff (Browning & Sanderson, 2012; Price et al., 2013; Sanderson & Hambrick, 2012; Witkemper et al., 2012). However, whilst much of the existing literature focuses on the potential for sport organizations to benefit from social media, less attention has been given to the negative consequences.

One specific consequence relates to how social media offers the means for individuals to engage in online shaming. It has been argued that public, online shaming is more prominent in sport than in other arenas of high-public visibility, with individuals suffering abuse related to their on-and off-field actions (Billings, Coombs, & Brown, 2018; Boyle & Haynes, 2018; Browning & Sanderson, 2012; Price et al., 2013). Recent examples include the online abuse suffered by the Liverpool FC goalkeeper, Loris Karius,

following mistakes in the 2018 UEFA Champions League final, and the criticisms directed at Manchester City winger Raheem Sterling after he was seen with an assault rifle tattooed on his leg during England training. In both of these cases, the public, online shaming process created what are perceived, by some to be negative, public associations towards the players through sport's public discourse.

A consequence of online shaming through social media is that it can be used to harm the reputations of individuals or organizations (Aula, 2010; Coombs, 2007; Cheung, 2014). For organizations, reputational capital is a 'stock of perceptual and social assets - the quality of the relationship it has established with stakeholders and the regard in which [they are] held' (Fombrun & van Riel, 2004, p. 32; see also Coombs, 2007). However, we can also argue that individual athletes possess reputational capital. When public shaming is effective, it can have deleterious effects on this reputational capital, having implications on both organizations and their staff (Ronson, 2016; Torrenzano & Davies, 2011). At present, relatively few empirical studies have sought to understand reputation management in the context of public shaming through social media. To address this, we explore a public, online shaming campaign initiated and managed by a supporter of an (English) Premier League football club (hereafter referred to as *the club*). Relevant to our analysis are the following aspects: how the shaming campaign was conducted; how the supporter used social media to generate wider awareness; how it damaged the club's reputational capital; and how the organization responded. This knowledge is important because as yet public, online shaming has not received the attention in the sport communication literature that it needs, hence our purpose is to dissect this case in order to inform scholars and practitioners of the need for appropriate reputation management strategies. To achieve this purpose, our paper asks three research questions:

**Research Question 1:** How do social shaming campaigns seek to increase awareness?

**Research Question 2:** How can social shaming campaigns impact organizations?

**Research Question 3:** How do organizations respond to social shaming campaigns?

We begin by providing an overview of online public shaming in sport, followed by a discussion on reputation management, and in particular, Online Reputation Management (Dijkmans, Kerkhof, & Beukeboom, 2015), which we argue sport organizations should be aware of in order to counter online shaming. These two reviews provide a foundation to our overview of a public, online shaming campaign that began in October 2014 when a Premier League club's Disabled Supporters' Association refused a supporter's request that his family to be allowed to sit together. The subsequent campaign initiated by the supporter occurred within a wider context of disability rights campaigning within the United Kingdom (UK).

## **2 The renaissance of public shaming in sport**

In recent years, we have seen what Ronson (2016, p. 8) terms the 'renaissance of public shaming'. As we can see, different authors (see Blackford, 2016; Cheung, 2014; Torrenzano & Davis, 2011) concur that due to human nature and to the influence of technology, society is moving in the same direction as pointed out by Ronson. Indeed, as Cheung (2014, p. 3) highlights:

Shaming has been used, in various degrees as a form of state or socially approved forms of punishment in different cultures for a long time....

Now, we have seen a unique form of "shaming" acting as a method of social sanctions arises in the Internet age.

This new form of public, online shaming is characterized by an intensified eagerness of society to publicly name and shame either people or organizations, and involves the “exposure of personal identifiable information of the targeted individuals, who are perceived to have transgressed different degrees of social norms (though often violated none or only minor legal offences), for the purpose of humiliation, social condemnation and punishment” (Cheung, 2014, p. 3). In certain circumstances, public shaming can be considered a form of abuse (Cheung, 2014; Laidlaw, 2017). Indeed, Laidlaw goes on to state that “shame can be an element of a wide variety of abuse. In some ways, shaming is not any category, simply a tactic employed, to varying scales, in inflicting the abuse” (Laidlaw, 2017, p. 3). However, the same author recognizes that public shaming has value as a core regulatory tool to address any kind of human rights abuses (Laidlaw, 2017). Therefore, the behaviour of the organization or the individual is integral to the way that online shaming is perceived, either as a form of abuse or as a way to highlight and bring attention to poor behaviour that goes against societal norms.

Online shaming is a novel area of scholarship in sport management. The extant literature bears this out with only a relatively small, albeit growing, number of studies that have looked at how social media has been used to publicly shame individuals. For example, both Cheung (2014) and Ronson (2016) examined the case of former head of the FIA, Max Mosley, Formula One racing’s governing body who was publicly shamed in 2011 when involved in a sex scandal. Similarly, Boyle & Haynes (2018) analysed two high-profile cases that emerged in 2010 involving individual athletes (John Terry, former player for Chelsea FC, and Tiger Woods) and how they managed their reputation and public image after being implicated in sexual and marital scandals. Furthermore, Sanderson & Hambrick (2012) analysed the case of Gerald Sandusky, the former assistant



coach at Pennsylvania State University, who was charged with sexual abuse of a minor over a 15-year period.

These examples highlight that studies have tended to focus on social shaming campaigns directed at individual athletes that have committed legal and/or perceived social or moral offenses. In these examples, where individual behaviour is called out, public shaming campaigns can arguably play a role in uncovering perceived social or moral offenses, despite the risk of shaming if the perception turns out to be incorrect. However, one of the more interesting aspects is how social media offers the potential for the development of social shaming campaigns in which there would appear to be very little justification. As Blackford (2016, p. 1) states:

I'd become increasingly aware of cases where people with access to large social media platforms used them to "call out" and publicly vilify individuals who'd done little or nothing wrong. Few onlookers were prepared to support the victims. Instead, many piled on with glee (perhaps to signal their own moral purity; perhaps, in part, for the sheer thrill of the hunt).

Despite the growing body of scholarship examining how high-profile individuals in sport are tainted in scandal and controversy, we still require more attention on how their organizations strategically respond to these crises. Online shaming can be seen as a potential threat to a sport organizations' reputational capital and that of the individuals who work for them (Aula, 2010; Fombrun & van Riel, 2004; Pownall, 2015; Rokka, Karlsson, & Tienary, 2014). Within the context of sport, public shaming has become a particularly pronounced phenomenon and the need for reputation management actions has been recognized (see, for example, Billings et al., 2018; Browning & Sanderson, 2012; Bruce & Tini, 2008; Holdener & Kauffman 2014; Pfahl & Btaes, 2008). Traditional

organizational reputation management tools, such as pre-crisis planning and post-crisis control strategies can be deployed, as these incidents automatically generate national and international media attention (Coombs, 2007). However, at present, the unpredictability of public, online shaming and the uncertainty over whether it is effective in impacting organizational or individual reputations mean that it may not be considered relevant in pre-crisis scenarios, given the sheer variety of issues that could begin a campaign (Kitchin & Purcell, 2017; Manoli, 2016). As such, we now turn our attention to the need for sport organizations to consider Online Reputation Management.

### **3 Online reputation management**

Filo et al., (2015) state that all types of sport organizations use social media to enhance and develop trustworthiness, brand attitude (or brand image) and customer loyalty. According to Dijkmans et al., (2015), “these (three) goals together are often referred to as Online Reputation Management”. In a pioneering study, Dijkmans et al., (p. 59) defined Online Reputation Management as “the process of positioning, monitoring, measuring, talking, and listening as the organization engages in a transparent and ethical dialogue with its various on-line stakeholders.” What is particularly noteworthy about the above definition is that it includes the management of possibly negative information found online, which is an essential part of the Online Reputation Management process and is particularly significant given the renaissance of public shaming (Ronson, 2016) as a form of abuse in sport.

Online Reputation Management was originally proposed by Dijkmans et al., (2015) who discussed what it involves, and how to manage it (see also Pownall, 2015). Indeed, Dijkmans et al., (2015, p. 59) argue the need for organizations to interact, create content that can be shared, continually monitor what stakeholders are saying, and address disparaging online content. This acknowledges how negative events and stories that gain

attention through social media have the ability to influence corporate reputation and are produced and reproduced through the “interactions and dialogue between social media users and organizations” (Rokka et al., 2014, p. 807).

With sport organizations, athletes and managers facing the potential for negative social media information and for online shaming, it has been acknowledged that they need to engage more strategically in the management of reputation (Billings et al., 2018; Hopwood, Skinner, & Kitchin 2010). When an issue arises through social media, a primary concern is what kind of short and long-term actions a manager should take to protect and defend the reputation of the organization. According to Aula (2010), “if undesirable opinions about an organization go unchecked or unanswered, the situation becomes difficult to correct. For this reason, reputation risk management should begin before, and not after, reputation crises” (p. 46). Of interest is that if an incident is not handled effectively and quickly, shaming can turn club-supporter issues, as we reveal, into a crisis. In this study, we focused on a public online shaming campaign initiated by a supporter of a high-profile Premier League club. While the justification for the social shaming campaign requires further consideration, the supporter specifically targeted both the club and one of its stakeholders in the Disability Supporters’ Association, posing a threat their reputational capital.

#### **4 Method**

An interpretive case study was chosen as the research design for this project. An interpretivist (constructivist) ontology believes that reality is socially constructed, subjective, and changeable, while an interpretivist epistemology sees knowledge as based on subjective meanings on social phenomena that can have multiple interpretations – such as a public shaming incident (Wahyuni, 2012). This interpretivist approach permits us collect a range of data to provide a rich and meaningful analysis of the nexus between

online reputation management and social media activism, that is ‘historically and locally situated’ (Smith, 2018, p. 142) in the disability rights movement. By doing so we aim to convince the reader of the importance and relevance of this topic for sport management practice (Shaw, 2016; Smith, 2018). This section will next situate the context of the campaign before our data collection and analysis strategies are outlined.

#### **4.1. Situating the case study**

The public shaming campaign initiated by the supporter occurred within a wider context of disability rights within the United Kingdom. This section will outline the multiple industry (league), organizational and individual layers of this context before explaining how the situation escalated from an email query into significant alterations to the policies and procedures at the club.

##### **4.1.1 Industry (league) background**

Access to sporting stadia in the United Kingdom has been and is still challenging for people with disabilities (Department for Work & Pensions, 2015; García, de Wolff, Welford, & Smith, 2017; Paramio-Salcines & Kitchin, 2013). Despite equality and disability rights legislation (i.e., the Equality Act 2010) to ensure businesses cannot discriminate by offering lesser quality services for people with disabilities, it is up to the individual to make a case when discrimination arises. In football, this has led to limited developments in stadium accessibility. In order to strive for greater accessibility, supporters with disabilities have collectivized to form Disability Supporters’ Associations who work with clubs to improve access to grounds. Nationally in England an advocacy group supports Disability Supporters’ Associations with communications and campaigns to highlight best and poor (discriminatory) practice. The mainstream media have increasingly noticed these practices; since 2014, there have been frequent references to

the state of facilities for people with disabilities at Premier League stadia with this having become a political issue in the UK (Gornall, 2014; Wilson, 2015, 2018). This is creating a context where the relationship between clubs and Disability Supporters' Association is becoming strained.

The league in this case is the (English) Premier League, which is one of the world's richest sporting leagues and the most watched professional sporting league in Europe (Deloitte, 2018). Comprised of 20 professional football clubs from across England and Wales, the league attracts significant public attention. This interest is monetized through the sale of television rights, commercial partnerships and sponsorships, merchandising and licensing, and ticket sales. Despite the exponential growth of the league's television rights, gate receipts remain an important revenue source for clubs as the latest Deloitte report highlighted (Deloitte, 2018). Contributing to these receipts is a growing customer group represented by supporters with different types of disabilities. To ensure the widest possible participation of all supporters, existing and new venues are expected to be accessible and inclusive for a wide range of users. Although there is still a long way to go, the majority of Premier League stadia offer a range of accessibility options, from accessible official web pages and various SNS, dedicated and safe reserved parking area, entry-points and exits, seating, audio-descriptive commentary, accessible Changing Places, amongst other features of accessibility (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2017, 2018; Paramio-Salcines, Downs, & Grady, 2016; Paramio-Salcines, Kitchin, & Downs, 2018).

#### **4.1.2. Organizational background**

The club in this case study has been one of England's most successful clubs and has operated a stadium of above 40,000 capacity for a number of years. As Price et al.,

(2013) stated, the majority of clubs use Twitter to communicate and engage with their supporters. The club's Disability Supporters' Association is one of the oldest Disabled Supporters Associations. At the time of the case, the club's Disability Supporters' Association had a large disabled supporter base (Disability Supporters' Association representative personal communication, 29 July 2018). As is the case at several other Premier League clubs, the Disability Supporters' Association assists the club in operating a waiting list system for accessible seats. This is managed through a ballot/rotation system that aims to allow all supporters with disabilities to attend an equal number of matches every season. Despite the equitable aims of this system, this approach and the low ratio of accessible seats to overall capacity, despite many expansion projects has meant the club has, over time been unfavourably mentioned in reports from the national advocacy group. This knowledge however is limited to the supporters with disabilities community and has, as yet had little impact on the reputation of the club.

#### **4.1.3. The supporter turned-activist and @YouDiscriminate campaign**

The crux of this case study was the @YouDiscriminate campaign, which was launched against the club by the parent of a young person with a disability. In October 2014, the parent enquired via email about attending with all three of his sons to a home game at the club's stadium. Upon receipt of the email, an officer of the club's Disability Supporters' Association replied that the request could not be accommodated. The Disability Supporters' Association representative explained that while the parent and his child with a disability could attend in the accessible section, his other two sons were required to sit elsewhere. As his other two sons were aged under 14, this was not a possibility and the foursome could therefore not attend any match together as a group. The supporter turned-activist started an online campaign through a twitter, then developed a blog that was supported through Facebook and Twitter accounts named

@YouDiscriminate. The campaign began online and drew heavily on the hashtag #familyutd which was picked up by the mainstream media (Gornall, 2014; Wilson, 2015, 2018), national and pan-regional advocacy groups and the (UK) Equality and Human Rights Commission. The public campaign sought to highlight -(shame)- discriminatory policies and practices used by the club and its Disability Supporters' Association to manage the availability of seating for supporters with disabilities. The campaign was resolved offline when senior executives at the club met with the supporter.

#### **4.2. A stepwise approach to data collection and analysis**

An advantage of the case study approach is the potential to gather data from a range of sources to inform the study (Sparkes & Smith, 2014; Yin, 2018). To create a comprehensive coverage of the public shaming incident our approach has sought to combine primary data from those involved combined with secondary data from organizations and online sources. The data collection and analysis in this study was an iterative process managed through three steps. Step one was the collection and analysis of the campaign data arising primarily from tweets, weblogs and newspaper reports, along with an analysis of organizational documents from the club and the Disability Supporters' Association to construct the official procedures used. The second step involved semi-structured interviews with key individuals from the campaign. The third step involved a second-order coding procedure based on the synthesis of the content analysis at step one and the In Vivo codes created at step two. Saldaña (2016) notes that In Vivo coding creates codes drawn from the actual language of the interviewees which can then be categorized into a relational model. This method promotes, and honours marginalized voices in research (Saldaña, 2016, p. 106), so in accordance with the social model of disability (see section 4.4) we felt this approach appropriate. Each member of the research team was involved in data collection, and we followed the guidelines established

by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) and Saldaña (2016) for data refinement, display and analysis. Each of these steps is now outlined in further detail.

#### **4.2.1 Step 1: Online data and document analysis**

This stage consisted of collecting and refining secondary data generated by tweets, online blogs, and the publication of news stories. Purposive, non-probability sampling was used to collect as much secondary data as possible to construct a timeline of the campaign. Tweets were collected through access to the supporter's twitter account through the period of the campaign. Between November 2014 and July 2015, the account created 957 tweets, of these 704 related to the @YouDiscriminate campaign, thus creating a data set for analysis. A content analysis of these tweets resulted in the identification of eight types of tweets that were determined according to the purpose of the tweet as depicted in Figure 1. Despite its positivistic overtones, the qualitative use of content analysis was selected for this online data and document analysis phase as it is the most prevalent form of analysis in sport and social media research (Abeza et al., 2015; Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010) and was useful for organizing the data available to assist (a) knowledge of the campaign and (b) the formation of the interview schedule. Many of these types of tweets were linked by the #FamilyUtd hashtag, or involved the supporter using links either to his @YouDiscriminate blog page - providing greater detail on the supporter's perspective of the circumstances of the campaign – or to news coverage of the campaign. These eight types of tweets were further organized into three categories that help to explain the key strategies used through Twitter. Within the timeline of the campaign, eighteen blog posts and five news articles were included in the secondary data set.

**INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE**



Purposive, non-probability sampling was used to select organizational documents of relevance to the campaign. Drawing on Prior (2003) our document selection criteria established a mechanism for the inclusion and exclusion of relevant documents from both the club and their Disability Supporters Association. This process enabled us to form an official perspective from the organizations about the management of inclusion and accessibility (Prior, 2003). These criteria were discussed between members of the research team and where disagreement occurred, we went with a majority decision. Given the limited documents, our inclusion criteria sought any document focused on either ticketing procedures for Disability Supporters' Association members, general policy, and included information on accessible and inclusive ticketing. Exclusion criteria related to any document that did not discuss themes of accessibility, equality, inclusion and/or discussion of disabled supporters. From these criteria five documents (see Table 1) were content analysed and the themes informed both the codes and the construction of the interview template.

**INSERT TABLE 1 HERE**

#### **4.2.2 Step 2: Semi-structured interviews and analysis**

For the conduct of the semi-structured interviews, again a purposive, non-probability approach was taken to identify relevant individuals that possessed in-depth knowledge about the campaign and its outcomes (Miles et al., 2014). This sampling method was chosen because it permitted the selection of participants who could provide “subtle, important, and potentially delicate information from a specific... group” (Seifried & Casey, 2012, p. 83). For exploratory studies such as this one, the approach generates

new understanding on the topics of Online Reputation Management and public, online shaming. The sampling approach adopted several inclusion criteria: personal/professional role in the incident, knowledge of private (non-online) discussions, knowledge of changes in policy and/or practice once the incident was resolved. The use of these inclusion criteria identified five individuals who met each criterion; each of these individuals was approached for interview (a full list of the sample is contained in Table 2). These criteria ensured that the sample of respondents was small but knowledgeable, with only a few individuals possessing the necessary inside knowledge of the case to be relevant for this study. Unfortunately, three members of the sample (the supporter and both managers from the club) declined our requests/offers for an interview.

#### **INSERT TABLE 2 HERE**

As per previous qualitative research on social media in sport (Browning & Sanderson, 2012), semi-structured interviews were selected as a supporting data collection tool to gain in-depth information on the #Familyutd campaign and the relations that developed during and after. Taking place two years following the initial incident also enabled a multi-agent, qualitative assessment of the campaign's outcomes. The interviews were conducted between November 2017 and August 2018 via Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) at the convenience of the respondents. The interview guide was developed by the research team and informed by the first step of data collection and analysis. The questions explored the campaign, the potential for an online shaming process, the organizational responses to this campaign, but also the general state of stadiums' services for individuals with a disability. -

In this step, the analysis of the interview data was In Vivo coded (Saldaña, 2016). For an example of how this In Vivo coding was performed please see Table 3. Charmaz (2014) states that quality is enhanced through this method as the coder performs a crucial check on what is significant, whilst preserving meaning. As each member of the research team coded independently, this board approach enabled a high level of inter-coder reliability. Where any disagreements occurred, a code was added if the majority of coders had recognized the essence of it.

**INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE**

#### **4.2.3 Step 3: Second-order analysis**

Focused/selective coding was our second order coding method used which sought to create categories of data that included both the content analysis of the online data and the In Vivo coding from the document and interview data. The aim of this step was to enable us to develop an operational model of the public shaming process (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2016) that focused on campaign outcomes and the subsequent organizational response.

#### **4.3 Comparability**

Currently an increasing focus is being placed on strengthening the case for qualitative research by disentangling the process from more positivistic epistemologies. We draw on the work of Shaw (2016) to provide the reader with the claim that we posit that our results assist in the conceptualization of public shaming and online reputation management. To this end, we have created a process model to explain the public shaming campaign that can be compared to other public shaming incidents. While we are careful to not over-reach and suggest it could apply in all public shaming situations, we are

confident it can be used in comparison in future cases, ultimately revealing its comparability, or not.

#### **4.4 Ethical considerations**

There were broadly two forms of ethical issues we faced in the construction of this project. The first was that although the research is on disabled people, the researchers are themselves non-disabled. Although acknowledging that there are a number of models of disability that can inform research ideas, we ensured that our research was set within the social model of disability (Oliver & Barnes, 2012; Smith & Bundon, 2018). This model posits that the research must separate the biological and social context in which the study is set. Although this model has shortcomings (Shakespeare, 2006) we argue that as non-disabled researchers it asks us to reflect upon our ableist assumptions in the initiation and design of the research. To this end we, like Paramio-Salcines and Kitchin (2013), ensured that members of the disability community working in the area of accessibility were consulted at the outset of the research project for feedback on our aims which developed into the application for ethical approval. As this case represents one situation whereby activism led to change it enhanced the worthiness of this project (Miles et al., 2014).

Research involving online data presents some challenges for ensuring that ethical considerations are maintained (Dolowitz, Buckler, & Sweeney, 2008). In our study, we were cognizant of this influencing the nature of informed consent, and confidentiality and anonymity. Each participant interviewed provided consent to the research; however, the supporter was unwilling to engage with the research. The conflict between informing a participant about the nature of the study (an examination of whether the campaign was effectively public shaming) and the participant's possibly different point of view about the possibility of shaming may explain why our approaches were refused. The next

challenge was to maintain confidentiality and anonymity while using public, online data when the case involved a few specific key actors, the Disability Liaison Officer, the Club and the supporter. While an individual's role was identified, we have kept reference generic, i.e., the supporter or Disability Liaison Officer. In the particular case of the supporter, their online data could easily be used to identify them. Despite this individual conducting a public campaign and thereby being considered a public figure (i.e., tweets can be published, see Williams, Burnap, & Sloan, 2017 for further discussion). Regardless, we ensured confidentiality and anonymity were maintained for the supporter by adjusting the wording of the tweets and blog quotes used in the findings. This has been modified to restrict the ability to search for the tweets and therefore undermine confidentiality and anonymity.

## **5. Findings**

We began this article by setting out three research questions. The findings are structured around these three research questions, with the resulting analysis leading to the development of a process-based model that illustrates the way in which the online shaming campaign played out.

### **5.1. The online campaign**

The first research question was: how do social shaming campaigns seek to increase awareness? As presented previously in Figure 1, eight types of Tweets were identified and were further organized into three categories that can be used to understand and explain the way in which the Twitter campaign unfolded, and the strategies used to seek to influence the football club (please see Table 4 for categories and examples).

**INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE**

The first category is termed ‘awareness’ in which the purpose of the tweets was simply to raise awareness of the issue, with later tweets focusing on raising awareness of the official campaign against the club. In this category, three types of tweets were identified: the first involved tweets relating to the issue – the inability of the supporter to sit with his family in the disabled seating area - and how the individual supporter perceived the football clubs’ actions as discriminatory. For example, one of the early tweets stated that *“On our way to @)CLUB #wishwecouldallgo but they don't let wheelchairs sit with family's”*.

The second type of tweets involved the targeting of high profile individuals and relevant organizations in the hope that they would support (and re-tweet the details) of the campaign. Given the reach of social media and the number of followers that celebrities have through Twitter, appealing to high-profile individuals to support a particular issue has the potential to generate significant awareness. To begin, this strategy was not particularly successful; very few individuals re-tweeted. However, by targeting two disability rights advocacy organizations, who retweeted the original tweet the campaign was put in front of many individuals who helped generate early awareness; *“@access thanks for the RT and for putting us in contact with @inclusion”*.

The third type of tweets was targeted at club stakeholders and in particular the media and club sponsors. Targeting the media proved particularly important once the official campaign had been launched. The launch of the campaign came three months after the initial tweets began raising awareness of the issue – *“it's time to make a stand. Lifelong @(CLUB) supporter, want my boys to experience it together”*. It was at this point that the campaign began to gather momentum – 48 hours later a local, online media source picked up on the story, and once the article was published (*“@Club disabled seating row:*

Lifelong supporter launches campaign against club”) the supporter used this story to drive yet more tweets and generated more coverage of the campaign.

The second category of tweets is termed ‘attack’ in which the purpose of the tweets was to directly criticize a range of organizations and a specific individual. The first type of tweets in this category was aimed at the football club. For example, “*15 years ago wheelchair users were treated unequal. It still happens at #(STADIUM) today #timeforchange*”, and “*@(CLUB) should take a leaf out of @ODEONCinemas book. watched @PaddingtonMovie wheelchair space so #familyutd*”.

A second type of attack tweets was aimed at other organizations such as the club’s partners and sponsors. In particular, all club sponsors that had previously been contacted were again contacted and ‘called out’: “*@(SPONSOR) still no reply to our request. Do you really support this type of #discrimination?*” These tweets were aimed at castigating and embarrassing club sponsors by suggesting they did not take the issue of disability discrimination seriously and to put pressure on the club to respond.

A third type of tweets also ran concurrently with the above: a series of tweets was aimed at criticizing the Disability Liaison Officer at the football club. This officer was the individual who had initially corresponded with the supporter. During a series of email correspondence, the officer had suggested that other non-Premier League clubs would welcome the supporter and his family because they had lower demand on their facilities. This private email correspondence was subsequently used by the supporter to express outrage at the club response and to shame the individual officer. For example, in an online blog the supporter stated:

*Who’s in charge of this [Disability Supporters’ Association]? Like the [Premier League], the [Disability Supporters’ Association] has grown in size, and now has, a treasurer, someone in charge of Social Media,*

*Customer Relations Executives..... But the main man in charge of the [Disability Supporters' Association] is a chap called [anonymized].*

During an interview with a Disability Supporters' Association representative, there was clear concern at the way the supporter had dealt with this issue:

The supporter spun the exchange like the club Disability Liaison Officer told him to “go and support someone else”, which was not the case. He could have approached it differently. It was only his first interactions with the club, he faces one decision he does not like and then he goes public and complains (personal interview with Disability Supporter Association representative, 30 July 2018).

This again highlights the dangers of social media and the potential for individuals to feel empowered through social media. In a further interview with the Disability Liaison Officer in question, it was clear that they regretted that the initial email exchange, and in particular the suggestion that other clubs would welcome the supporter and his family, was the driver for his public campaign. This specific aspect was picked up by the online source mentioned above and then the journey from online, to local online and offline press, then national mainstream tabloid, broadsheet and radio media once the campaign was officially launched.

The third category of tweets is termed ‘advocacy’ in which the purpose of those tweets was to discuss more generally the issue of accessibility and discrimination that was sometimes extraneous to the campaign. These tweets took a more conciliatory tone seeking to perhaps counteract some of the more antagonistic tweets that attacked the clubs, the Disability Liaison Officer and other organizations. For example, “*Great news*



*coming out of the house of lords. Let's get this bill past and get some @GOVUK backing and get #access4all".*

Our analysis of the tweets relating to this specific case demonstrates two issues. First, it highlights the fundamental ability of social media to empower consumers and offer the potential for online activism (Aula, 2010; Torrenzano & Davis, 2011). The classic text by Hirschman (1970) states that when there are organizational failings, consumers can either exit (i.e., they choose to consume elsewhere) or they use their voice to express dissatisfaction. In the case of football club supporters, exit is often not an option due to high levels of loyalty (support). Thus, it means that supporters may be more likely to use their voice, and, in the era of social media, this voice can carry more weight than in previous eras. Social media thus offers the opportunity to challenge poor practice: this was recognized in the very first tweet that began the campaign, which stated, *"Hello Twitter, long time no see. Social media has its pros and cons, for a while I'm going to be using it to raise awareness of sum things"*.

The second issue that this analysis highlights is that Twitter can effectively be used to shame organizations and individuals. In this case, the second category of tweets - 'attack' – do this explicitly. We argue that the campaign intentionally sought to damage the reputation of the club and the individual Disability Liaison Officer that the supporter felt had aggrieved him. Despite the initial conversations between the supporter and the Disability Liaison Officer having been conducted through private emails, the supporter had later used these to shame the club and the Disability Liaison Officer, in order to underpin the campaign, and to generate media attention. We can provide an anonymized example of the text misinterpreted by the supporter and used in communications via twitter and the campaign blogs. In addressing the lack of specific seating to cater for the

supporter and his needs, the Disability Liaison Officer attempted to express the interplay between space and safety issues at the club's stadium:

The only solution to this particular scenario would be to bring along an additional adult to look after one of the children and keep an eye on the child sitting with you. It isn't possible to group you all together because the configuration of any wheelchair platform makes this impossible... this isn't specific to us but applies to every club.

There are some clubs that would welcome you with open arms and possibly ask you to bring as many family members as possible... the downside is it wouldn't be [here], most probably Club X, Club Y or Club Z. They have the space and that's the critical thing.

I will stop there and allow you to comment on the points already made but I look forward to part two.

Kind regards,

(Name and contact details anonymized for academic paper)

This explanation became the crux of a series of tweets and online blog posts criticizing the club and the Disability Liaison Officer. It was subsequently framed in the media outlets who picked up the story “@Club tell family with disabled son to watch Club Z instead” (Wilson, 2015). In this type of situation, it should be noted that anyone who works for an organization who responds to an external email is potentially exposed to its public and potentially negative effects (Blackford, 2016). Another risk for associated advocacy organizations is that if the supporter does not understand their role, this does not save them from ire; “@kickitout *show your cojones and tackle the discrimination of disabled fans by @Club*”. On this occasion the tweets sent by the supporter did not receive a response, which while castigated in further tweets by the supporter did not warrant further attention and reputational issues. Hence, when individuals did object to the way the supporter was conducting the campaign they were met with a number of tweets, ignoring the conduct issue and attacking them for supporting the maintenance of discrimination. Such as in this example; @Aon: “*you should be*

*ashamed of your campaign the club provide terrific access for disabled people*". This was met with nine tweets in response, defending the campaign but again shaming the staff member involved and attacking the other user; *"If you think that this sort of discrimination is acceptable. You are the one who should be ashamed"*.

## **5.2. Campaign outcomes**

The second research question was: how can social shaming campaigns impact organizations? Essentially, here we sought to try to identify the outcomes of the social shaming campaign. To address this, we drew on document analysis and interviews to identify three key outcomes that resulted from the public shaming campaign. The first outcome was how the campaign led to increased awareness in particular through an enhanced national media profile. As we discussed previously, one of the strategies of the Twitter campaign was to generate awareness through targeting club stakeholders, including the media. The interview with the membership officer corroborated the role of the campaign in raising awareness of a critical issue that did need addressing: "the campaign did start to highlight how it [better accessibility] was needed and how under resourced it was at a stadium that big; it really shouldn't have those numbers" (Advocacy Organization representative, interview, 28 November 2017).

When the campaign was launched, it was reported in the local online media. Following the continuation of the campaign, larger media outlets became interested in the story, including the city's main local paper, two national papers, the public British Broadcast Corporation on its radio channels, and the Daily Telegraph. Headlines like those mentioned above were important for the campaign as it ensured that the shaming of the club reached a much wider audience.

The second outcome was centred around how this particular social shaming campaign played a role in supporting the broader debate on discrimination and

accessibility within Premier League stadia. The issue at the centre of this was that many Premier League clubs were failing to meet basic standards on disability access at stadia that had been set out in the Accessible Stadia Guide, with the Equality and Human Rights Commission threatening legal action against Premier League clubs that were failing to adhere to the basic guidelines. These concerns became the subject of a Daily Telegraph campaign focused on better stadium access for disabled football fans. This media campaign started in 2016 however, as noted above, the Daily Telegraph had previously been one of the few national media outlets to notice the social shaming campaign and report this. This is an example of how the localised nature of this particular issue became central to the broader debate around disability access at stadiums. For example, the issue of disability access was debated in government with the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee hearing that the Premier League had proposed sanctions for clubs failing to provide adequate provision; *“Fines of up to £25,000, [or in cases of] more serious breaches... the matter being referred to a specially appointed independent panel which would be able to impose heavier fines or, potentially, deduct points from clubs”* (Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee, 2017, p. 10).

If the Premier League did not sufficiently sanction clubs then the Equality and Human Rights Commission would receive the full support of the government in pursuing legal action if necessary (Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee, 2017). What this demonstrates is that the public shaming campaign in question did not occur in isolation. It happened to take place at a very opportune moment, aligning with broader environmental pressures to improve accessibility for disabled supporters.

The third outcome of the campaign is that it became a threat to the reputational capital of the football club. Had the campaign remained an isolated campaign, it is unclear as to whether it would have been deemed significant enough for the football club to take

action. However, by supporting the broader campaign for improved disability access, thus reinforcing and strengthening calls for football clubs to offer improved access, the campaign became a threat to the reputational capital of the football club, and it became an issue that the football club needed to manage appropriately. Our evidence for this is that when the issue became one that attracted national media attention, the football club then sought to engage with the supporter when the Group Managing Director agreed to a meeting. Whilst the original response had come from the Disability Liaison Officer within the Disability Supporters' Association, at no point during the eight-month campaign did any senior figures within the football club seek to get involved. Arguably, this demonstrates that until this point, the football club did not feel the campaign would have an impact on their reputation and the agreement to meet the supporter highlights a shift in the way the football club perceived this campaign.

### **5.3. The organizational response**

The previous section highlights that it was only after the campaign had gathered momentum via the national media attention that the reputational capital of the club appeared threatened, which then spurred the club to meet with the supporter. The meeting with the supporter was also a significant point in time as the analysis of the Twitter account demonstrates that all tweets and blogs associated with this particular campaign ceased once the meeting had taken place between the football club and the supporter. This meeting, which took place at the supporter's residence rather than at the club, was therefore a significant point in the chronology of this case study; it would appear to represent the point at which the club acknowledged their failings; that they used this meeting to appease the supporter; and that they had, by this point, decided upon a clear strategy not only for improving accessibility at their stadium. Our third research question

that asked: how do organizations respond to social shaming campaigns? We identified a number of ways that the football club responded to the social shaming campaign.

### **5.3.1. Internal policy changes**

The club itself has improved their disabled seating provision in general and two accessible family seating areas to ensure that families can sit together at their stadium. As the Equality and Human Rights Commission report states, from 2017 the club is to increase the number of spaces for wheelchair users from 120 wheelchair seats to 280 wheelchair seats in three areas of the stadium, including two designated family areas as the initial supporter campaign demanded (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2018). The development of this physical infrastructure at the club's stadium and its policies provide stark evidence of the wide impact that public shaming can have on a professional football club.

Another side effect of the public shaming campaign has been that the Disability Supporters' Association's position within the club has been marginalized, and the responsibility for accessibility has been taken over by the club's management. All queries are now handled by the club and only once a member registers with them do they then communicate with the Disability Supporters' Association. One tangible aspect that was seen following the campaign was the Twitter account of the Disability Supporters' Association being deleted. The Disability Supporters' Association still exists but essentially, "it serves its members only. The person running it only seems to be public when there is a good news story to tell... It is all window dressing" (Disability Supporters' Association representative, interview, 30 July 2018).

As Massaro (1997) argued regarding the impact of shaming, "one cannot know in advance what the impact of shaming a person might be. The emotional impact may range from none, to mild discomfort to a profound and complete loss of self that inspired a

desire to die” (p. 655). In our case study, it was evident that the Disability Liaison Officer initially involved in the query became the target of the campaign launched by the supporter. Because of this campaign, this staff member had their Disability Supporters’ Association role discontinued and has been reassigned into another area for the club and being placed onto a short-term contract:

Well I got invited to more and more meetings, but I felt that I was increasingly out of the loop on decision making. I was offered the [Disability Access Officer] role but they said they could not afford to pay me what the role required. I am now on a 3 day per week consultant contract where the club pay my company and the company pay me. I think they believe it gets around their employment responsibilities (Disability Supporters’ Association representative, interview, 30 July 2018).

It is clear that it is this individual who has suffered personal consequences from the campaign, receiving personal criticism and abuse online throughout the campaign and then being removed from their position – indeed into a more precarious job - once the campaign was completed. That this individual is also a member of the disability community also means that despite the positive outcomes for many, it was not one of universal benefit.

As previously mentioned, the club integrated many of the responsibilities of the Disability Supporters’ Association into their own organization, including the handling of queries about accessible seating for both home and away supporters, the publication of ticket ballot details for both home and away on their website, the publication of the club’s Access Statement and Visitor Supporter’s Guide, and the positioning of accessibility within a dedicated unit responsible for the inclusion of not only supporters with

disabilities but also LGBTQI+ supporters, and supporters from ethnic minority communities. This dedicated section manages the club's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy that has been enacted since the year following the campaign's completion.

### **5.3.2. External responses**

Following the meeting with the supporter one of the club's first actions was to support one of the national advocacy organizations by purchasing signage at the other 19 Premier League clubs across England and Wales to promote a disability accessibility awareness campaign. This gesture can be construed as an endorsement of both the advocacy group and the wider issues of discrimination of supporters with disabilities in English football. In response to this campaign, and the club's donation with the signage, the relationship between the club and the advocacy organization has become closer as a result; '[we] are now re-establishing a really good relationship with the club, which is great as we were waiting for 4 years to do this!' (Advocacy Organization representative, interview, 28 November 2017).

## **6. Analysis and Implications**

The analysis of the data and the response to the three research questions enabled the development of a model that sets out the processes through which the social shaming campaign sought to increase awareness; how it affected upon the football club; and how the football club responded to the campaign (figure 2). Figure 2 provides a process model that diagrammatically represents both the public shaming campaign and our research questions, by breaking the campaign down into a series of stages. Stage 1 was the origination of the issue whereby the supporter is advised to go to another service provider. Stage 2 represents the campaign whereby three categories of tweets were used. The campaign outcomes presented in stage 3 link the campaign's receipt of national media profile to the broader campaign for disability access to sport in England, which combine



to pose a threat to the reputational capital of the club. Because of this threat, the club initiated some internal and external responses effectively disarming the campaign, addressing the supporter's needs and at the same time re-establishing relationships with a national advocacy group for supporters with disabilities.

## **INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE**

We posit that this series of corrective actions (Coombs, 2007) prevented the crisis from escalating wider and directly involving the Equality and Human Rights Commission. We believe that due to the club's reaction once the mainstream press became aware provides this case with a uniqueness to what has been covered in previous sport crisis communication studies (Billings et al., 2018; Brown, Brown, & Billings, 2015; Bruce & Tini, 2008; Pfahl & Bates, 2008). In this case, even with the lack of proactive actions we argue that crisis was averted. Like others have found, the tendency for the club to bolster its reputation by drawing on examples of its previous good work, which the DSA in this case could have provided were not required. In much of the media coverage around the case, the media seemed unaware of the club's previous accessibility shortcomings (see NADS, 2007). Perhaps if they had been, then a different outcome may have ensued, as previous studies have revealed that when trust between the organization and the media is low, the media can be more vociferous with their treatment of crisis (Onwimechili & Bedeau, 2017). Finally, the development of new policies, investment in the stadia and investment in staffing resources around Equality, Inclusion and Diversity have aligned the club well with Dijkmans et al., (2015) recommendation about generating online ambassadors. With the support behind many Premier League clubs significant

both nationally and internationally, these ambassadors may, if future issues arise, defend the club, as seen in Brown et al., (2015).

In this context, social media clearly contributes to empowering individual supporters and with the growing use of social media, it is not uncontroversial to suggest that public, online shaming of individuals or clubs will increase in future years. This case shows the impact that a low budget, yet persistent campaign can cause. As other scholars (Billings et al., 2018; Pownall, 2015; Torrenzano & Davis, 2011) anticipated, social media gives unprecedented power to supporters to initiate substantial changes in policies and procedures – specifically in this case study the focus has been on the accessibility to stadia for supporters with disabilities. As supporters feel empowered to exercise their rights and voice concerns via social media, clubs must be prepared to respond in an appropriate way. In this paper, we have provided a detailed understanding of how the campaign developed over time, the outcome of the campaign and above all, the responses that the club initiated in order to manage this public shaming campaign. As such, this study has implications for the more effectively handling of public shaming campaigns.

One of the first implications for reputational management is that sport organizations should have pre-crisis planning scenarios for a range of potential risks (Aula, 2010; Billings et al., 2018; Coombs, 2007; Pownall, 2015). This risk assessment would have included the club's insufficient levels of accessible seating and prepared a response for this. Inadequate planning is counterintuitive for online reputation management, as Dijkmans et al., (2015) and the needs on non-customers, in this case disabled supporters who have been online openly activating for better, more equitable access and an effective Online Reputation Management system could have monitored social media for early warnings of this potential issue.

Though different strategies and actions might take different forms depending on the reputational capital held by any sport organizations, the authors contend that clubs must be aware of the potential impact of not only groups of supporters, but also any supporter's use of social media to initiate a crisis. We contend that this crisis did not occur without sufficient prior warning. The club knew that its accessible seating ratio was insufficient and therefore inadequate crisis planning was conducted (Coombs, 2007; Kitchin & Purcell, 2017). Organizations must better position themselves to strategically respond to the newly emerging dark side effects that public shaming may represent as social media challenges conventional reputation management (Aula, 2010), how it might affect upon their reputation and that of the individual staff within them. Greater attention should be devoted to integrating negative comments and campaigns into the club's response on social media. As found above, club management failed to quickly deal with/respond to the supporter's request, which, if they had done so, could have prevented the campaign from gaining greater coverage/attention. In trying to control any crisis that emerges, clubs need to develop a solid framework to manage negative communications on a multitude of management decisions, from moving from "*doing only what is required*" to now being more responsive and engaged to the requests of individual supporters as seen above.

While senior management and the Board of Directors are responsible for an organization's policy direction to address potential crises, which might affect the reputation of the club and their staff, they did not face up to the consequences of this public, online shaming campaign. An irony of this campaign to highlight discrimination was that the only individual who was targeted online, (who suffered personal loss of reputation and job position within the organization) was a member of the disability community who had worked for many years to provide accessible services for the club's

supporters. Irrespective of this outcome, it is clear that public shaming has opened new avenues to empowering supporters to initiate change at their club.

## **7. Conclusions**

In this study, we set out to address three research questions; the first was to understand how a social shaming campaign sought to increase awareness. The second research question sought to understand how social shaming campaigns can impact upon organizations and their reputational capital. Third, we sought to understand the manner in which organizations can respond to social shaming campaigns. The following points highlight our novel contribution to this emerging area of sport communications. In addressing the first question, we have provided an analysis of a public, online shaming campaign taken against a high-profile Premier League club by one of its own supporters. Our analysis revealed categories of tweets and online blogs that sought to increase the awareness of the issue, to attack those who sought to downplay, or trivialize the issue and to provide advocacy for other users who experienced stadium accessibility issues.

In addressing research questions 2 and 3, we explored the process of Online Reputation Management in the context of the campaign. Dijkmans et al.'s (2015) tasks of positioning, monitoring, measuring the potential impact of this campaign were neglected by the club and only once the online shaming campaign made it into the national press and gained the awareness of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, did the club initiate a resolution. It is clear that once the club initiated a response, they showed they could interact with the supporter, propose changes and produce content that could be shared to bolster their reputation for being inclusive and accessible (Dijkmans et al., 2015). We contend that the public, online shaming campaign brought this issue to the attention of a greater number of stakeholders, including the national press, which created a reputational crisis and brought about a response. The campaign was therefore successful

in raising awareness of the issue from those who knew about it (supporters with disabilities and their advocacy organizations) to a wider audience, not just nationally but for the international drive for the inclusion of disabled people and equality of access.

Based on this study, we feel there exists a pressing need for more research that explores the nexus between sport, fan-activism (including the use of approaches such as public shaming) and Online Reputation Management in general. Further analysis of the types of responses that sport organizations offer to negative comments would also provide some form of minimum threshold where comments are merely a gripe, or issues that might develop into a public, online shaming campaign. In particular, there remains a further need to explore in depth the *dark side* of social media in sport as a contemporary form of abuse.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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**Table 1: Anonymized details of documentary sources**

| Document                    | Description  | Source   |
|-----------------------------|--|----------|
| Access statement            | A document setting out the design and design issues found in a physical facility – such as a stadium.                    | EPL Club |
| EDI Policy                  | The EPL club’s Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy.   | EPL Club |
| Equality Action Plan Report | A document outlining the EPL club’s achievements in relation to inclusion and accessibility.                             | EPL Club |
| Visiting Supporters Guide   | A document intended for away fans that explains the journey details, key contacts and accessible features of the stadium | EPL Club |
| Ballot procedure            | A document aimed at DSA members outlining the rationale for and procedures of the ticket ballot system.                  | DSA      |

Source: Authors

**Table 2: Sample of participants who satisfied selection criteria**

| <b>Organization</b>   | <b>Position</b>            | <b>Accepted interview</b> |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| None                  | Supporter (fan activist)   | No                        |
| Club                  | Group Managing Director    | No                        |
| Club                  | Accessibility Manager      | No                        |
| Club DSA              | Disability Liaison Officer | Yes                       |
| Advocacy Organization | Membership Officer         | Yes                       |

Source: Authors

**Table 3: An example of In Vivo Coding**

| <b>Transcript</b>   | <b>In Vivo Code</b>                   |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| I wouldn't email the same way again, I accept that.   | Not that way again                    |
| I would have ensured I had support from the club.   | Support from the club                 |
| The seating options requested are available at other stadiums, like Club Z  | Options available elsewhere           |
| but I think the supporter had involvement from other stakeholders during the design to ensure this occurred.                                    | Unrevealed assistance to his campaign |
| What the supporter said about me was slanderous personally.   | Slanderous personally                 |
| It also impacted on the fans too,   | Impacts on the fans too               |
| we had to discontinue the use of twitter because he was using it as a tool to further his campaign, he would bombard us with public complaints. | Discontinued our use of twitter       |

Source: Authors



**Table 4: Category, type and example of campaign tweets**

| Category  | Type of tweet  | Example   |
|-----------|--|---|
| Awareness | 1 - tweets relating to the issue                                     | On our way to @(CLUB) #wishwecouldalldgo but they don't let wheelchairs sit with family's' [Sic.]   |
|           | 2 - targeting of high profile individuals and relevant organizations | @access thanks for the RT and for putting us in contact with @inclusion   |
|           | 3 - targeted at club stakeholders                                    | help spread the word, changes at @(CLUB) to allow #FamilyUtd to watch the game together   |
|           | 4 - Tweets promoting the launch of the #FamilyUtd campaign           | it's time to make a stand. Lifelong @(CLUB) supporter, want my boys to experience it together #FamilyUtd  |
| Attack    | 1 – attack the club  | 15 years ago wheelchair users were treated unequal. It still happens at #(STADIUM) today #timeforchange’, and ‘@(CLUB) should take a leaf out of @ODEONCinemas book. watched @PaddingtonMovie wheelchair space so #familyutd. |
|           | 2 – attack other organizations or individuals                        | @(SPONSOR) still no reply to our request. Do you really support this type of #discrimination  |
|           | 3 – attack the DLO   | @DSAClub celebrate 25 years at @Club and yet secure bottom of #access table   |

|          |                           |  |
|----------|---------------------------|--|
| Advocacy | 1 - Conversational tweets | Great news coming out of the house of lords. |
|          | linking campaign to       | Let's get this bill past and get some @GOVUK |
|          | disability discrimination | backing and get #access4all                  |

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Source: Supporter on Twitter, Authors

Figure 1: The development of codes and themes from online data analysis

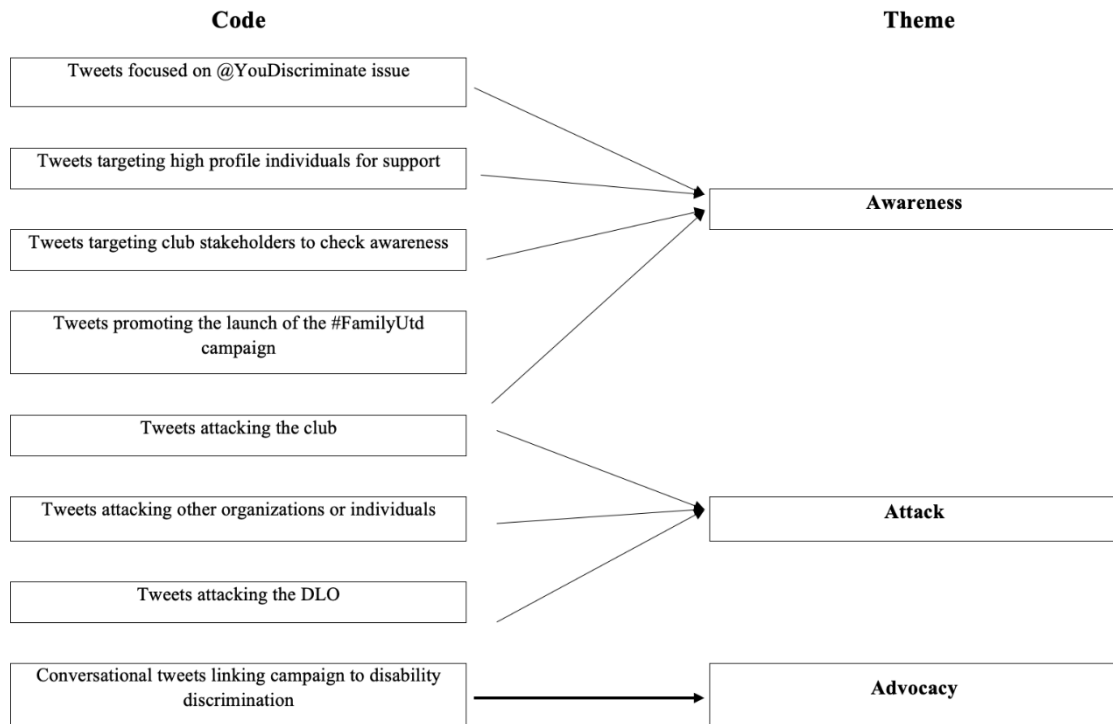


Figure 2: A process model to explain the public, online shaming campaign

