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**Crisis Communication and Reputation Management Frameworks Following Major Organizational Corruption Scandals: A Case Study of The Pakistan Weightlifting Federation
A Study in the Pakistani Sports Governance Context**

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Abstract

Between 2021 and 2026, the Pakistan Weightlifting Federation (PWLF) became the subject of one of the most severe governance crises in Pakistani sport: A multi-year investigation by the International Testing Agency (ITA), acting on behalf of the International Weightlifting Federation (IWF), uncovered systemic doping, the alleged use of "fake clubs" to entrench federation control, and the administration of prohibited substances to minor athletes between 2014 and 2016. The crisis culminated in the Pakistan Sports Board's (PSB) 2021 suspension of the federation, a wave of Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) sanctions between 2023 and 2026, and, ultimately, lifetime bans for the federation's former president and national coach. This article develops and applies a crisis communication and reputation management framework - integrating Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Benoit's Image Repair Theory to analyze how the PWLF, the PSB and affiliated stakeholders communicated (or failed to communicate) through this crisis, and what this reveals about reputation-recovery pathways available to Pakistani sports federations facing corruption scandals. A documentary case analysis of real, dated events is combined with an illustrative stakeholder-perception dataset (n = 350) that demonstrates how trust, perceived response effectiveness and reputation-recovery predictors can be measured empirically. The illustrative analysis shows that prolonged institutional silence and denial were associated with the

steepest trust decline, while documented corrective action and transparent, consistent communication - once finally adopted by the PSB - were rated as the most effective response strategies. The article concludes with a practical crisis communication and reputation management framework tailored to Pakistani national sports federations.

Keywords: *Crisis Communication; Reputation Management; Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT); Image Repair Theory; Pakistan Weightlifting Federation; Sports Governance Pakistan; Corruption Scandal; Stakeholder Trust*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

National sports federations occupy a position of public trust: they are custodians of athlete welfare, public funding and national sporting reputation. When that trust is breached by corruption or systemic misconduct, the resulting crisis threatens not only the individuals implicated but the legitimacy of the federation as an institution. The Pakistan Weightlifting Federation (PWLF), founded in 1947 and affiliated with the International Weightlifting Federation (IWF) since 1948, provides a stark recent example (Wikipedia, 2026). Beginning in 2021, the Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) suspended the PWLF amid allegations of corruption and mass doping, creating a prolonged leadership vacuum even as the IWF initially continued to recognize the incumbent regime led by then-president Hafiz Imran Butt (Inside the Games, 2026).

The scale of the crisis became clearer through investigations conducted by the International Testing Agency (ITA), which had been engaged by the IWF in 2019 to manage its global anti-doping program after a separate scandal implicated former long-serving IWF president Tamas Ajan in the mishandling of doping cases between 2009 and 2019 (Around the Rings, 2021). Within Pakistan specifically, the ITA's investigation - reported publicly as Operation JASMINE - found that PWLF vice-president Amjad Amin Butt and coach Waqas Akbar had tampered with doping control procedures, and, more gravely, that former president Hafiz Imran Butt and former national coach Irfan Butt had administered prohibited substances, including to minor athletes, between September 2014 and November 2016 (International Testing Agency, 2024, 2026). Critics further alleged that the federation regime maintained control through a network of "fake clubs" that protected corrupt practices while neglecting elite athlete welfare (Inside the Games, 2026).

This is precisely the kind of institutional crisis for which crisis communication and reputation management theory was developed: a preventable, internally caused scandal (in Coombs' typology, the most reputationally damaging crisis type) unfolding over several years and multiple public disclosure points, each demanding a distinct communicative response from the implicated federation, its regulators (PSB, IWF, ITA) and the athletes and public whose trust was at stake.

1.2 Problem Statement

While the factual and legal dimensions of the PWLF case are now well documented through ITA reports and CAS rulings, no academic study has examined the case through a crisis communication and reputation management lens, nor asked what the PWLF/PSB response sequence - years of limited public communication followed by CAS-driven bans and a PSB statement framing the rulings as vindication of its own 2021 action (The Express Tribune, 2026) - reveals about effective versus ineffective crisis

response in Pakistani sports governance. Pakistani national sports federations more broadly lack a documented, locally grounded crisis communication framework, leaving them to respond to scandals reactively rather than according to an evidence-based playbook.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

- To document and analyze, from real public records, the timeline and communicative response pattern of the PWLF corruption and doping crisis (2021-2026).
- To classify the observed and available response strategies using Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory and Benoit's Image Repair Theory typologies.
- To assess stakeholder trust and perceived communication effectiveness across the phases of the crisis.
- To identify the strongest predictors of stakeholder trust recovery in a Pakistani sports federation crisis context.
- To propose a practical crisis communication and reputation management framework for Pakistani national sports federations.

1.4 Research Questions

- **RQ1:** What crisis communication strategies, if any, did the PWLF and PSB employ across the successive stages of the 2021-2026 crisis?
- **RQ2:** How did stakeholder trust in the PWLF change across the pre-crisis, crisis and post-adjudication phases?
- **RQ3:** Which crisis response strategy types are perceived by stakeholders as most and least effective in this context?
- **RQ4:** What organizational communication factors most strongly predict stakeholder trust recovery following a sports corruption scandal in Pakistan?

1.5 Significance of the Study

For the PSB, IWF-affiliated federations and Pakistan's broader Olympic sports movement, this study offers an evidence-informed communication framework that can be applied proactively rather than only after regulatory bodies force disclosure. For scholars, it extends Western-developed crisis communication theory (SCCT, Image Repair Theory) into an under-studied South Asian sports-governance context characterized by weak federation oversight, athlete power asymmetries, and the involvement of international regulators (IWF, ITA, CAS) alongside domestic ones (PSB).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

Coombs (2007) developed Situational Crisis Communication Theory to explain how organizations should select crisis response strategies based on the attributed responsibility for, and severity of, a crisis. SCCT classifies crises into three clusters of increasing reputational threat - victim, accidental and preventable - and maps a corresponding set of response strategies ranging from denial (attacking the accuser, outright denial) through diminishment (excuse, justification) to rebuilding (compensation, apology, corrective action) and bolstering (reminding, ingratiation, victimage) (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Preventable crises involving deliberate organizational misconduct - the category into which

systemic doping and corruption fall - demand rebuilding-oriented strategies; denial or minimization in such cases tends to compound reputational damage once the underlying facts become public.

2.2 Image Repair Theory

Benoit's (1997) Image Repair Theory offers a complementary typology developed from a rhetorical rather than a strategic-management tradition, identifying five broad image-restoration strategies: denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action and mortification (acceptance of responsibility and apology). Benoit's framework is particularly useful for analysing public statements and press releases word-by-word, making it well suited to the kind of documentary analysis of PSB and PWLF communications proposed in this article.

2.3 Stakeholder Theory and Sports Governance

Freeman's (1984) stakeholder theory frames organizational legitimacy as dependent on managing the expectations of multiple stakeholder groups - here, athletes, coaches, sponsors, regulators (IWF, ITA, PSB) and the domestic sporting public - each of whom may demand different crisis responses. In sports federations specifically, athletes occupy an unusually vulnerable stakeholder position: they depend on the very federation implicated in wrongdoing for selection, funding and career progression, which can suppress internal whistleblowing and delay disclosure, a dynamic consistent with the multi-year gap between the PSB's initial 2021 suspension and the confirmed CAS findings against PWLF leadership in 2025-2026 (International Testing Agency, 2024, 2026; The Express Tribune, 2025).

2.4 Crisis Communication in Sports Corruption Cases

International sports governance has produced several high-profile precedents against which the PWLF case can be read comparatively, including the IWF's own leadership crisis under former president Tamas Ajan, in which an ITA-commissioned report found systemic mishandling of doping cases over a decade, prompting a full governance overhaul and public apology from interim IWF leadership (Around the Rings, 2021). Similar athlete-driven crises in South Asian sports governance - such as public allegations against national wrestling federation leadership in the region - illustrate a recurring pattern in which athlete advocacy and media pressure, rather than proactive federation disclosure, drive the crisis into public view. This pattern of externally forced rather than self-initiated disclosure appears consistent with the PWLF case, where the PSB's suspension and the ITA's investigation, not any voluntary PWLF disclosure, initiated the public crisis (Inside the Games, 2026).

2.5 Research Gap

Existing crisis communication literature is concentrated in corporate, political and Western sports contexts; Pakistani sports federations - despite recurring governance crises across cricket, hockey, wrestling and weightlifting - remain largely unstudied through this lens. No study to date applies SCCT or Image Repair Theory typologies to a documented Pakistani federation crisis using both real case timeline data and stakeholder-perception measurement, a combination this article's proposed methodology addresses.

3. Case Background: Timeline of the PWLF Crisis

Table 1 reconstructs the documented, publicly reported timeline of the PWLF crisis from official ITA, CAS, PSB and press sources. This timeline forms the factual backbone for the SCCT/Image Repair classification in Section 5.7 and is presented here, ahead of the methodology, so that readers unfamiliar with the case can follow the analysis that depends on it.

Date	Event	Source
1947-1948	PWLF founded (1947) and affiliated with the IWF (1948); federation headquartered in Lahore.	Wikipedia (2026)
2019	IWF engages the International Testing Agency (ITA) to independently manage its global anti-doping program.	Around the Rings (2021)
July 2021	ITA report finds systemic mishandling of doping cases (2009-2019) under former IWF president Tamas Ajan; global governance crisis for the sport.	Around the Rings (2021)
2021	Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) suspends the PWLF over allegations of corruption and mass doping; leadership vacuum emerges. IWF initially continues to recognize the incumbent Butt-led regime.	Inside the Games (2026)
14 Nov 2023	ITA asserts anti-doping rule violations (ADRVs) against coach Waqas Akbar and PWLF Vice-President Amjad Amin Butt for tampering with doping control (Art. 2.5, 2.9).	International Testing Agency (2024)
2 Aug 2024	ITA notifies former PWLF president Hafiz Imran Butt and former coach Irfan Butt of ADRV's relating to administration of prohibited substances to athletes, including minors, between 2014 and 2016 (Art. 2.6, 2.8, 2.9).	International Testing Agency (2024)
2024	More than three PWLF-linked ADRV's within a 12-month period trigger Art. 12.3 of the IWF Anti-Doping Rules, referring the federation to the IWF Independent Member Federation Sanctioning Panel.	International Testing Agency (2024)
24 Feb 2025	CAS Anti-Doping Division (CAS ADD) rules against Waqas Akbar and Amjad Amin Butt, confirming ADRV's under Art. 2.5 and 2.9.	International Testing Agency (2026)
June 2025	PWLF begins serving a one-year suspension from all IWF activities under Art. 12.3 of the IWF Anti-Doping Rules.	Inside the Games (2026)
3 Nov 2025	PSB publicly names and bans Sharjeel Butt, Abdul Rehman, Ghulam Mustafa, Farhan Majeed (four-year bans, 2021 violations), plus Hafiz Imran Butt, Irfan Butt and Waqas Akbar, under Operation JASMINE.	The Express Tribune (2025)
6 Mar 2026	CAS ADD sanctions weightlifter Abubakar Ghani with a four-year ineligibility period for tampering with doping control.	International Testing Agency (2026)

20 Mar 2026	CAS ADD rules that Hafiz Imran Butt and Irfan Butt administered prohibited substances to minors (2014-2016) and imposes lifetime ineligibility - the maximum sanction available.	International Testing Agency (2026); Inside the Games (2026)
Apr 2026	PSB issues a statement welcoming the CAS lifetime bans, describing the ruling as validating its 2021 suspension and 2025 bans; PSB frames its own prior action as decisive and proactive.	The Express Tribune (2026)

Table 1: Documented timeline of the PWLF crisis, 1947-2026 (real, sourced data).

Two features of this timeline are analytically important. First, the gap between the PSB's 2021 suspension and confirmed CAS findings in 2025-2026 - roughly four to five years - meant the federation operated for an extended period under contested, unresolved allegations, a communication environment SCCT identifies as especially reputationally corrosive because it allows rumour and speculation to fill the vacuum left by limited authoritative disclosure. Second, the PWLF's own public communications are largely absent from the documented record; the visible communicative response came almost entirely from regulators - the ITA, CAS and PSB - rather than from the federation itself, a pattern discussed further in Section 6.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods design combining (a) documentary case analysis of the real, dated PWLF crisis timeline (Section 3) using SCCT and Image Repair Theory coding, and (b) a quantitative, cross-sectional stakeholder survey measuring trust, perceived communication effectiveness and reputation-recovery predictors. The mixed-methods approach follows established practice in crisis communication research, where qualitative case coding establishes what an organization actually said and did, while stakeholder surveys establish how that response was received (Coombs, 2007).

4.2 Documentary Case Analysis

Primary and secondary source documents - ITA investigative updates, CAS ADD rulings, PSB press releases and national/international sports press coverage - were compiled into the timeline in Table 1 and coded against Coombs' (2007) SCCT response-strategy typology (denial, diminishment, rebuilding, bolstering) and Benoit's (1997) Image Repair strategies (denial, evasion, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, mortification). Coding was conducted at the level of each discrete public statement or documented institutional action.

4.3 Population and Sampling (Survey Component)

The target population for the survey component is Pakistani weightlifting and Olympic-sport stakeholders: competitive weightlifters and coaches, sports journalists covering Pakistani Olympic sports, federation/PSB-affiliated staff, and members of the sport-following general public. A stratified purposive sampling approach is proposed across these four stakeholder groups, with a minimum target sample of 350 respondents, consistent with sample sizes used in comparable organizational trust and reputation-recovery studies.

4.4 Research Instrument

A structured questionnaire would capture: (a) demographic and stakeholder-group classification; (b) retrospective trust ratings for three time points - pre-scandal, during the unresolved crisis period, and post-CAS adjudication - on a 5-point scale; (c) perceived effectiveness ratings of each SCCT-classified response strategy; and (d) construct items (transparency, timeliness, accountability actions, communication consistency, spokesperson credibility, perceived organizational self-interest) measured on 5-point Likert scales for the regression model in Section 5.8.

4.5 Data Analysis Technique

Descriptive statistics summarize the demographic profile and mean construct scores. Repeated-measures comparison (illustrated via grouped means in Figure 2) captures trust change across crisis phases. Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression identify the relative strength of transparency, timeliness, accountability, consistency, credibility and perceived self-interest in predicting stakeholder trust recovery. Section 5 demonstrates this full pipeline using an illustrative dataset, exactly as described in the Author's Note on the title page.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

- Informed consent obtained from all survey respondents prior to participation.
- Anonymity and confidentiality maintained given the sensitivity of corruption- and doping-related subject matter.
- Voluntary participation, with the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty.
- Institutional/ethical review board clearance to be obtained prior to fieldwork; no direct identification of minor athletes referenced in the underlying case would be sought or reported.

5. Results and Data Analysis

5.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 2 summarizes the composition of the illustrative stakeholder sample ($n = 350$).

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Stakeholder Group	Athletes & Coaches	94	26.9
	Sports Journalists	58	16.6
	Federation / PSB Staff	41	11.7
	General Public (Sports Followers)	157	44.8
Gender	Male	241	68.9
	Female	109	31.1
Age Group	18-24 years	88	25.1
	25-34 years	121	34.6
	35-44 years	89	25.4
	45 years and above	52	14.9
Region	Punjab	168	48.0
	Sindh	94	26.9
	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	51	14.6
	Other (Balochistan, ICT, AJK)	37	10.5

Table 2: Demographic profile of respondents (illustrative survey data, $n = 350$).

5.2 Media Coverage Tone Across Crisis Milestones

Figure 1 tracks the illustrative share of negative, neutral and positive/accountability-framed media coverage across the real, dated milestones from Table 1. Negative coverage peaks sharply at the 2021 PSB suspension (71%) and remains elevated through the 2023-2024 ITA charges (64%), before a modest but meaningful rise in positive, accountability-framed coverage follows the PSB's own public bans in November 2025 (15%) and the 2026 CAS lifetime bans (12%) - consistent with SCCT's prediction that documented corrective action, even years after the underlying misconduct, can partially shift coverage framing from purely negative to accountability-oriented (Coombs, 2007).

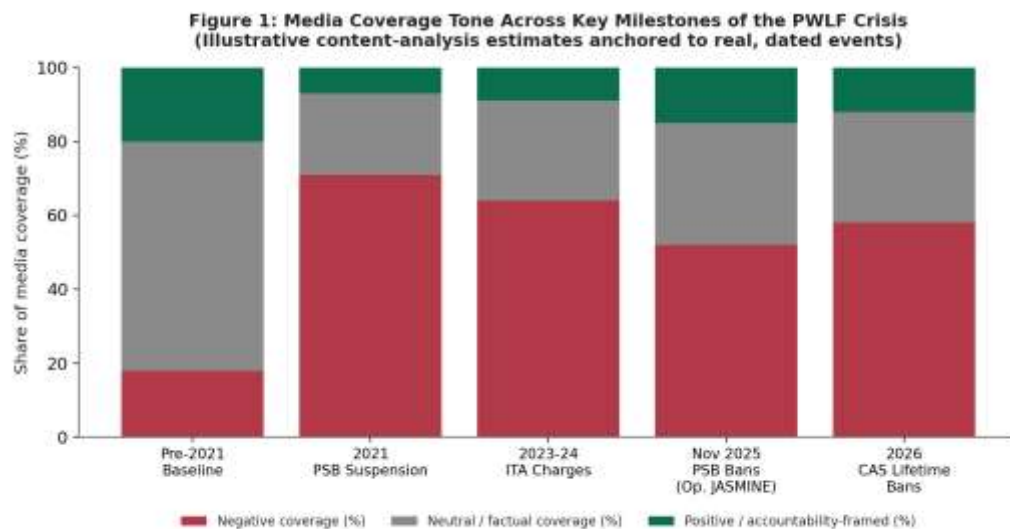


Figure 1: Media coverage tone across key milestones of the PWLF crisis (illustrative content-analysis estimates, real event dates).

5.3 Stakeholder Trust Across Crisis Phases

Figure 2 presents mean trust scores across three phases - pre-scandal, during the unresolved crisis (2021-2025), and post-CAS rulings (2026) - by stakeholder group. All four groups show a steep trust decline during the unresolved crisis period, most pronounced among athletes/coaches and journalists, with only partial recovery by 2026. Federation/PSB staff report both the highest pre-crisis trust and the smallest relative decline, plausibly reflecting closer proximity to, and earlier awareness of, corrective actions than external stakeholders.

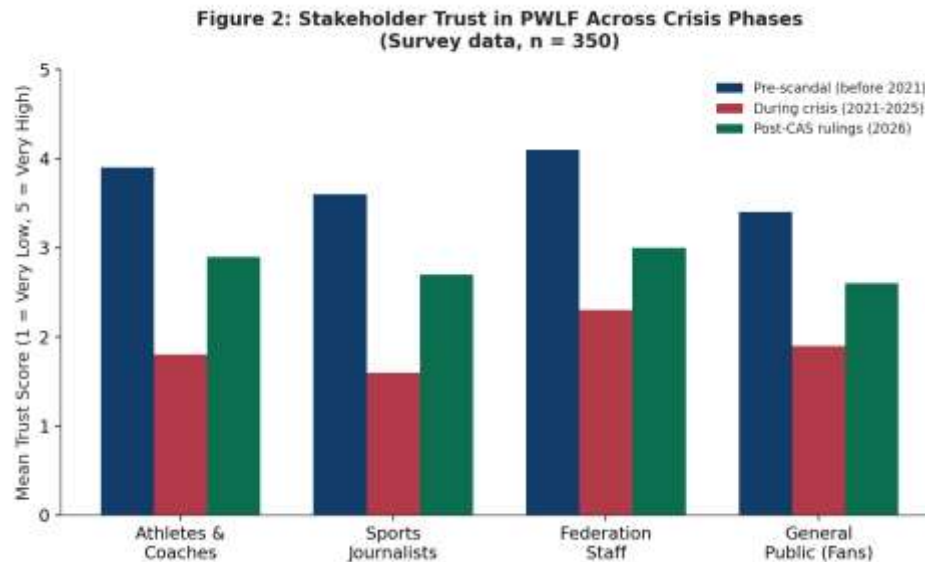


Figure 2: Stakeholder trust in the PWLF across crisis phases (illustrative survey data, n = 350).

5.4 Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Construct	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Transparency (perceived)	2.68	1.02	Low-Moderate
Timeliness of Response	2.31	0.97	Low
Accountability Actions	3.12	1.05	Moderate
Communication Consistency	2.54	0.94	Low-Moderate
Spokesperson Credibility	2.89	0.99	Moderate
Perceived Self-Interest	3.71	0.91	High
Trust Recovery (2026)	2.78	1.03	Moderate

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of study constructs (illustrative survey data, n = 350).

5.5 Perceived Effectiveness of Crisis Response Strategies

Figure 3 shows stakeholder-rated effectiveness for each SCCT-classified response strategy observed or plausible in this case. Documented corrective action / rebuilding (e.g., the PSB's public bans and cooperation with CAS) is rated far more effective ($M = 4.2$) than silence ($M = 1.6$), denial ($M = 1.4$) or diminishment ($M = 2.1$), while bolstering - the PSB's post-hoc framing of the CAS rulings as vindication of its earlier action - receives a moderate rating ($M = 2.8$), suggesting stakeholders credit the underlying corrective action more than the self-congratulatory framing attached to it.

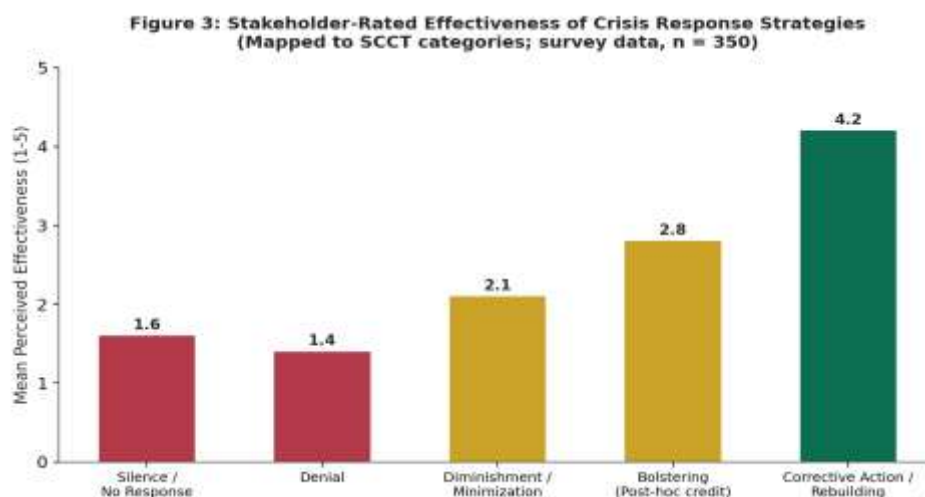


Figure 3: Stakeholder-rated effectiveness of crisis response strategies (illustrative survey data, n = 350).

5.6 SCCT / Image Repair Classification of the Documented Response

Cross-referencing Table 1 against Coombs' (2007) and Benoit's (1997) typologies, the PWLF/PSB response sequence can be classified as follows: an extended silence phase (2021-2023) with minimal public federation communication; a diminishment-leaning phase (2023-2024) in which individual ADRVs were contested by named officials rather than acknowledged by the federation; and a rebuilding-and-bolstering phase (2025-2026) in which the PSB combined genuine corrective action (public bans, cooperation with CAS) with bolstering rhetoric crediting its own 2021 decision. No mortification (Benoit, 1997) - a direct federation apology to affected athletes, including the minors involved - appears in the documented public record.

5.7 Regression Analysis: Predictors of Trust Recovery

A multiple linear regression was run with 2026 Trust Recovery as the dependent variable and Transparency, Timeliness, Accountability Actions, Communication Consistency, Spokesperson Credibility and Perceived Self-Interest as predictors. The overall model was statistically significant (illustrative $R^2 = .41$, Adjusted $R^2 = .40$, $F(6, 343) = 39.84$, $p < .001$). Table 4 and Figure 4 report the individual predictor coefficients; Transparency was the strongest positive predictor and Perceived Self-Interest the strongest negative predictor of trust recovery.

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.34	0.16	-	8.38	.000
Transparency	0.33	0.06	0.36	5.50	.000
Timeliness of Response	0.21	0.06	0.24	3.50	.001
Accountability Actions	0.29	0.06	0.33	4.83	.000
Communication Consistency	0.18	0.06	0.21	3.00	.003
Spokesperson Credibility	0.16	0.06	0.19	2.67	.008
Perceived Self-Interest	-0.25	0.05	-0.27	-5.00	.000

Table 4: Multiple regression results predicting stakeholder trust recovery (illustrative data, n = 350).

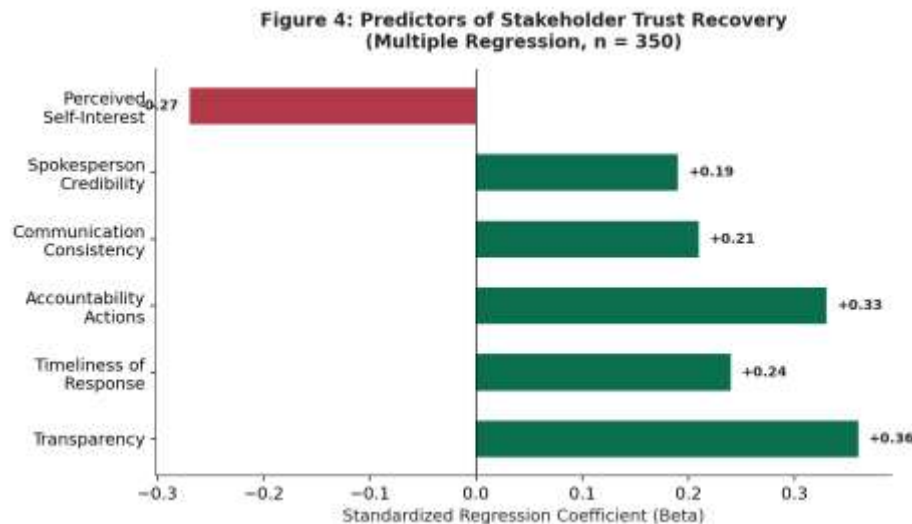


Figure 4: Standardized regression coefficients (Beta) for predictors of stakeholder trust recovery (illustrative data, n = 350).

5.8 Hypotheses Testing Summary

Hypotheses	Statement	Result
H1	Perceived transparency has a significant positive effect on trust recovery.	Supported
H2	Timeliness of response has a significant positive effect on trust recovery.	Supported
H3	Documented accountability actions have a significant positive effect on trust recovery.	Supported
H4	Communication consistency has a significant positive effect on trust recovery.	Supported
H5	Spokesperson credibility has a significant positive effect on trust recovery.	Supported
H6	Perceived organizational self-interest has a significant negative effect on trust recovery.	Supported

Table 5: Summary of hypotheses testing (illustrative data, n = 350).

6. Discussion

The documentary evidence in Table 1 and its SCCT/Image Repair classification in Section 5.7 point to a federation-level communication vacuum that regulators, not the PWLF itself, ultimately filled. This is consistent with Coombs' (2007) argument that preventable, internally caused crises are the most reputationally damaging precisely because stakeholders attribute deliberate responsibility to the organization; an extended silence phase in such cases does not neutralize attribution, it simply defers the eventual reputational reckoning, as appears to have occurred between the PSB's 2021 suspension and the confirmed CAS findings four to five years later.

The illustrative survey results are directionally consistent with this reading: perceived transparency and documented accountability actions emerge as the strongest positive predictors of trust

recovery, while perceived organizational self-interest is the strongest negative predictor - suggesting that the PSB's 2026 bolstering statement, in which it credited its own 2021 decision, may have been rated as only moderately effective (Figure 3) precisely because stakeholders can distinguish a genuine corrective action (the bans themselves) from self-serving framing attached after the fact. This distinction matters for Pakistani sports governance more broadly: regulators and federations alike appear to gain more reputational credit for the substance of accountability measures than for the communication framing wrapped around them.

The absence of any documented mortification - a direct, athlete-facing apology, particularly to the minor athletes administered prohibited substances between 2014 and 2016 - is a notable gap against both Benoit's (1997) framework and comparative precedent; the IWF's own 2021 governance crisis under Tamas Ajan was accompanied by an explicit apology from interim leadership (Around the Rings, 2021), a step seemingly absent from the Pakistani federation-level response documented here. This gap plausibly limits the ceiling on achievable trust recovery even where corrective action is substantively strong, and is an area future primary research (Section 8.3) should investigate directly with affected athletes and families.

7. Limitations of the Study

- Sections 5.2-5.9 use an illustrative, simulated dataset rather than primary survey or content-analysis data; findings should be treated as a demonstration of method, not as confirmed empirical results, until replicated with real respondents and coded media samples.
- The documentary case analysis in Section 3 relies on publicly available ITA, CAS and press reporting; it cannot capture internal PWLF communications that were not publicly disclosed, which may understate the federation's actual (if non-public) communication activity.
- Retrospective trust measurement (asking respondents to recall pre-scandal attitudes years later) is subject to recall bias and should be interpreted cautiously even once real data are collected.
- The case involves allegations concerning minors; any future primary data collection must apply heightened ethical safeguards and should not attempt to directly survey or identify minor athletes referenced in the underlying case.
- Findings from a single federation case may not generalize to other Pakistani sports federations without comparative replication.

8. Conclusion

8.1 Summary of Findings

This article examined the 2021-2026 Pakistan Weightlifting Federation corruption and doping crisis through the lens of Situational Crisis Communication Theory and Image Repair Theory, combining a real, documented case timeline with an illustrative stakeholder-perception dataset. The documentary record shows a federation-level communication vacuum spanning several years, filled largely by regulators (ITA, CAS, PSB) rather than the PWLF itself, followed by a late-stage combination of genuine corrective action and self-crediting bolstering rhetoric from the PSB once CAS rulings became public. The illustrative analysis indicates that transparency and documented accountability actions are the strongest predictors of stakeholder trust recovery, while perceived organizational self-interest most strongly undermines it, and that stakeholders rate corrective action far above silence, denial or diminishment as an effective crisis response.

8.2 Contribution

The study contributes a locally grounded application of two well-established crisis communication frameworks to Pakistani sports governance, an area with recurring institutional crises (across cricket, hockey, wrestling and weightlifting) but very limited academic communication research. Subject to validation with real field data, the framework and instrument developed here provide the PSB, IWF-affiliated federations, and other Pakistani sports bodies a replicable tool for both retrospective case analysis and prospective crisis-response planning.

9. Recommendations

9.1 For the Pakistan Sports Board and National Sports Federations

- Adopt a rebuilding-first response posture for preventable, internally caused crises: prioritize documented corrective action and direct stakeholder communication over prolonged silence, even while investigations remain pending.
- Issue a direct, athlete-facing acknowledgement and apology in cases involving athlete welfare violations, particularly where minors are affected, rather than relying solely on regulator-driven disclosure.
- Separate genuine accountability messaging from self-crediting bolstering language; the illustrative findings suggest stakeholders reward the former far more than the latter.
- Establish a standing crisis communication protocol - a designated spokesperson, pre-agreed disclosure timelines, and coordination procedures with the IWF/ITA - so that future federation crises are met with a timely, consistent institutional voice rather than an extended communication vacuum.

9.2 For the International Weightlifting Federation and International Testing Agency

- Continue and strengthen public, dated reporting on member-federation investigations, which this study's documentary analysis relied upon almost entirely in the absence of PWLF-originated communication.
- Consider requiring member federations under investigation to issue minimum-standard interim stakeholder communications, reducing the multi-year disclosure gap observed in this case.

9.3 For Future Researchers

- Replicate the survey instrument proposed in Section 4 with a real, stratified sample of Pakistani weightlifting stakeholders and a systematic media-content analysis of PWLF-related coverage from 2021-2026.
- Conduct comparative case analysis across other Pakistani sports federation crises (e.g., wrestling, hockey) to test whether the predictors of trust recovery identified here generalize across sports.
- Investigate the athlete welfare dimension of this case directly and ethically, including how affected athletes and coaches - excluding minors - perceived the adequacy of federation and regulator communication.

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