

WHAT'S IN A NAME: EXAMINING WHAT SPORTS TEAM NAMES COMMUNICATE

**WHAT'S IN A NAME:
EXAMINING WHAT SPORTS TEAM NAMES COMMUNICATE**

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BRIDGET LEWIS

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Adviser:

Dr. Marie Mallory

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This Master's Thesis is accepted in partial
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At Liberty University.

Marie Mallory, Ph.D.

Thesis Chair

Cecil Kramer, D. Min.

Committee Member

Bruce Kirk, Ph.D.

Committee Member

Date

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Abstract

For years, there have been controversy and discussion regarding high school, college, and professional sports team name changes. Professional sports teams have gained the most attention regarding team name changes or lack thereof. This study can bring an understanding of the message communicated through the chosen names and logos of sports teams as well as the effects of financial, political, and fan base changes on team name changes in the sports industry. Extensive research is provided to show the previous content on the topic as well as areas where further research would be beneficial. This includes previous and current sport name changes, name history, political, media, and financial influence, Native American involvement, relatable communication theories, and reactions. Based on the gathered research, there was still a need for specified studies regarding the overall influences of these name changes and what the names and teams communicate. This study brings clarity to this issue by evaluating the Washington Redskins (Washington Football Team), Chicago Blackhawks, Cleveland Indians, Atlanta Braves, and Kansas City Chiefs. The structured qualitative method used was implemented to gain data from sports professionals or players, sports fans, and the impacted party (Native Americans) of these teams. This data contributes to an area of sports communication that has previously been overlooked and provides teams with an idea of how to communicate future name changes to their fans and the public.

Keywords: sports, team names, sports fans, Native American sports names, sports names changes

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The sports industry has provided individuals with endless hours of entertainment. Countless sports fans enjoy the community and involvement that sports provide. Many use sports as a distraction from real life or a form of mindless entertainment. Others religiously watch their sport or team and remain invested in live and/or mediated games, statistics, players, coaches, etc. Devoted sports fans will often remain dedicated to one team in a league. There is often loyalty to that team, and it is frequently expressed through demeanor, apparel, merchandise, season tickets, etc. Many will still represent and stay loyal to their sports team through their success and failure.

Sports is a multi-billion-dollar industry that gains attention across mass media outlets and is recognized internationally. Any controversy regarding players, locations, fans, and representation is widely discussed and followed. While the topic of team names and mascots and what they imply has been discussed for years, there has been an increase in recognition and demand for change. A team name and image are largely represented through the team's branding, but the fans play a huge role in what they wear, use, and even post related to sports teams.

What message is communicated through the chosen names and logos of sports teams? What are the effects of financial, political, media, and fan base influences on team name changes in the sports industry? These are the questions that are reviewed and answered through this process. This research considered the messages that sports teams intend to communicate through their team name and logo and brings understanding to what message is received by audiences. Additionally, how the fans and affected parties viewed the financial and political influences on

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these changes, as well as how the dedicated sports fans have reacted prior to, and post, name changes were evaluated. While certain teams have changed their name due to other factors, many of the known changes have seemed to be because of an offended party expressing their disapproval of what is communicated through a long-lasting name. The overall goal of this research is to evaluate the effect of team name changes in the sports industry.

Understanding the general perspectives from various teams can bring a clear understanding of the true impact of either changing a team name or leaving it the same. The year 2020 especially brought a spotlight on the past decisions of existing teams with potentially offensive names or connotations. The attention this brought seemed to increase conversations, debates, and the desire to make a change. Multiple sports teams have been placed under the microscope to determine if their names offer any offensive connotations that may be negatively received by fans and the public at large.

With the recent revisitation of sport team names, various political issues have been brought up as well. There is much controversy regarding the cause and effect of completed or attempted changes to college and professional sport team names. This has been an issue for decades; however, the intensity has seemed to increase in recent years. Various factors come into play with the requests or decisions to change a team name. The discussion of Native American names and logos in the sports industry has been an ongoing battle. There is much conflict among communities, cultures, media, sports fans, and teams regarding the issue of sports teams' names, potential name changes, and what the names and logos communicate.

From the collected research, there is a limited number of first-hand accounts of the reason why individuals find certain team names offensive. Through the research, there also seems to be a disconnect among how owners, sports professionals, and fans view the impact of the name. It

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seems obvious that in multiple situations, those responsible for the team intend to communicate one meaning through their name and logo choice, while their audience, the fan base, and the general public, seem to interpret the message differently. There is also a lack of research regarding the perspectives of Native Americans. Since Native Americans are the impacted parties, their views should be taken into account. Multiple studies mentioned how other non-Native Americans have expressed their disappointment in the team names. However, limited research was found of first-hand accounts from Native American individuals, creating a need for additional research. This study gave insight and guidance to certain aspects of that topic that have been previously overlooked. The structure and purpose of this study combined qualitative data from multiple individuals to help fill the gaps in existing research and help clarify the issue of what sports team names and logos communicate.

There is an extensive amount of concern in the United States about portraying a certain image and limiting the chance of offense. This is greatly felt in the sports industry. However, while many of the teams have changed names for political reasons, certain teams had other factors come into play. These factors include the historical presence, relocation, and change of ownership. Despite the nonpolitical reasons, there are still those who do not approve. Sports can become a social identity for many fans, and any change to this identity can be challenging.

The route to these changes and influences was also analyzed. The potential increase in pressure or influence from the media must also be determined. This was evaluated based on the agenda-setting theory which explains how the media communicates to, and influences, the public (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Closely related to the agenda-setting theory is framing theory. Framing is a way to evaluate how the media is communicating messages (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Both theories can be used to explain certain media influences.

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The current research has been a guide towards formulating the correct methodology and process to reach the desired audience. The reviewed research was beneficial in providing insight on the gaps in the related topic. With the increase of team name recognition and debate, the need for conducting this research to contribute to an area that has limited accounts is necessary. As will be shown in the review of current literature, there is a large gap of first-hand accounts and asking direct questions to the affected parties (Native Americans), making this research unique. The combination and analysis of sports fans and Native Americans contributes in a manner not yet found in research.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

In order to better understand what message is communicated through team names and logos and the effects of financial, media, political, and fan base changes, understanding previous name changes, reactions to name changes, implementation, affected parties, and the financial and mediated sports industry can contribute to the research. This chapter reviews the literature that has been previously written regarding the discussed topics.

History of Name Changes

Over the years, multiple sports teams have changed their team names, resulting in logo changes and rebranding. Many of the original professional sport name changes were not due to political reasons. One of the older sports team name changes was in 1997 when the Washington Bullets changed their name. The Bullets were being associated with the rising crime and violence in Washington D.C. There was a great increase in shootings and violent behaviors and the coach thought this reflected poorly on the team. The Bullets administration did not want their name to communicate acceptance of the violent conditions in their home state. This is when the decision was made to change the Washington Bullets to the name Washington Wizards. This was chosen in the hopes that it would reflect the wise and energetic nature of the team (Deprisco, 2020).

Soon after, other sports teams followed suit.

The Tennessee Titans were originally in Texas and held the name the Houston Oilers. After their move to Tennessee, they became the Tennessee Oilers. However, many did not accept this name because they claimed it did not relate to Tennessee in any way. The owner of the team began considering various names. The Titans did become a nickname of the team and the owner evaluated the fact that Nashville was known as the “Athens of the South,” making the name

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appropriate and relevant. The team also wanted a name that would reflect them as players and especially represent strength and leadership (Oilers change name to Titans, 1998).

The Houston Astros originally began as the Colt .45s, named after a gun, meant to represent winning the west. The Colt Firearms Company had originally approved the use of the name, but later required a percentage of all Houston Colt .45 merchandise. This was the main push for Houston to change their team's name. This turned out to be a positive change, allowing the Houston team to stay present and progressive, by taking the name the Astros (Lisle, 2006). This name was inspired by the Astrodome which was being built in Houston and was the first fully enclosed sports stadium. The new stadium and name change were welcomed by many fans (Lisle, 2006). Even after the loss of support from Colt .45, the team adjusted and even improved their recognition and fan support.

Another team that experienced a similar situation is the New York Jets. The New York Jets were originally called the New York Titans. The owner appreciated this name because it communicated the idea that Titans are stronger than Giants, which is a jab towards the New York Giants. Many fans were proud of the name as well. However, the Titans had many issues including the owners putting their own financial needs in front of the team, causing the team many financial struggles (Cosentino, 2019). Five investors ended up buying the Titans and began revamping their image. They changed their colors and relocated, and this is when they were nicknamed the Jets. In 1963, they made the official name change from the Titans to the Jets. This was largely influenced by the increase in commercial airlines and the team being situated near two major airports. While the original name is still respected, many have embraced the New York Jets and their rebranding (Cosentino, 2019). The evaluated teams, while not necessarily controversial, successfully changed their name while keeping their support.

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Certain professional sports teams have changed their names for historical reasons as well. Sports teams have evaluated their city's or state's history and chosen their name to honor the history. The Charlotte Hornets are a prime example of this situation (Bennett, 2019). Charlotte began a new National Basketball Association (NBA) team called the Charlotte Bobcats. They originally wanted the name the Charlotte Hornets, but the New Orleans Hornets still held this name. However, when the New Orleans team finally changed to the New Orleans Pelicans, the Bobcats renamed their team to the Charlotte Hornets. This name was determined based on the city's history during the Revolutionary War. During the war, entering Charlotte was referred to as "stepping on a nest of hornets" (Bennett, 2019, para. 7) by the British officers, hence the name. Charlotte's new team name was readily accepted by fans and the team (Bennett, 2019). In this case, the name brought history and a story to their team which was exactly what they had hoped to communicate.

Many college sports teams have also renamed and rebranded because of the relation to Native American symbols or names. This has been an ongoing topic within schools and universities. In 1972, North Dakota's Dickinson State University removed their mascot, the Savages. Because of the mascot's Native American connotation, the students protested and fought for a change. In 1974, the team officially became the Blue Hawks. This was chosen to reflect the fierceness of the team while also representing the university's colors (History of DSU, 2020). In 1973, the Eastern Washington University Board of Trustees took a vote and determined their current name, the Savages, was also no longer acceptable. The students actually voted to keep their name and mascot, however, the board believed it was too controversial, and they overruled the vote and changed the name anyway. Their team name was changed to the Eagles because the board thought it sounded better than the Savages and did not bring any controversy

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(Greene, 2020). While both of these schools changed their names because of the reference to Native Americans, and did so successfully, it is relevant to note that Native Americans supported the name change but were not included in the deciding factor or renaming process.

In 1991, the Michigan Department of Civil Rights heavily suggested that schools remove all racially insensitive names or logos because of the message they communicated. To honor this request, and the student's request to change the name, the Eastern Michigan Hurons, named after the Huron Indians whose influence was heavy throughout Michigan, changed their name to the Eagles. The school allowed recommendations from a committee and chose from the given options. The majority rule was the Eagles, solidifying the name (EMU traditions, 2020). Eastern Michigan University was one of the first to change its name and/or logo because of the request from the Michigan Department of Civil Rights (Staff & Welk, 2020). However, it is noteworthy that there is no indication that the Michigan Department of Civil Rights was in discussion with, or had input from, Native Americans.

Not long after, St. John's University dropped its Native American logo and removed its name, Redmen. Originally, the name Redmen was created because red uniforms were worn by the team. However, over time, the name became connected to Native American influences. Because of this connection and Native Americans viewing the name as a slur, many argued that the school needed to change its name to become politically correct. This was a large beginning to an increase of politically correct conversations in the public and media. One reporter mentioned that the school's decision for the name change was made for them since newspapers and radio would not allow the name since it was viewed as offensive. After the decision to change the name, the team was then called The Red Storm to still communicate their idea of the team and replaced the old Native American logo with a logo of a horse (Braziller, 2013).

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In the following years, more colleges followed suit. In 1997, Miami University of Ohio dropped its original name, the Redskins, and became the RedHawks. The main reason for the name change was because the Miami Tribe requested that the University no longer use the name Redskins and consider a name change. This resulted in the change from Redskins to RedHawks, showing similarity without being related to Native Americans (Miami tribe relations, 2020). This is one of the first changes of record which was solely instigated by Native Americans themselves. Miami University and the Miami Tribe even partnered to increase educational opportunities specifically related to Myaamiaki heritage (Miami tribe relations, 2020). In 1999, the Oklahoma City University Chiefs also recognized the controversy and changed their team name to the Stars. This was a longstanding team nickname that made for an easy transition for the team (Staff & Welk, 2020).

Another college, Seattle University, had originally changed its name from the Maroons to the Chieftains with the intent to honor the college's namesake, Chief Seattle. However, due to racial concern, they changed their name to the Redhawks in 2000. There was no mention of why this name was chosen to replace the Chieftains nor that there were complaints from Native Americans regarding the need for change (Staff & Welk, 2020). However, once Seattle University had decided to change its name, local Native Americans said they agreed with this decision and were surprised it was not addressed sooner (Bush, 2006). Interestingly enough, this was another university that once the decision to change their name was made, Native Americans were in complete agreement. However, many never brought it up themselves or were addressed prior to universities making the decision for a name change.

In 2006, Midwestern State University had concerns that their current name, the Indians, would result in a hostile school environment by communicating an offensive message. This

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resulted in their new name, the Mustangs. It took time for the University to adjust to this new name. However, in order to bring the same energy to the team and fans, their mascot became a Mustang horse that bore the school colors. The University also said they appreciated how the mascot and name, the Mustangs, still represented a link to the Indian culture which is a large part of their school history (Fournier, 2019).

These studies show the ongoing issue and debate regarding what team names communicate. These colleges all originally exhibited a form of Native American background and culture in their teams (Lang, 2018). However, because of the student's protest and/or the increasing problems surrounding the interpretation of the name's meanings, colleges often had easier transitions when deciding to change their team names and symbols (Staff & Welk, 2020). These changes allow for a deeper analysis into the issue of team name changes, specifically related to Native American influence. However, through these studies of past name changes, a solid understanding of what was communicated, how Native Americans may have contributed to these conversations, and how Native Americans respond was not found.

There have been over two thousand sports teams with Native American names. This includes professional, college, and high school sports teams (Lang, 2018). Over the years there has been an increase in opposing views regarding using Native American team names and symbols (Hylton, 2010). Some believe these names send a racist message and should be removed completely from the sports industry. Others believe these names are not meant to be offensive or disrespectful but rather communicate a historical and honorable heritage. According to research, it almost always comes down to these two opposing views. There have been various perspectives and debates arguing both cases which makes it challenging to come to an agreement on changing

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the team names (Lang, 2018). Interestingly, there is surprisingly little information available regarding the Native American perspective on these names.

First, it was mentioned that Native American sports team names can be interpreted as racist and offensive. Some argue that these Native sports team names mock the culture, religion, and race of Native Americans which could cause distress to many Natives. On the other hand, others believe Native team names are not offensive at all but rather communicate an idea of power and strength (Lang, 2018). Many hope it can even be an intimidation factor for other teams. To some, naming a sports team after Native Americans can be seen as a compliment. Other sports teams even named their team after players of Native ancestry. For example, the Cleveland Indians changed their name from the Naps to the Indians to honor their third baseman Louis Sockalexis who was Native American (Lang, 2018). These debates continue without much clarity on the opinions of those involved.

Understanding the previous and current research and studies can help shape future findings and directions. A more recent study was conducted by Brandon Lang, Ph.D. (2018) that surveyed sports fans at six different professional sporting events to determine the sports fan's opinion regarding the Redskins team name. This study attracted individuals that were at sporting events and provided a series of questions for them to answer. The questions included if each individual believed the Redskins and Indians' names to be offensive, their political stance, education level, sex, and nationality. The data collected from these surveys showed that the age and sex of the sports fans did not make a large difference among the results (Lang, 2018). However, political bias and education level did make a difference when it came to the Redskin's name. The study showed that when it comes to the use of the Redskins as the team name, liberals are more offended than conservatives. It also showed that college graduates were more offended

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than non-college graduates (Lang, 2018). However, the overall findings were that sports fans are not overly concerned regarding the Native American team names in the industry. The study showed that there is even less concern among sports fans than others in society (Lang, 2018). This leaves room to determine what the fans are actually thinking about the name and not just their lack of concern. Because this study only focused on the fans of the Redskins and the Indians, this left a gap for research on the opinions and perspectives of other sports fans and Native Americans.

As shown above, there have been few studies conducted regarding the topic of Native American team name change. Because of the limited studies and a lack of focus on Native American views, there is still a gap in understanding what is communicated through the Native American names, creating a need for additional research. An older survey, before heavier media influence, was conducted by Chilton Research Services. This study by Lee Sigelman (1998) used two surveys, one local and one national, to gain insight into the public's opinion regarding the Washington Redskins team name. The surveys were conducted through random telephone calls where interviewees were questioned about if the Redskins should change their name or not. The national survey included 810 participants and the local survey included 1,244 participants. The data received from the surveys also supported the idea that the majority of the general public did not believe the Redskins should change their name. From the conducted surveys, the data showed that those of higher education and/or racial or ethnic minorities were more supportive of the name change. However, even among this group, the support for the name change was still limited (Sigelman, 1998).

This study, as well as the majority of studies analyzed, have been conducted in regard to the Washington Redskins or only receiving public opinions. The current studies and research

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found have shown very little feedback from other sports teams with Native American influences (Sigelman, 1998). There was also no found research specifically asking Native American individuals what they believe these team names communicate and how they view the claims that the teams are honoring the Native American heritage, showing a need for further studies.

Current Professional Teams

The Washington Redskins is a major professional team that has been the receiver of backlash for years regarding their team's name. The topic and debate of changing the Redskins name has been going on since 1990 and is still controversial, even after the agreed name change. The owner was adamant about keeping the original team name. Some argued that the name would never be changed until money became a factor. This became a reality when Dan Snyder, owner of the Redskins, was told by investors that he could not build a new stadium until the team's name was changed (Grimes, 2020). Until 2020, Dan Snyder had held his ground regarding the name. He views the Redskins name as a representation of pride, honor, and respect, which he believed could produce further wins as well. However, other team owners disagreed and said legacy is not reliant on the team name. Investment firms even began reaching out to the team's sponsors to urge them to cut ties until the team changed its name. FedEx specifically addressed the team and required them to change their name, threatening a loss of funding if they did not comply (Grimes, 2020). With the constant uproar and threat of financial loss, the team's hand was forced. The available information suggested finances were the true reason for the change; however, it leaves one to wonder if the Washington Football Team fans agreed with this interpretation.

Further research focused on the potential positive impacts of changing the Redskins name. This research discussed how changing the Washington Redskins name could actually

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increase the team's revenue. The idea that a name change could increase fans and ticket sales may seem far-fetched; however, there is proof that it is effective (Maese, 2020). When the Charlotte Bobcats changed their name to the Charlotte Hornets, ticket sales increased by 59% the following summer. When another D.C. team, the Montreal Expos, moved to D.C., they changed their name to the Washington Nationals. After this name change, the Nationals ticket sales also increased. On the other hand, the Washington Redskins have been decreasing in sales and fan base (Blasi, 2020). In November 2019, the Washington Post conducted a poll of 905 adult D.C. residents, and it reported that only 13% of D.C. residents favor the Redskins as a local sports team. The poll showed drastic differences within the responses among demographic groups. Only five percent of white participants chose Redskins as their favorite Washington D.C. team. On the other hand, 21% of black participants claimed the Redskins as their favorite (Maese & Guskin, 2019). While their name and lack of popularity and support may not have been related, the Washington Redskins decided to rename (Blasi, 2020).

In the 2021 season, they will take the name The Washington Football Team. It is believed that this change will profit the team's finances. One major selling factor will be fan gear. Because of the name change, the team believes that fans will drive merchandise sales, especially jersey sales. There is also the belief that fans will be more likely to buy tickets because of the name change (Blasi, 2020). However, this belief has not been validated by sports fans at the time of this writing.

Researchers Mark Nagel and Daniel Rascher (2007) suggested there was some financial incentives for the prolonging or resistance of changing the Washington Redskin's name. A huge factor could have been that the Redskins name was worth five million dollars a year – just for the name. There have also been comparisons between professional sports teams and high school and

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college sports teams regarding their willingness to change. Even among the criticism, many professional sports teams have resisted changing their name. Suzan Shown Harjo, an advocate for American Indian rights, believed that high school and college sports teams are willing to change their Native American names or logos because their focus is on education and representing the school. She then claimed that professional sports teams are not willing to change because their focus is money. However, there is no existing proof to these claims as there have not been exact studies regarding the financial benefits or harm of using Native American names or symbols in sports (Nagel & Rascher, 2007).

Many sport professionals and fans have been strongly against changing the Washington Redskins's name. Many claimed that there is no point when people are trying to conform to what Americans are complaining about rather than accepting the name and heritage. In 2013, a sportswriter, Rick Reilly, spoke out saying he could not promise to not use "Redskins" again. Reilly was outspoken about his dislike for the strong opposition for the name. Reilly (2016) said, "Some Native Americans have expressed a counterintuitive and supportive opinion; therefore, the argument against the name has no foundation or no standing, and the status quo should prevail" (para. 1).

It has been shown that professional sports teams typically change their name for three reasons – new ownership, relocation, or political reasons. When one of these changes occurs, this can influence finances in one way or another. It also greatly affects team merchandise sales which is a large form of fan communication. There is not enough existing data to show the financial and fan gain or loss due to a sports team name change. A study was conducted by Mark Nagel, Professor in Sport and Entertainment Management, and Daniel Rascher, Professor and Director of Academic Programs in Sport Management, to try and bring clarity to the idea that a

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team's name or logo could cause financial harm (2007). The study took National Football League (NFL) licensing revenue data to compare teams to the Redskins. This was done to analyze the costs involved with rebranding and determine if the Redskins merchandise sales were impacted by the name. After conducting the study and analyzing the data, it showed that the merchandise sales for the Redskins did not decrease even with the name controversy and negativity. The researchers determined that additional research would still need to be conducted to determine what financial compensation would be required for the team name to change (Nagel & Rascher, 2007).

The early 1970s increased the recognition of cultural issues and movements to end the use of Native American names, logos, and symbols in the sports industry. Since the movements began, there have been hundreds of schools and universities that have removed their Native American names and symbols (Wright, 2007). However, it has taken longer for professional teams to agree to change their names. Many have questioned why there is so much resistance among the teams and fans, and it is largely assumed that the financial aspect is involved (Wright, 2007). There is such a large presence of team loyalty across the United States. The sports industry continues to increase funds and fan base. There is a plethora of money that is collected because of a team's name and symbol. Sports apparel alone is extremely popular and would be expensive to replace. The entire visual and verbal rebranding involved with a name change has also seemed to hinder the team's willingness to change their name. Fans invest time and money in their team, often creating an emotional connection with the team's name and mascot (Wright, 2007).

There was specific research conducted by William Wright that showed the division of views within Native American tribes regarding team names (2007). This research analyzed

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previous responses to the Native American team name controversy to determine to what extent should the views of the public and Native Americans be taken into account. One of the analyzed studies was conducted in 2002 by *Sports Illustrated*, and it showed that more than 80% of Native Americans did not want Native American names and logos removed. There was also a lack of support in the movement when another poll showed that 46% percent of the public agreed that “Redskin” was offensive, and 36% percent of Native Americans did not (Wright, 2007). There continues to be those who support the two opposing views of the use of Native American name and symbols within sports teams. There are those who view these actions as racists and those who view them as honorable to the Native American culture (Wright, 2007). Wright’s study was conducted before the increase of racial and social issues, creating a gap in the information regarding the differences in Native American views compared to non-native sports fans. There is still a lack of feedback on how Native American’s view the use of names and symbols. In order to gain this information, further research of Native American views is needed.

A more recent study was conducted by Sharrow, et al., further questioning the views of those who claim Native American names are used as a racial slur and those who claim it communicates honor and respect (2020). Sharrow, et al. analyzed if racial attitudes were reflective in influencing how the public views the changing of the Redskin’s name (2020). This has been the ongoing case with the Redskins. The owner has not given up the idea that the Washington “Redskins” was used to honor and respect Native Americans. No matter how many times Natives have insisted the name is a racial slur, many still view “Redskins” as a form of honor. Due to this ongoing issue, this study was conducted to evaluate symbolic racism and racial attitudes towards Native Americans during the current racial issues and if the public’s views have been shaped because of it. The ongoing use of Native American team names has

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seemed to be influenced because of public and fan support for the names used. This study surveyed individuals to determine their thoughts on the Washington Football Team's name change and if they believed "Redskins" to be offensive. They were also asked how often they are interacting with sports news. The final response included asking to scale how hard Native American's work and if they agree that Native Americans have an unfair advantage from the government. The study concluded that the support for using the team's name is influenced by racial attitudes and symbolic racism toward Native Americans (Sharro, et al., 2020). This study briefly combines the views of the sports fans and Native Americans, however, there is still a large gap left based on assumptions rather than true feedback from sports fans and Native Americans.

Months following the official name change of the Washington Redskins, the Cleveland Indians also announced their plans to eliminate their team's name and logo. The official announcement was made on December 14, 2020, with the promise to change the team's name after the 2021 season. The decision came after extensive pressure was placed on the team to change the name. It was not enough to simply remove the Chief Wahoo mascot. When the Washington Redskins announced their team's name change, additional pressure was directed towards the Cleveland Indians. The team agreed to fully investigate Native American culture and truly understand the effect of the names by meeting with various Native American groups. The team did consult local and national Native American groups but nothing was mentioned regarding the specifics of their interactions (Waldstein & Schmidt, 2020).

Shortly after the Cleveland Indians announced their name change, an informal report was conducted to determine how fans feel about the name change. 55% percent of participants wanted the Cleveland Indians to keep their original name. Some of these believed the name was

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only being changed to be politically correct (Noga, 2020). This leads to controversy with the Cleveland Indians. This team has also defended its team name for years. They view their team name as a sign of respect towards Native Americans as well as an opportunity to impact the community with a positive message (Martin, 2020). The Cleveland Indians believe they can actually help advance social justice and equality with their name being a form of communication and a visible representation of the community. They are very conscious of their city and team and desire to unite individuals. However, they stated they would stay aware of the stakeholders and community and what they believe is the best route for their team's name (Martin, 2020). In addition to the stakeholders and community, additional research regarding more in-depth opinions from the sports fans as well as Native Americans is necessary.

There are still existing teams that have not accepted the pressure to replace their name. This is true with the Chicago Blackhawks (Kim, 2020). After the Washington Redskins officially changed their name, the pressure on the Blackhawks has especially increased. However, the Blackhawks are standing behind their name. The Blackhawks have reminded opposing individuals that they are named the Blackhawks as an honor to an individual who was Native American. The Chicago Blackhawks were named after the Black Hawk of Illinois. Black Hawk has been an inspiration to generations of Native Americans and the team honors his legacy by holding on to the Native American culture and contributions (Kim, 2020). The team has recognized the controversy and wishes no disrespect towards anyone. However, they are also dedicated to keeping their name while raising further awareness and communicating respect for the Native American's contributions, specifically Black Hawk. The Chicago Blackhawks and the American Indian Center of Chicago (AIC) even came together to educate the public on Native American traditions, values, and influences. However, this was short-lived as the AIC thought

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harmful stereotypes were being communicated (Kim, 2020). Nevertheless, there have still been measures taken to help people recognize the value and honor of these names and their meanings.

The Atlanta Braves are another team that is holding strong to their name. They also fully believe the name honors and supports the Native American community. They have established a relationship with numerous Native American tribes and are committed to understanding cultural issues and the Native American community. This has allowed the Braves to proudly support the culture and their fans while communicating an honorable view of Native Americans. There seem to be no plans for changing the name in the near future (Martin, 2020).

At one point, the Braves did attempt to use more intense Native American symbolism but quickly stopped the idea (Turner, 2015). In 2013, the Atlanta Braves were planning on bringing back their original logo of the “screaming savage” by placing it on their practice baseball caps. This plan was quickly cut when multiple critics and individuals from the media expressed their strong disagreement with this decision. Before this, the Braves were beginning to distance themselves from Native American symbols. However, the mediated sports community has still ranked the Atlanta Braves among those teams with controversial names and logos (Turner, 2015). In a study conducted by Jacob Turner on the semiotics of the Braves’ logo, it was determined that Native Americans should have control over their own images and representation (2015). The symbols used by sports teams matter and can influence how the public views a culture. The point was made that through the use of semiotic symbols and messages, sports fans become communicators of these messages and how viewers interpret them (Turner, 2015). This further brings up the question of what is truly communicated.

Now that the Washington Football Team has officially changed their name and the Cleveland Indians have agreed to as well, the Kansas City (KC) Chiefs, like the others, are

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getting more pressure than ever before (Brito, 2021). For years, Chief fans have dressed up in headdresses and face paint while performing chants and a hand-chopping motion to symbolize a tomahawk. In summer 2020, the Kansas City Chiefs listened to the public and asked if fans would no longer show up in headdresses or face paint that symbolizes Native Americans. While many were pleased with this decision there have still been strong disagreements on keeping the original name (Brito, 2021). Leading up to the 2021 Superbowl between the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and the Kansas City Chiefs, a group of individuals developed a protest to oppose the use of the Chief's name. The protestors, along with other Native Americans, informed the sports fans that their form of honor is seen as mocking Native Americans rather than honoring them. The protestors demanded a name change and held signs and chanted that they are not mascots but are still people (Snipe & Weber, 2021).

Native American Influences and Perspectives

It has been shown that a major influence in the desire for sports team name changes has been because of the Native American influence and use of names and symbols. The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) has been influential in campaigning against what they deem to be multiple negative and offensive American Indian stereotypes, especially concerning the sports industry (Hylton, 2010). However, there is still a divide among Native Americans regarding Native American team names and influences. Many other organizations have also agreed with the National Congress of American Indians that Native American names and symbols should be eliminated from all sports teams (Hylton, 2010). Many tried to convince professional sports teams with little success. However, since 1963, no professional sports teams have taken a Native American team name. There has been no desire to rename a modern team to Native American names. Rather, several sports teams have argued for their original name to hold

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on to their history and the original meaning behind their name. When the Braves, Indians, Redskins, and Blackhawks were originally named, it was not seen as derogatory but rather honorable (Hylton, 2010). Over the years, communication and imagery have changed, creating a potential reason for the change of views regarding the team names.

For years, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) has been advocating to change the uses of Native American names and symbols within the sports industry. There is a strong belief that the team names and mascots are derogatory to the tribes. Many Native Americans have not faltered on their stance and there has only seemed to be an increase of concern with the use of Native names. The National Congress of American Indians (2021) stated the following:

In general, NCAI strongly opposes the use of derogatory Native sports mascots.

However, in the case where mascots refer to a particular Native nation or nations, NCAI respects the right of individual tribal nations to work with universities and athletic programs to decide how to protect and celebrate their respective tribal heritage (para. 2).

They have recognized the emotional and financial impact the names have on the teams but understand that there is no excuse for offensive use of Native American heritage or stereotypes (Anti-defamation & Mascots, 2021). This research was provided by the National Congress of American Indians. While this is extremely beneficial, gaining more personal insight for individual Native Americans can better contribute to understanding how the team names are viewed.

The National Museum of the American Indians have been strong believers that there were racial issues in sports and created a seminar called “Racist Stereotypes in American Sports” (Eitzen, 2015). This did gain much attention in Washington news. Many had come out with

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examples trying to convince others to remove any Native American names from their sports team. An example given was what if a Muslim school named its sports teams the “Christians.” Imagine if this fictional team had a mascot portraying a cross and clerical collar and had communion as a cultural aspect during halftime. Then, if their excuse was paying homage to the Christian culture, it is believed Christians would still not be amused. The author related this to Native Americans and how Native symbols are considered sacred to their religions and cultures (Eitzen, 2015).

In 2001, the United States Commission of Civil Rights called for schools to remove the use of Indian mascots and names because the message can be considered offensive. However, there has been a copious number of Native Americans who have not cared about this controversy. They do not view the use of Native names and symbols as an offense. On the other hand, Native leaders, the National Congress of American Indians, the National Indian Education Association, and other Native organizations all agreed that the Native symbols and names used in sports should be removed (Eitzen, 2015). These split opinions among the Native American culture have brought more controversy to the opinions of team name changes and what they communicate.

Financial and Political Impact

Sports have been watched and enjoyed for years. However, as previously shown, in recent years, there has been a decline in viewers. In 2020, there were polls taken for almost 2,000 sports fans to determine the decline of watching sporting events. This survey was specifically regarding why fans are watching less basketball. 39% of fans said they were watching fewer basketball games because it was becoming too political. 28% said it was due to no fans, and 19% voted that it was due to the NBA's association with China (Badenhausen, 2020). Despite these

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numbers, the NBA still believes it is important to address racial issues, support players, and play the game. Understanding the reasons behind this decrease in support and attendance can bring awareness to other teams and leagues as well. With further research, there can be a way to determine how to communicate these issues without losing views for political reasons. As shown, there have been various factors involved that have influenced team names and logos.

Professional sports team owners have a large amount of power among the team and team decisions. Many are wealthy individuals who invest in the team (Rosner & Shropshire, 2011). This investment can be risky. However, the owner does have control over his or her own salary which could also be a factor in their team decisions. There is competition among other teams, especially with financial investments and revenue (Rosner & Shropshire, 2011). Owners naturally operate their team to make the most money. This pressure to make the most money often guides the owner's decisions. This includes team names and the determining factors to change a name or not. In larger teams, there will not only be the owner but a management team as well. While this is important, it can make the decision-making process challenging. Other professional teams have a board of directors and executive committees, in addition to the team owner, who also influences decisions. The National Football League (NFL) has a certain amount of control over teams which prevents the team owner from making any decision they want (Rosner & Shropshire, 2011). The levels of control and power in a sports team will be a factor in whether a team changes its name or not. It can also influence their portrayal and communication of the decision to their fans and the general public.

When it comes to professional sports, changing a team name can also be costly. There have to be updated logos, uniforms, color schemes, signage, business cards, etc. It has been estimated that it cost at least \$10 million to change a team name (Maese, 2020). At first, this

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could be a deterrent for changing a team's name. However, depending on how fast the fans embrace the name change, a new name can eventually increase team revenue. For certain teams, such as the Redskins, many believe keeping their current name could have ended up losing money because of the message communicated by the name and logo. One professor from Emory University's Marketing Analytics Center compared certain financial and fan impacts on the schools who changed their names. He compared schools such as Illinois, Syracuse, Stanford, and St. John's and how their names and logos have changed over the years. He then evaluated if there was any lasting damage to the sports teams and fans. His findings determined there was no significant damage to revenue or fan base after the name change (Maese, 2020). This does call to question if this is enough of a factor to influence a name change or not.

There are sports teams whose names do cause true offense to some individuals. However, there are also many situations where individuals have overanalyzed certain names for the sake of being politically correct (Rhode, 1995). There are various instances where teams are concerned about the risk of offending someone because of how the meaning of their name, symbols, or logos is being interpreted. When people begin to be hypersensitive, sports team names could easily offend them. It begins a chain reaction that could cause debate and controversy over hundreds of high school, college, and professional teams. As shown in other research, there have been multiple colleges that have readily changed their sport team names and logos when faced with the idea of racial conflict or controversy. However, professional sports teams are generally privately owned. This allows them to rename or keep their names without fear of losing funds from federal or state funding (Rhode, 1995).

Understanding sports fans is vital for this study as they are largely influenced by team decisions. True sports fans will often remain dedicated to their team. However, sports fans can be

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placed with those who have high team identification and those with low team identification. Low identification sports fans are not as emotionally affected by team performance or decisions. On the other hand, those fans with high team identification are typically connected to a team through each game, season, location, etc. (Wann & James, 2019). Many sports fans stay loyal to their team throughout their life. They will also willingly share their reactions to the team's successes and failures as well as decisions made by the team. These high identification fans will often be more vocal on their reactions to their team, as well as viewing parts of the team as an extension of themselves. The team's views may heavily impact the sports fans. Gender can also play a role in team identification and fan base in general. With most professional teams, males warrant a larger majority of the fan base. However, when it comes to local teams there seem to be similar levels of identification among males and females (Wann & James, 2019). Understanding these influences can help shape views and knowledge of the impact of sports team name changes. This can also bring a better understanding of the impact media has on sports fans. However, there is still missing information regarding how sports fans have viewed these influences, once again creating a need for further data.

In addition to differences among low and high team identification, age may play a factor in how fans react to the decisions sports teams make and how their messages are interpreted. One variable is that the younger generation has expressed further interest in sports and is more emotionally invested. However, many of the older fans are more concerned with traditional team values such as sportsmanship, loyalty, and the general joy of the game. Younger fans typically turn a blind eye to the materialism of athletes and the lack of role models in the field, whereas the older generation takes these values much more seriously (Wann & James, 2019). This could be an influential factor in the generational differences regarding team name changes as well.

Theoretical Frameworks

The collected research provides a solid base for understanding the topic. However, evaluating certain details and actions with communication theories can bring further development. Many of the recent controversies regarding team name changes in the sports industry have been portrayed through media (McCombs & Ghanem, 2001). As one team begins to be placed in the spotlight from the pressure to change their name, the media brings up other past and present teams as well. This will often increase the discussion regarding financial and political factors that come into play with team name changes. There will always be opposing sides and the media involvement usually directs how the audience views the situation, especially with those who are frequent viewers of media (McCombs & Ghanem, 2001). This is where the agenda-setting theory and framing come into play. The agenda-setting theory evaluates how media influences and shapes what the audience views as important. It can also show how the media may portray certain stories or topics above others to increase the public's recognition and reaction to these stories. This is often accomplished by placing a larger emphasis on, and showing, certain stories above others (McCombs & Ghanem, 2001). There is an agenda to what the media shares and during what times they share it.

Framing is also heavily related to the agenda-setting theory and is even referred to as the second-level agenda-setting. The second-level agenda setting explains how the media creates an idea for how the public should think about and interpret what is being presented. The media will often include or omit information in order to influence the viewer's conclusion of something. Framing is also meant to provide this information and perspective without the viewers knowing they are being persuaded in a certain direction (McCombs & Ghanem, 2001). Both the agenda-setting theory and framing can be seen in how sports teams and/or the media communicate the

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topic of team name changes to the public. Two individuals can frame the same topic and create entirely opposing views on the matter. This has seemed to be relevant in the public's perception of how they view a team name or logo (Carstarphen & Sanchez, 2012). There have also been additional studies conducted to show how agenda setting is also used in political socialization as well as why certain issues are taken more seriously in the media and politics. One specific study conducted by Ana Capella explores how agenda-setting theory can contribute to why certain institutions, especially political, gain more media attention while others seem to be denied or discredited through media. The study on agenda-setting shows how this theory has been used for various reasons to gain more and more recognition until the final decision-makers have no choice but to listen (Capella, 2015). Capella also acknowledged the power agenda-setting has on keeping issues off the agenda, creating more strategic and persuasive influences on the public from the media (2015).

The agenda-setting theory and framing theory communicate certain messages, especially through the idea of media. Using agenda-setting and framing to evaluate certain communication influences within sports teams and team names can bring further research and understanding of the field. The public often gains their ideas of sports teams and ideas based on how often the media portrays them and the way the media portrays the team or overall industry (McCombs & Ghanem, 2001). While this is amplified through media, the sports industry can also use agenda-setting and framing through how they distribute information and what they allow the media to perceive. Those in sport leadership, as well as players and professionals, are often trained on what to communicate to the public and how to communicate it (Yoo et al., 2013). This can greatly influence how the media views the teams and associations and, in turn, how the public views them. Sports fans alone will often be more accepting of the information given from the

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organization itself, such as the National Basketball Association, National Football League, Major League Baseball, and National Hockey League. Because of the loyalty to a team or sport, fans are more likely to agree with team leadership and players rather than the media, while the general public may gain more from the media (Yoo et al., 2013). The agenda-setting and framing theories can be seen in how people understand what team names and logos are communicating as well as how the media and public portray the controversy. This is seen in the previous research and studies done and can be applied to future studies, especially in the qualitative form.

Many fans turn to sports as a way to unwind and support their team. True fans are often checking statistics, players, scores, etc. They have set up updates to ensure they do not miss the latest news or games. This has caused much competition in the mediated sports industry. There is strong competition on what news outlets will develop what information and at what time. This has resulted in the media using agenda-setting to gain the most viewers or readers. Newsrooms, presenters, writers, editors, producers, etc., always go in with a certain agenda and frame (Bellamy, 2006). There are various ways to pitch a story, and the sports world is no exception. The media related to the sports industry will carefully evaluate and craft the information that they wish to disperse to the public. Choosing the best facts or eliminating others, in order to gain the most attention and impact is almost second nature (Bellamy, 2006).

The previous research on this topic secures a foundation for further research on the impact of team name changes in the sports industry while amplifying the gaps and themes in previous research. No further research could be found specifically focusing on understanding how the sports fans and affected parties view what has been said and suggested regarding team names in the sports industry as well as how these parties understand what is communicated through the chosen names and logos. The gaps in the existing research especially show the need

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for further exploration and a more in-depth understanding of how Native Americans view their heritage used in the sports industry and how they have reacted to other's views as well.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Purpose

This chapter provides an outline of the methods used in this research study. In prior research regarding similar topics, many have used quantitative methods to collect data and explain results. Previous research has seemed to focus on an individual team and not the general topic, especially in relation to the fans. In the available research, there seems to be a missing correlation between team name changes and the overall influence of the message on multiple parties. For the purpose of this study, qualitative methods were used. The qualitative approach allowed individuals to answer questions that would help explain their views on the topic without stifling what they can express, directing the researcher to better understand participants and how their meanings and ideas are formed (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Using a qualitative approach offered the best route to understand the research problem from the perspective of those involved or affected in regard to the sports industry.

For the purpose of this study, the current research on the topic was used as a guide to formulate questions that were used for interviewing the selected participants. These participants included sports fans and affected parties of the selected teams. The teams that were the focus of the research were the Washington Football Team (previously the Redskins), Chicago Blackhawks, Cleveland Indians, Atlanta Braves, and Kansas City Chiefs. Participants were recruited through multiple methods. Three sets of participants were needed for this study, including athletes, Native Americans, and sports fans. In order to recruit these participants, athletes were invited to participate through social media outlets and some individuals were recommended through personal references. Sports fans were given the opportunity to participate

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through engagement with posts on social media and personal contact. Finally, a list of Native American tribal leaders, found on the U.S. Department of the Interior Indian Affairs website (2021) was utilized to create a contact list of this participant group. Once the list of contacts was created, these potential participants were contacted via email and social media, requesting their participation in the questionnaire. The individuals who communicated interest in participation then received a recruitment letter through their email or social media. The recruitment letter explained the purpose of the study, the process required, and how it would be beneficial to the public and communication world. Upon agreement, the participants were directed to the consent form which further outlined the procedures and purpose for the study. The link to the anonymous online questionnaire was at the bottom of the consent form. The questionnaire remained confidential for each group. The research was conducted in an unbiased, professional, and organized manner during the entire process. In order to maintain privacy, the questionnaires were made anonymous. The targeted participants, interview questions, and analysis of the gathered data allowed for understanding and further explanation of the effect team name changes have on the sports industry, fan base, and offended parties. This included understanding what the names communicate and how political and financial aspects come into play.

Not only did this bring further research to the communication field, but it can also guide teams when making decisions regarding name changes. This research contributed new information to an area of sports communication that has been previously overlooked.

Qualitatively studying the messages communicated by sports teams to the public through their names and logos, and the messages received by fans and public parties, provided a unique insight for communication studies. This research also provided areas for future research as thoughts and opinions regarding how, and what, team names and logos communicate are discovered.

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Population

The population targeted for this study were sports fans of the teams who have changed their name as well as a mix of the parties affected by the current or previous team name. A few sports professionals of the teams were also contacted to discuss their views. The affected parties consisted of Native Americans from across the United States in order to evaluate their views on the subject. Native American participants were from varying tribes and included adults of all ages. There was a set of questions that were presented to professionals and/or players in the sports industry as well as fans of the teams who have already changed their team's name or are considering it. The individuals affected by the team names were also given a questionnaire with specific questions that differ from the sports fans and professionals. All participants involved range in age and, based on the existing research, the majority of sports fans and professionals interviewed were male. Because of the topic and desired information, using open-ended questionnaires for qualitative research was the most beneficial for furthering research in this field. Utilizing the anonymous questionnaires gave a better understanding of the participant's opinions, reactions to the subject, and direct final views.

Investigative Techniques

For the investigative techniques, structured open-ended questions were used in the form of an online questionnaire. This allowed for further collection of in-depth information on the topic. The interview questions were structured in a manner that brought organization and clear understanding while leaving enough flexibility to allow the interviewees to expand on certain topics. The questions were created to be clearly worded and avoided asking "why" questions to reduce the chance of it seeming like an interrogation. This was especially important when interacting with the affected parties.

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Regarding distribution, each individual was contacted via email or social media through a structured recruitment letter (see Appendix A). Their participation was requested, and they were asked for a yes or no response. Upon sending the interview questions, the participants were given a requested date by which the interview should be completed. This allowed adequate time for the participants to respond while providing enough time to analyze the information. For the analysis portion, as much data as possible was collected early on. As the questionnaires were completed, the information received was beginning to be processed. The information was then evaluated and implemented using the data analysis spiral.

Instrumentation

Survey Monkey was used as the main instrumentation method. Because the chosen method was using structured questionnaires with open-ended questions, the best approach was using Survey Monkey to easily and anonymously distribute each questionnaire. This instrumentation was used to receive individual answers from each participant. Because of the instrumentation delivery, there was increased reliability. The written, open-ended questions allowed for further validity and accuracy to the responses. After receiving the information from the instrumentation, the questions were evaluated and structured to gain the necessary data.

Data Collections

The instrument was distributed through the most feasible method for each participant. Because participants were in various locations around the United States, online questionnaires provided the most accuracy. Potential participants received a brief synopsis of the goal as well as the request to answer a few questions regarding the topic. Each participant was contacted well in advance to give ample time for a response. Each potential interviewee was asked for a yes or no answer regarding their willingness to participate. The participants were also given two weeks from

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the time of the request for the questionnaire to be completed. This included sending reminders to any agreeing participant who had not yet responded a week before the discussed deadline.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis is necessary for any qualitative research study. Analyzing the data allows for the researcher to brainstorm, make comparisons, and draw conclusions (Corbin & Straus, 2008). For this research process, collected descriptive/univariate statistics were collected. After receiving these statistics, the analysis process was begun. Analyzing data requires an in-depth understanding of the data. After collecting this, the data must be prepared and organized so the information can be coded and separated into themes. Once complete, the data and themes can be used to create tables, graphics, etc., to present the research findings cohesively. This allows the researcher to easily communicate their findings. This plan included organizing all the data received from the teams, fans, and affected parties. The answers to each of the participants' questions were also organized with the proper participant. Creswell's Data Analysis Spiral was then used to analyze the data (Creswell, 2013).

This data spiral represents entering the data, data moving through the analytic circle, and then receiving a narrative from it. The data analysis spiral method begins with organizing the data. Depending on the study, the researcher will receive an overwhelming amount of data to organize and analyze, making this an essential first step. Next on the spiral is reading and noting emerging ideas. Researchers should immerse themselves in the data by reading and re-reading the entire dataset. This will allow the researcher to begin to see and develop certain similarities or differences within the research. The next step is to describe and classify data into codes and themes. Coding is the process used to break down the text and responses into smaller categories to better understand and label the data. This process improved the development and classification

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of the themes within this study. The fourth step of the spiral is interpreting the data. This allows the researcher to begin to make sense of the information, codes, and themes while still developing a larger meaning to the data. The final stage of the data analysis spiral is representing and visualizing the data. Representing and visualizing data allows for a visual representation of the findings and results. In qualitative research this is often shown through the use of charts, diagrams, tables, etc. (Creswell, 2013). Using the data analysis spiral for analyzing the collected data allowed for better organization of the information and finding reliable and consistent themes throughout, making the interpretation of the data a more effective process.

Ethical Consideration

Considering the sensitivity of the topic, the questions were presented in a manner that did not imply any sort of bias towards one direction over the other. The majority of the participants and the researcher had power differentials. However, presenting this information with respect to them and their position was the most appropriate method. The professionals and players among the sports teams were challenging to contact and gain responses. However, the manner the information was presented assisted with gaining further participants. Sports fans were easily assessable and relatable, making the recruitment of fans a more effective process. It was also important to be aware and respectful when requesting participation from Native Americans. It was important to ensure sensitivity of the topic and show understanding of the Native American culture. Additionally, to remain ethical, an informed consent was required. Each participant was given a consent form (see Appendix B) that was administered before the questionnaire link.

Bias

The main difference between the participants and the researcher was their stage of life. The majority of the participants were not fellow graduate students. Another difference was

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gender. While there were female participants, the majority were male. Neither of these differences produced much difficulty in distributing and receiving the questionnaires. These differences were considered to ensure all parties involved were comfortable and respected. For a specific part of the study, targeted responses from Native Americans were necessary. Because of the cultural differences, it was important to be especially aware of how the worded questions and presented information showed an unbiased perspective. Their traditions and opinions regarding the matter were also considered throughout the process.

Limitations

The sports industry and name changes can be a broad topic. However, the topic was narrowed to teams whose previous or current names reflected a Native American heritage. Certain areas were outside my interest for this study. One area that was avoided was biased political reasons for changing a sports team name. The focus was on the facts and the participant's opinions rather than personal political opinions. Because of the situation, only a few answers from sports professionals of the affected team were received. While this provided additional insight, more of the focus was on the data from the sports fans and affected parties.

While the opinions and perspectives of Native Americans contributed significantly to the study, a greater number of responses from this group would be valuable. Within the Native American communities, there are very specific rules regarding what and when information is communicated. There are many policies and procedures associated with gaining personal insight into this community. Many of these procedures could not be completed due to the time restrictions of the current study.

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Questions

The questions used for the questionnaires were carefully structured open-ended questions (see Appendix C) for each of the 3 subsets. Each set varied depending on if the interviewee was a sports fan of the selected team, a sports industry professional, or a Native American. While only a few sports professionals were contacted, the online questionnaires were still created so the answers would remain anonymous. The questions varied slightly depending on if the discussed team was considering a name change or had already changed their name.

The questions used in the online questionnaire were designed to gain the missing data on the topic of team name changes in the sports industry and the effect it has. The questions also allowed the groups to share their individual opinions regarding media influence and how these changes have been communicated. The questions varied slightly depending on each subset. However, there were notations stating the exact question asked.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the views of the sports fans from various sports teams as well as the affected parties, Native Americans. This also included commentary from selected sports professionals regarding the team name. Participants within this study consisted of those from all demographics, gender, and locations. The results give guidance on the views regarding the name change or discussed name change, financial and media influences, and what is communicated through the name and symbols. This chapter presents the data analysis for each question asked in order to answer the stated research questions. This first set of data consist of sports fans of the Washington Football Team, Cleveland Indians, Atlanta Braves, Chicago Blackhawks, and Kansas City Chiefs.

Support

The first question asked if the potential for the team name change influenced the fans' support. For the Washington Football Team questionnaire, they were asked if the team did not change their name would the support of the team change. 78.57% of sports fans stated their support has not changed with the official change and potential name change. However, 21.43% said their support has changed. This change in support was mainly negative, showing that their support for the team would lessen. A few mentioned they would still support the team, but their support would lessen. This was because they view the potential name change as caving into influences and forcing change without gaining opinions from Native Americans. When asked if the potential name change would influence support, a participant responded:

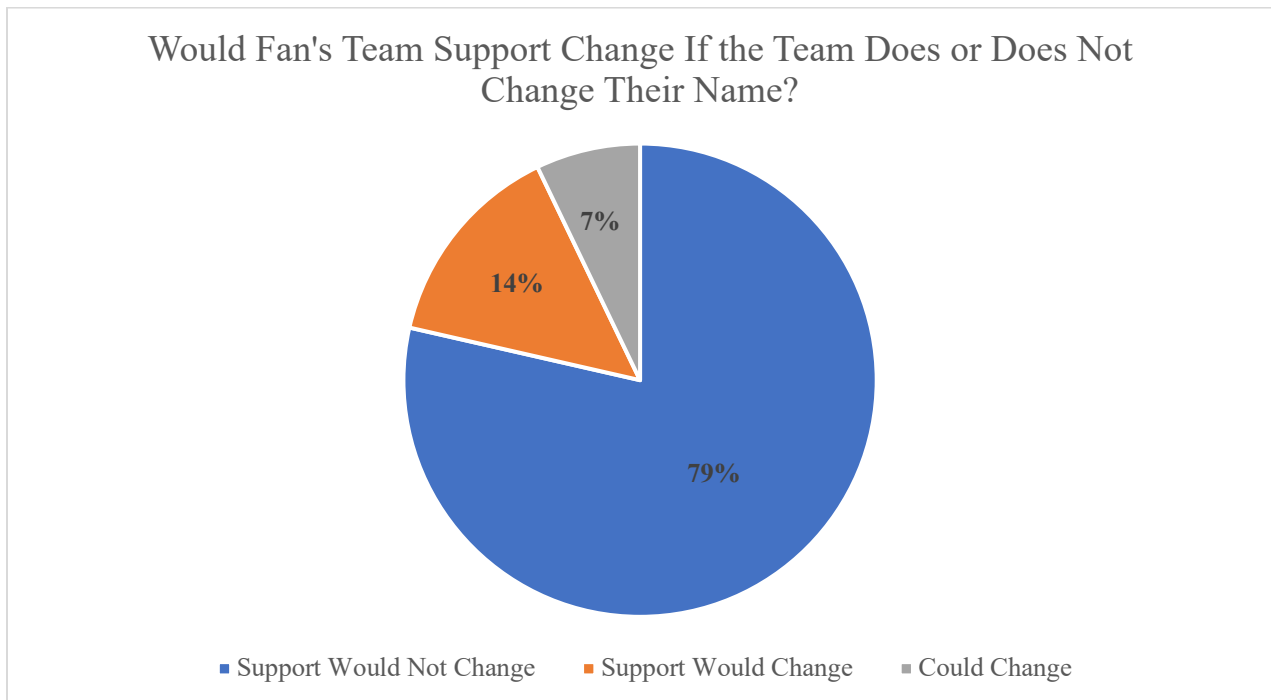
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Yes, somewhat. I feel if the team ownership and the league force a name change without getting the opinions of the public, particularly the Native American community, it will be hard for me to support the team or the league (personal communication, 2021).

One went as far as to say, “If they change the name, I will never watch another game” (personal communication, 2021). On the other hand, one participant said the potential for a name change had given them “greater respect for the leadership of the organization” (personal communication, 2021). There were also those who said their support would not change because they were not concerned with what the name communicated but rather the city it represents and the players that make up the team.

Chart 1

Would Fan's Team Support Change If the Team Does or Does Not Change Their Name?



The next analyzed question asked if the support of the team would change if the team does or does not change their name. This was directed at sports fans of the Cleveland Indians,

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Atlanta Braves, Chicago Blackhawks, and Kansas City Chiefs. For the Washington Football Team, they answered if the team name change, from the Redskins to the Washington Football Team, had influenced their support of the team. The results showed that 78.57% of participants stated their support of the team would not change or had not changed. Many included that their loyalties will always be with their team and the players, the name will not be the determining factor that waivers their support.

Only 14.29% of the participants stated their support of the team would change if a name change occurred. It was mentioned that if the team name was truly changed because of what is communicated, it would not be a problem. However, changing for political reasons would not be accepted by them. Another participant did express that their support would change, but it would increase. This fan explained saying, "I will still likely be a fan of the organization, but if the team's name changes, I will feel more comfortable voicing my support for the team and wearing their apparel" (personal communication, 2021).

The additional 7.14% said their support could change depending on the reasons and factors involved in the change. The responses showed that if the change occurs because of political and media pressure their support may waiver. When asked if their support would change, one participant answered:

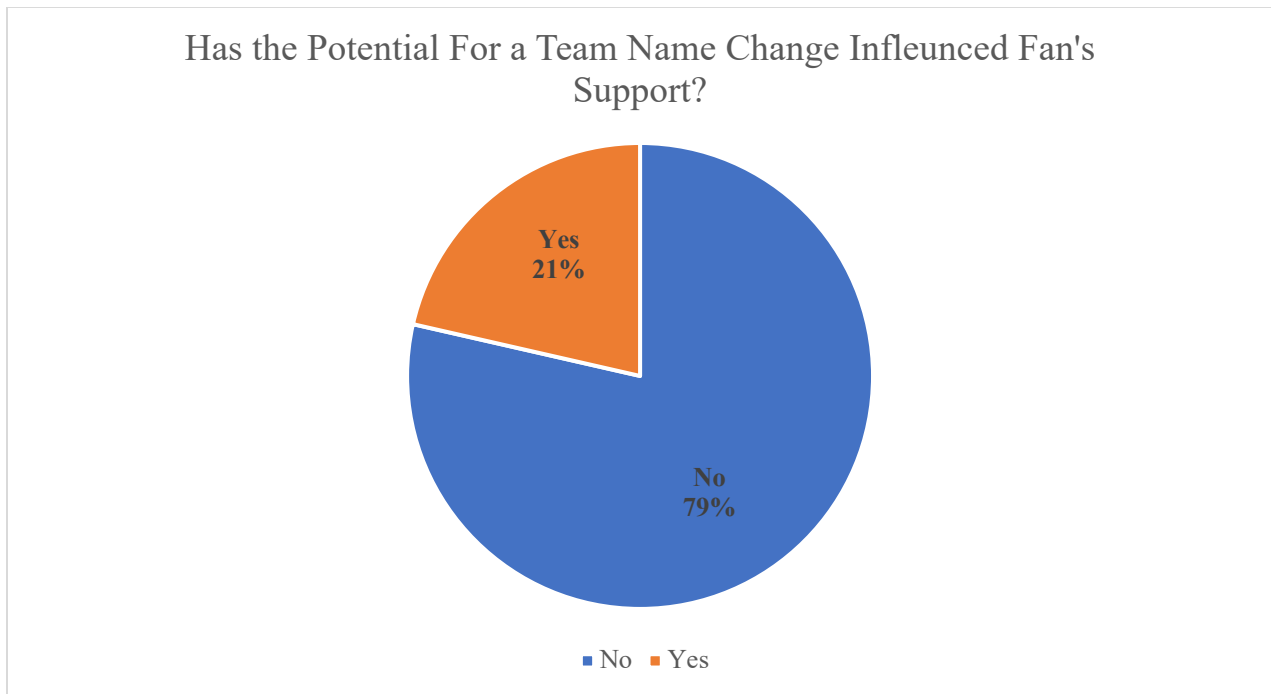
It seems to be a political move that does not represent the actual real-world feelings and opinions of the communities depicted in the team name/logo/mascot/history and that is somewhat annoying to witness. This move seems to draw attention away from the game and force a narrative quite beyond the reach of the sport into a realm it does not belong (personal communication, 2021).

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Another participant mentioned that depending on the chosen name, they would not visually support the team by wearing the new apparel or representing the name and logo through merchandise.

Chart 2

Has the Potential for a Team Name Change Influenced Fan's Support?



Financial Reasons

The next question was to determine how the fans viewed whether the name change or potential name change was due to financial reasons. Through the questionnaire data, 60.71% of participants said they do believe that finances influence name changes in the sports industry. Out of the 60.71% who agreed finances influence the name change, 35.29% believe that while it is influential, it is not the main deciding factor. 39.29% believe financial reasons have not played a role in determining a name change. They agree that it could actually cause a loss in sales or income from the cost of rebranding and offended fans. There were also ideas that the financial

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aspect is used as an excuse rather than the ownership taking responsibility. One Washington Football fan said:

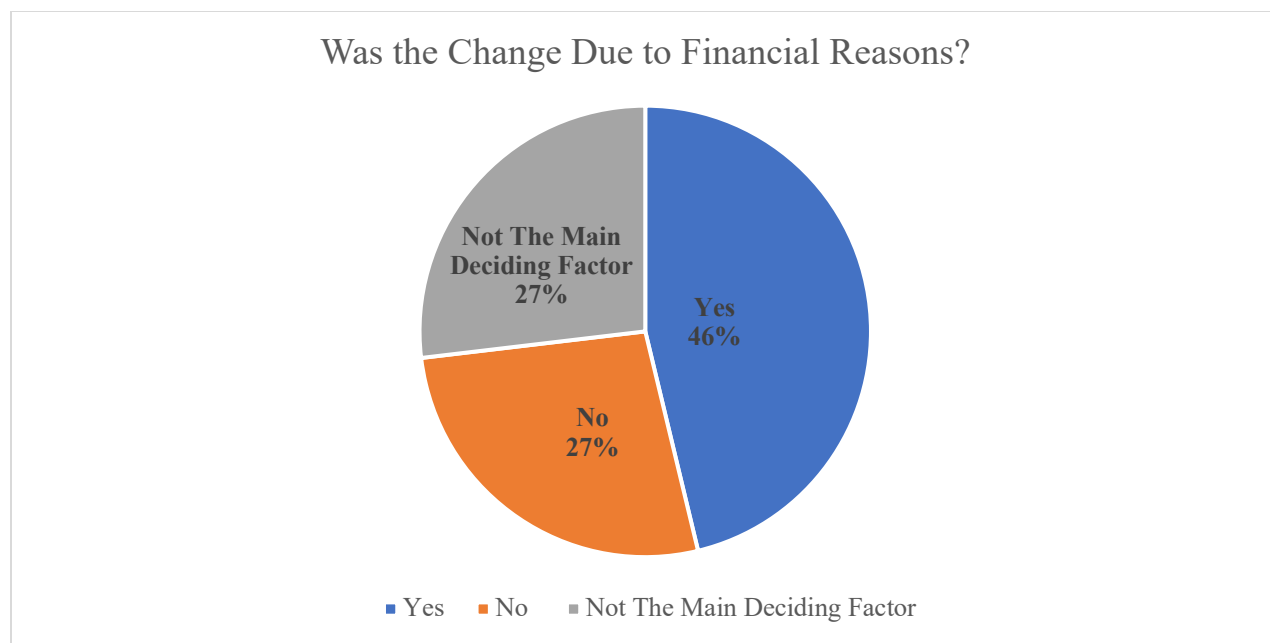
I think there were some financial motives behind the name change, as sponsors such as FedEx were threatening to take away their sponsorships, but at the same time they are one of the wealthiest franchises in the NFL, so it seems almost like a lame excuse for changing the name. It was easier for them to cop out and blame it on potential financial backlash rather than deal with some of the potential consequences and setbacks of not changing the team name (personal communication, 2021).

Another elaborated saying, they do not believe finances would play a role in deciding a name change and continued to respond:

If anything, I believe that changing the name may hurt finances more than help. The only reason I think it could be financial is that they would increase in merchandise sales due to people switching over to the updated name. Though it is interesting that the announcement of the name change came immediately following sponsors of the WFT threatening to back out (personal communication, 2021).

Chart 3

Was the Change Due to Financial Reasons?



Fan Reaction

When analyzing the responses from the fans, the results indicate that 89.29% have noticed other fans discuss and react to the potential name change and/or the current name changes. Only 10.71% of the participants said they have not heard other fans discuss the topic. Many who responded as noticing fans discuss the name change elaborated by explaining the extensiveness of the topic. There were additional details explaining how fans have strongly disagreed with the name change because of their loyalty to the team and how they view the name and logos. The participants included they have received disapproval of name changes from friends, family, and other supporters as well as have seen fans react across social media platforms. It was also mentioned that the fans would be much more supportive if just the logos were changed and not the names. There was a common theme with the Washington Football team fan reactions and what they replaced “Redskins” with. One elaborated:

Fans of the Redskins, in particular, do not all seem to be on board with the name change period while many of the fans have stayed loyal to the franchise, they think it is

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overblown, especially with not having an actual team named to represent it. If there was a team name that would have replaced “Redskins” right away, I think less people would have been so upset about the situation. At the same time, fans are upset because they do not think the name was offensive in the 1st place. On the other hand, there are fans who think it was long overdue, but even people who are not fans of the Washington football team make fun of them for getting rid of the name and think it was a bad move (personal communication, 2021).

When discussing the Washington Football team another participant said, “I have not personally heard a single positive comment on the name” (personal communication, 2021). Another recognized that “A main reason is because Washington did not choose a permanent name yet. ‘The Football Team’ did not seem like a great choice at the time, and a lot of fans from other teams harped on that a lot” (personal communication, 2021).

With fans from the other teams, the analyzed data showed many fans recognized “negative and sarcastic comments on social media” (personal communication, 2021) and general discussion through the media. The majority answered that other fans are against any name change. Common verbiage used from analyzing the data of fan reactions regarding a team name change was negative, disappointed, and forced.

Chart 4

Have Other Fans Reacted?

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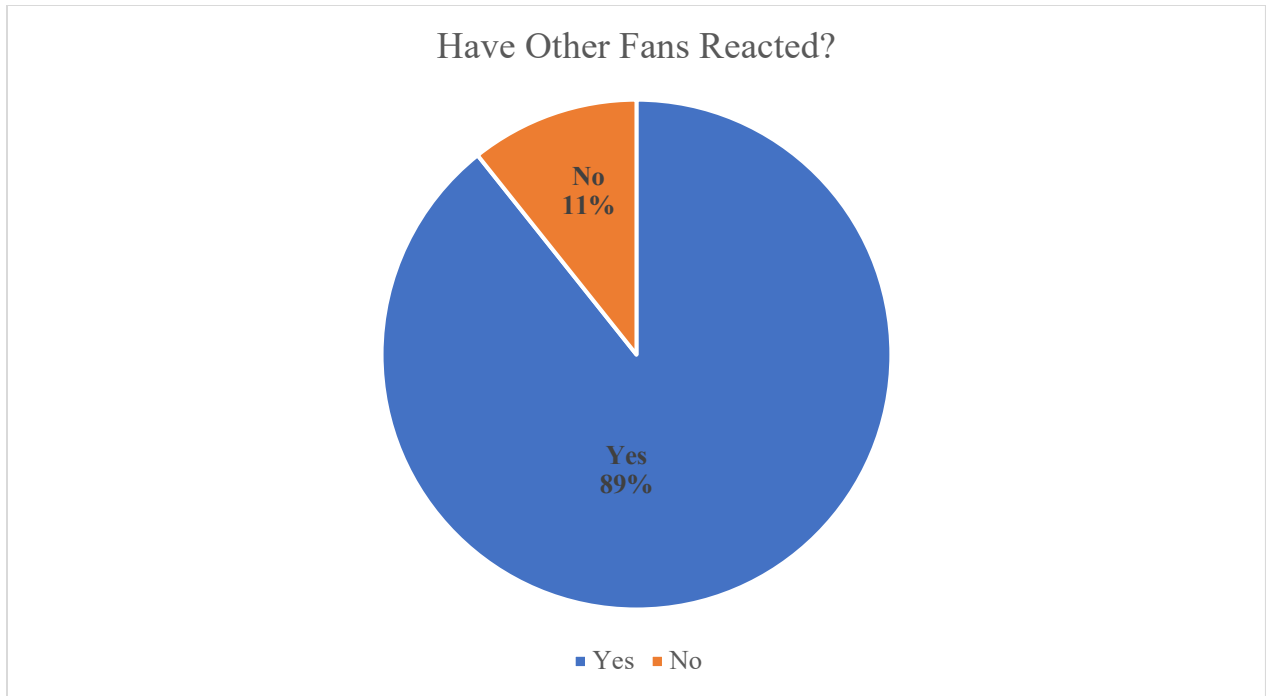


Table 1

Data of Sports Fans Questionnaire Responses

Responses	Yes	No	Maybe
Would support change with a potential name change?	78.57%	21.43%	0%
Would support change if teams do or do not change?	78.57%	14.29%	7.14%
Have finances been a factor?	60.71%	39.29%	0%
Have you noticed other fans react?	89.29%	10.71%	0%

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What the Current Names Communicate

The last two questions dove deeper into what the current names of the teams communicate and what a name change would communicate. For the fans of The Washington Football team, they answered what they believe the name (Redskins) communicated before the change and what the current name communicates. The open-ended questions allowed for the participants to elaborate, gaining additional insight on their feelings and views towards the name change or discussion of a name change.

There were various answers in response to what the original names communicated with many common themes throughout. As specified through the collected data, sports fans of the Washington Football Team believe that the name, Redskins, was intended to communicate honor towards the Native American community and traditions. However, they have recognized that it has instead been seen as racist and hateful. While many agree Redskins should not be used if it communicates racism, they do not agree with the means to get to this decision. Many fans have mentioned that this was not a strong issue until social media and political discussion became more involved. However, they do believe it is viewed as derogatory and racist.

The sports fans for the Cleveland Indians had a different perspective. Most strongly view the Indians as a name that represents honor, pride, legacy, and as a means to recognize the history, culture, and respect for Native Americans. Some fans mentioned that they do agree the old logo of Chief Wahoo was not appropriate and believe it should no longer be associated with the name. There were a few fans who disagreed and believe the name should be changed. One mentioned that the name communicates “irreverence for the cultures affected and cowardice and laziness on the behalf of leadership who has not yet changed the name” (personal communication, 2021).

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The majority of fans of the Atlanta Braves do not think the name has a negative connotation. Some didn't even know it could be seen as derogatory or controversial. The common theme among the participants was that the name, Braves, communicates strength, confidence, honor, success, and pride. They view the Atlanta Braves as showing great respect and honor for the Native American culture and heritage. However, there were a few who recognized that because they are not Native American, they cannot truly understand the meaning. The results did show that if it was truly considered offensive by Native Americans and not only others, then they would support and agree with a name change.

The questioned fans of the Chicago Blackhawks all agreed that the team's name communicated similar themes as the others. The results show that fans believe that Blackhawks communicate honor and heritage while representing Native American and Illinois history. The participants did recognize that the ideas of what the name communicates are from their perspective as fans. One stated:

"I believe, from purely a sports perspective, the current name communicates heritage within the NHL. The Blackhawks are an Original Six NHL franchise, so they have been a part of this league since its inception with the same name and, largely, the same logo" (personal communication, 2021).

There were fewer Kansas City Chiefs fans represented in this study, however, those who participated believed the name communicates a recognition of a heritage. One fan expressed: "I love the name of the Chiefs and I even like the logo because it looks like a proud chief in his finest outfit. To me, it looks like royalty!" (personal communication, 2021).

What A Name Change Would Communicate

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The final question for the sports fans of the Indians, Braves, Blackhawks, and Chiefs asks what they think the name change would communicate. For the Washington Football team fans, they were asked to answer what the current name, Washington Football team, communicates. The bulk of the Washington Football team sports fans are not happy with the current name. They view the change as something that was forced. The results showed that it was common among the fans that they believe the Washington Football team name communicates taking an easy route and a team that operated in fear of financial loss. Most believe if it was not for money, the team would not have changed their name. Others included that the name communicates the social and political pressure placed on the team and shifts the pressure to other teams that are considered to have racist names. One respondent suggested what they believe to have been a more appropriate way of changing the name, saying:

I think they are trying to communicate a new social awareness and consideration to minority communities, in this case, the Native Americans, in an effort to appear more socially sensitive. I think maybe that would be better communicated by taking intentional and thought-out action to enact meaningful change such as, perhaps, investing some of their 400-500 million dollars generated every year into Native American businesses, schools, communities, etc. But they won't because that costs actual money. Forget that they had a record-breaking revenue in 2019. 'Let's making a public statement or change our name and do nothing of substance' seems to be the standard corporate social policy these days (personal communication, 2021).

The responses from the fans frequently made note of the financial influences involved with the Washington Football team name change.

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Data from sports professionals was also received. As mentioned by fans, some of the tension with the name change has been because of the lack of an actual name. It makes it more challenging to accept the change when a true name that communicates a legacy or pride has not been determined. The data also showed that team owners felt extensive media pressure to change their name. When asked if the owners feel media pressure to change the name, a sports professional answered saying, “100%! Mainly through Twitter. I also believe since that is the drive of current media, other media outlets can get that type of information and produce it in their articles” (personal communication, 2021). One professional did say the previous name communicated ignorance and the current name communicates a clean slate.

When asked what a name change would communicate for the Cleveland Indians, the responses were mainly negative towards the name change but many recognized the need for the change and what it would communicate to others. Multiple individuals mentioned the name change would communicate social or political pressure. Common verbiage included that it would communicate a yielding to cultural pressure, caving into society's ideas, and a loss of the represented honor and strength. One specific respondent elaborated on the support Cleveland shows for inclusion. This participant responded:

Here is the thing about Cleveland. The city is a true leader in racial issues. The first black pro football player was in Northeastern Ohio (Fritz Pollard); Cleveland was the first AL team to break the color barrier (Larry Doby); they were the first major city in the US to elect a black mayor (Carl Stokes); the first MLB team with a black manager (Frank Robinson) ... you get the idea. This is completely in character for a Cleveland team. And most people from Cleveland are not really fussing about this...they are the first pro team to do this willingly not under threat of boycott or financial penalty (unlike Washington).

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Cleveland has many reasons to be mocked, but when it comes to issues of dealing with issues of equality, they are truly the leading city in the nation about how to handle these things sensibly, in a common-sense manner, and with grace. I do personally wish they'd stick with the Indians because I think it's a great and generic name (unlike Blackhawks, Redskins, and Braves for example), but it's also the only name I have ever known and it's only a name...my only hope is that they will not pick some lame name that does not age well” (personal communication, 2021).

Others mentioned the name change would communicate the desire to avoid backlash, the awareness of social and political issues, inclusion, respect for all ethnicities, and representing the need to “repair relationships with indigenous communities” (personal communication, 2021).

In response to what a name change would communicate for the Braves, fans were split on what it would communicate. The data communicated that others have agreed that it would show the recognition of growing displeasure from the Native American community, and it could communicate a level of respect and honor for Native Americans. Others view the name change as giving in to fake pressure, financial status, and a lack of trust in the Native American image. The Braves fans have been fairly consistent in agreeing that if the name truly caused offense or disrespect to Native Americans, they would support the name change.

The fans of the last two teams had less to say regarding what a name change would communicate. The Blackhawks fans stated their opposition by saying a name change would communicate that the tribe was not honored as it should have been and that the team was succumbing to social pressure. One fan believes it could communicate two different things.

On one hand, it can communicate that whoever is screaming the loudest gets their way. This would be the case if the majority, or overwhelming majority, of Native Americans

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are fine with names like this. However, if most Native Americans do not like using their names, then it would communicate a message of unity and understanding (personal communication, 2021).

The Kansas City Chief fans were less inclined to answer or were uncertain what a name change would communicate. Others love the name the Chiefs and even thought the logo represented pride. The data from sports professionals showed that they have noticed that the fanbase is against a name change and supports the history behind the name. It was mentioned that the team was named after the former mayor who was nicknamed “Big Chief” and the stadium was called “Arrowhead” because arrowheads were found when the stadium was being dug. Changing the team would disregard this history. One professional also shared that it is unlikely for finances to be a factor in the change and there has been limited media pressure for the Chiefs.

Table 2

Common Themes Shown in What Team Names Communicate

Themes	What the Names Communicate
Honor & Pride	Many participants used “honor” and “pride” to describe what they believe the team names communicate. The sports fans of the Washington Football Team (when it was still called Washington Redskins), the Cleveland Indians, Atlanta Braves, and the Chicago Blackhawks all mentioned viewing the team names and influences as a sense of honor and pride to Native Americans and for the team.
History & Culture	While not as many of the participants mentioned history and culture, this was still a common theme among the responses. Kansas City Chiefs fans have especially viewed the team name as communicating history and heritage. It was also mentioned that the Chicago Blackhawks name represents the culture and history of not only the chief it was named after but also Illinois as a state.

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Racism & Hate	Racism and hate were also used frequently in participants' responses. Even if a participant mentioned they view the name as a sense of honor and pride many also recognized the potential for an implication of racism and hate. There were a few participants who explicitly stated using the current team names show racism and hate towards all Native Americans.
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Results from the Affected Parties

In addition to gathering data from the sports fans of the mentioned teams, information from the affected parties (Native Americans) was also received. For the purpose of this study and to answer the research questions, both perspectives were necessary. From the collected results, none of the Native American participants had truly positive reactions to the use of Native American names and symbols within the sports industry. The collected data shows common themes among the responses from the affected parties.

Use of Names, Logos, and Symbols

The first question asked was how Native Americans have viewed the use of names, logos, and symbols by sports teams. All participants do not appreciate the use of Native American names within the sports industry. Many did agree that certain names and symbols are worse than others as there can be more of a negative connotation with some, such as the Washington Redskins. It was even mentioned in a couple of the responses that using the name "Redskins" is especially derogatory and has even been equated to using the "N" word. One participant expanded on the topic. They explained:

I find Redskins and Savages to be the two most offensive names. Secondly, I find so many teams use inaccurate representations; for example, using full headdresses for every name such as using full headdress for Shawnee tribes when Shawnees males plucked the

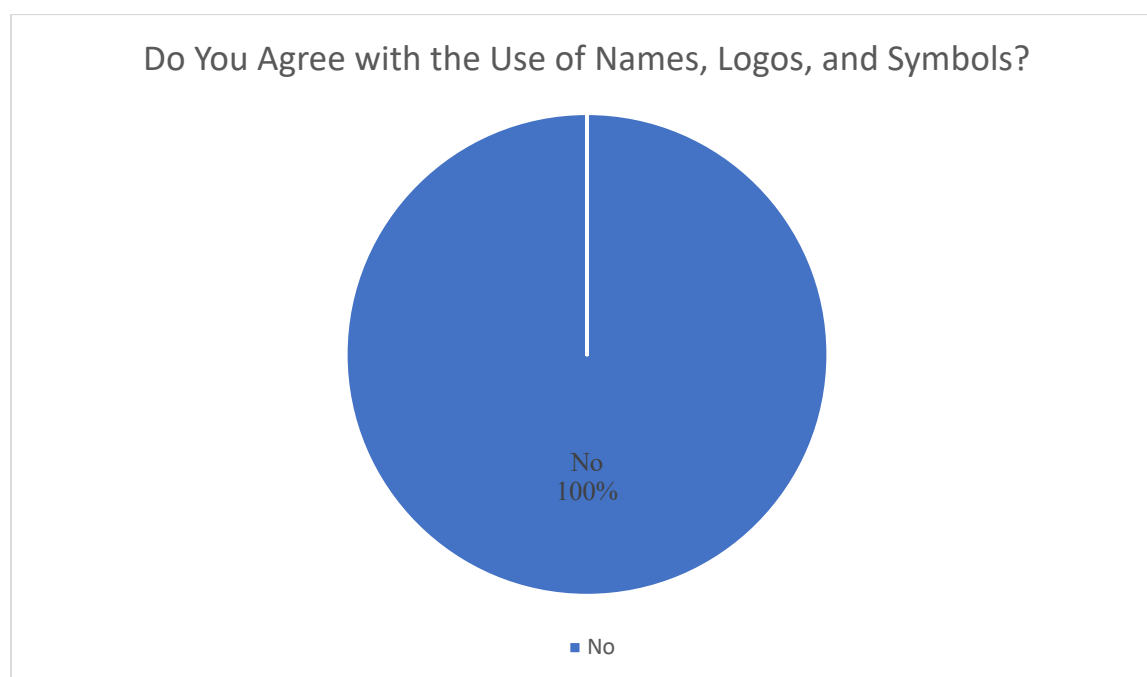
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hair from their heads or shaved their heads. Institutions don't do their research which leads to more negativity" (personal communication, 2021).

One did mention they personally do not have a problem with the names that show more of a fight and honor, such as Braves or Chiefs, but do have an issue with the more offensive names, such as Washington Redskins.

Chart 5

Do You Agree with the Use of Names, Logos, and Symbols?



Removal of Native American References

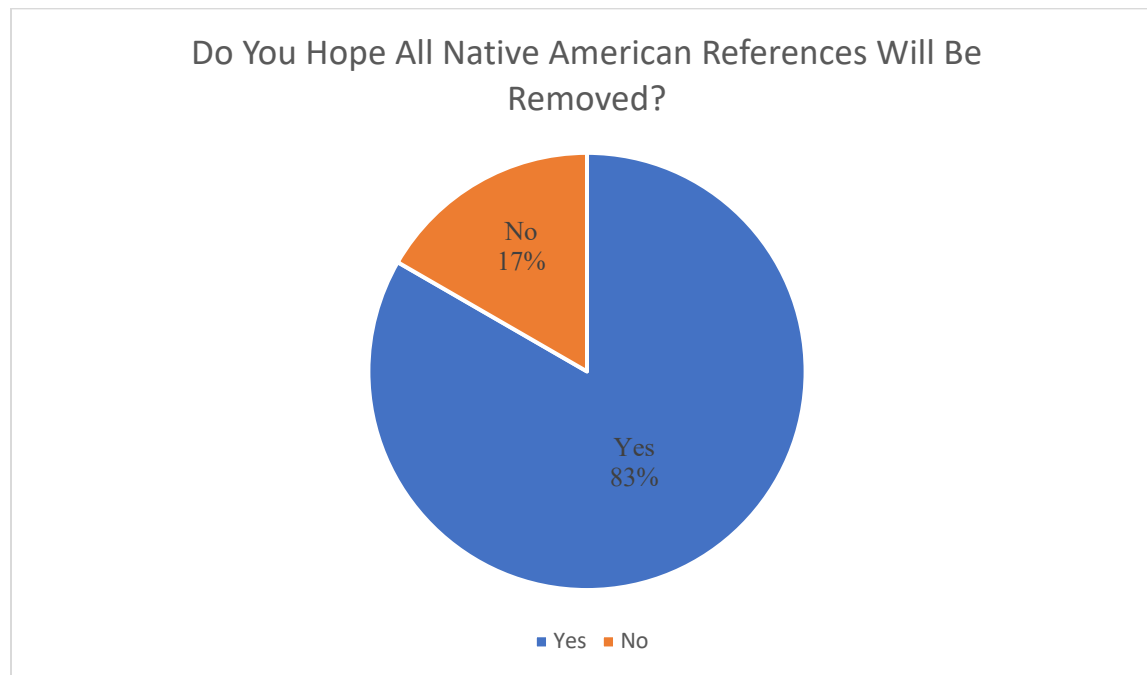
The participants were then asked if they hoped others in the sports industry would remove all Native American references from their teams as well. 83.33% of participants said yes and that other teams should change their names. One went on to say, "Some need to change – it is a good thing – Natives are human beings and having them as 'mascots' means they are not human and need to be treated as such" (personal communication, 2021). Another respondent answered the question saying, "It appears we may be headed that way. I'm ok with the changes.

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If we are doing it for one, then be across the board” (personal communication, 2021). Those who said no, did not believe all names were an issue but did agree certain names should be changed.

Chart 6

Do You Hope All Native American References Will Be Removed?



Honor and Respect Opinion

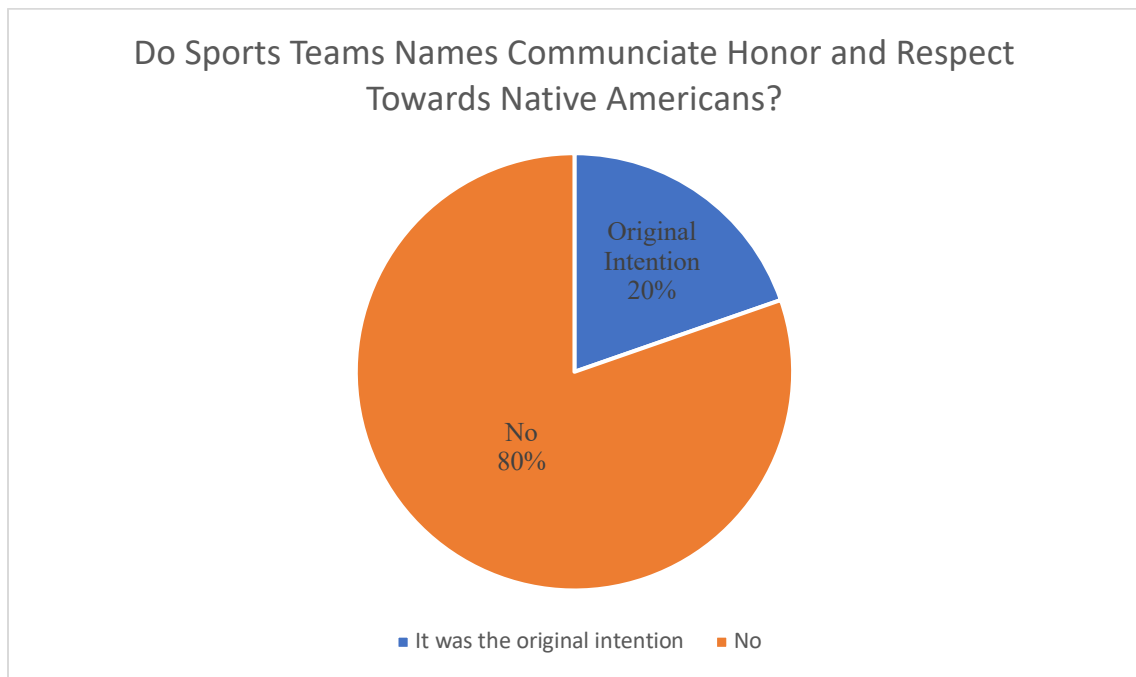
The next question asked if the participants agree with sports teams who have claimed their names communicate honor and respect for the traditions and values of Native American culture. Again, 80.33% do not agree with this and the remaining think it is only right if done with absolute respect. A few others mentioned they do believe the original intention was to honor Native Americans, but it ended up being insulting and shows the teams' lack of understanding. This is seen through a participant's response saying, "I don't doubt that they intend to honor but don't realize they aren't and don't understand why they aren't" (personal communication, 2021). Further agreement came when an additional participant said the claims of honor and respect "might have been the purpose at the beginning, but the way it was used was not complimentary"

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(personal communication, 2021). When asked if they agree that teams use Native American influences as a sign of honor and respect, a participant answered, “I do not agree with this. It appropriates indigenous culture, falsely represents indigenous people, and opens the door for racism” (personal communication, 2021). An additional participant said they also do not agree with this because they think “most people are not very well informed regarding the Native American culture” (personal communication, 2021).

Chart 7

Do Sports Teams Names Communicate Honor and Respect Towards Native Americans?



Influential Native American Namesake Views

A follow-up question was for the participants to reflect on the fact that a couple of teams have named their teams after influential Native Americans. The participants were asked if these names should be changed as well. The responses on this were similar in that the participants can only accept this if the individual Native Americans were portrayed with 100% accuracy and respect. Others thought it should be changed no matter what. One elaborated saying: “I think

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teams should find ways to honor and respect native culture without making it harmful. Naming a team after one person could be commemorative, but again it must be carefully watched”

(personal communication, 2021).

Another explained it would depend more on the family of the individual rather than the tribe.

Following up on the previous question, a respondent replied, “Again, if they fully understand our culture and understand the history behind that person, great. If not, leave it alone” (personal communication, 2021).

What Native American Names Communicate

The next question asked what the Native American participants believe the team names communicate. The responses show the participants believe the team names communicate negativity and disrespect towards Native Americans. The names communicate stereotypes and misrepresentation of the entire Native American culture. The responses show the impact of the names, and one specifically said that the names communicate that “Natives are not human, and they are animals – because most teams are named after animals – so treat them as animals” (personal communication, 2021). Another said, “As a member of an indigenous group, I consider the Redsk*ns to be a racist slur – literally the Native American equivalent of more prevalent slurs for other minorities. Other names falsely represent Native American communities” (personal communication, 2021). In response to this question regarding what they think the names communicate, one participant even said, “I would like the teams that use influential Native American names to answer this question” (personal communication, 2021). It was also pointed out that if a team is going to go to the expense of changing the Native American symbols the name should be changed as well.

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Table 3

Common Themes Shown in What Native Americans View What Team Names Communicate

Themes	What the Names Communicate
Disrespect & Negativity	The majority of the participants claim the name communicates disrespect towards Native Americans and their culture. Participants claimed these names do not portray Native Americans and their communities in a positive manner, communicating a negative message towards Native Americans.
Stereotypes & Misrepresentation	A common theme among Native American participants was that the sports team names communicate stereotypes and misrepresents the entire Native American culture. They claim the team names and logos paint Native Americans in an inaccurate manner, falsifying their traditions.
Racism	Racism and hate were used by a few of the Native American participants to describe what team names communicate. Many recognize the original intent may have been to honor them, but it was not executed properly. A couple participants mentioned the lack of care for asking Native Americans creates a sense of racism.

What a Potential Name Change Communicates

The participants were then asked what they think a potential name change would communicate. Many believe a name change would communicate positive results and further understanding. In response, one participant explained:

I think teams with these names should change them but also acknowledge why they were originally named that. Some of the names – the Chiefs, for example – didn't start off as having an indigenous connotation. Honoring the history of the teams is important but it is

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more so to not open the gateway for racism, whether intentional or unintentional”

(personal communication, 2021).

Many of the participants agree that a name change would communicate something positive. It could communicate a “desire to admit previous insensitivity, desire to express increased awareness, desire to contribute to elimination or reduction of racism” (personal communication, 2021) or “an admission to past indiscretions” (personal communication, 2021). In agreement, another participant explained that it would communicate that “they are listening to the people they ‘feel’ or ‘think’ they are honoring – if you are going to honor them then listen to what they have to say and honor that” (personal communication, 2021).

Table 4

Common Themes Shown in What A Team Name Would Communicate

Themes	What a Name Change Would Communicate
Positivity & Understanding	A common theme was a mix of positivity and understanding. Many participants believe a name change would communicate an understanding for Native Americans as well as produce positive results. The name would communicate something positive towards their culture and the public.
Listening	According to the participants, a name change would also communicate that people are listening to them. It would show the teams care about the people they claim to be honoring and are willing to hear and understanding Native American viewpoints.

Necessary Name Change

In one final question to truly determine the effect of team names and symbols, the participants were asked if team name changes were or are needed. The participants were all in

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agreement that some sort of name change was or is necessary. A few further explained the reasoning behind their responses. One said, “I think the name changes certainly are needed. It’s disrespectful, (occasionally) outright racist, culture appropriating, misrepresenting, and at its best it lets traditions form that are harmful to Native Americans (The Chiefs’ ‘tomahawk chop’ for example)” (personal communication, 2021). Another answered, “Yes because if you are not seen as human your children will not be seen as human and the discrimination will continue. People have feelings and natives are no different” (personal communication, 2021). There were some participants who agreed with certain changes to team names in the sports industry but showed a varied perspective. One responded:

I guess that depends on how the team views the name and what they feel it stands for. We need to respect everyone's differences. I think we may still have a long way to go in regard to respecting different cultures (personal communication, 2021).

Another answered also in agreement saying, “In the case of Washington Redskins yes...others should be evaluated on their own merits” (personal communication, 2021).

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Chart 8

Are Team Name Changes Needed?

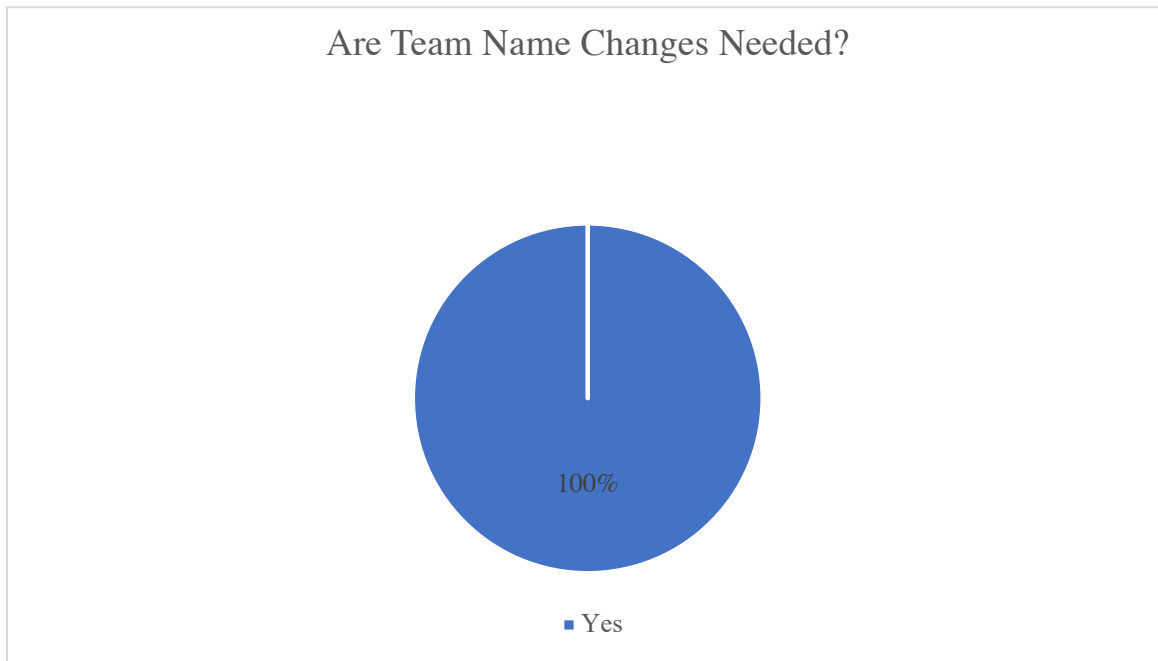


Table 5

Data of Native American Questionnaire Responses

Responses	Yes	No
Do you agree with the use of names, logos, and symbols?	0%	100%
Do you hope all Native American references will be removed?	83.33%	16.67%

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Do sports team names communicate honor and respect towards Native Americans?	80.33%	19.67%
Are team name changes necessary?	100%	0%

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

The main purpose of this research was to understand what is being communicated through the chosen names and logos of sports teams, especially from the perspective of fans and the impacted parties (Native Americans). This included the effects of financial, political, and fan base changes on the team while evaluating the influence of media pressure. The results indicated that the majority of sports fans do believe the name change or potential name change communicates the influence of financial, political, social, and/or mediated pressure. This has seemed to be the reason behind the opposition of the team. However, many agreed that if the name of the team was offensive to Native Americans, and not just other parties implying that it is, they would understand and support the name change since it would then communicate respect towards Native Americans. Since five teams have been in question, the best method is to discuss each team and its fan base. The Washington Football team, Cleveland Indians, Atlanta Braves, Chicago Blackhawks, and Kansas City Chiefs all have loyal and supportive fans that offered effective insight into what the teams represent. This study was very relevant to understanding current social impact.

Discussion of Sports Fans Findings

Research has shown that sports team names communicate a manifold to the players, fans, and impacted parties. The specific teams in question have also been evaluated because of their Native American association with their names and logos. However, with the increase of controversy regarding the team names, new research was needed. This study contributes to the previous context by considering what team names communicate through gaining a better understanding of how the fans view the team and how Native American's view it. There has

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been a limited amount of research addressing what team names and logos communicate and how it has been influenced by financial, political, and mediated pressure.

After analyzing the data collected from open-ended questionnaires, certain themes and ideas were developed. The data was telling regarding how sports fans of the Washington Football Team, Cleveland Indians, Chicago Blackhawks, Atlanta Braves, and Kansas City Chiefs view the team names and what they believe influences miscommunication. The first discussed team is the Washington football team. Through the data, it shows that sports fans of the Washington Football team seem the most discontent with the decision to change the name from the Washington Redskins to the Washington Football Team. The fans have also expressed their disappointment in the new name that was chosen for the team. Based on the results, the main reason for this disappointment and frustration from the fans was due to the forceful and quick nature of the decision to change the name.

Many fans were more upset that leadership chose the temporary name, the Washington Football Team, rather than taking the time to come up with a name and communicate the reason behind it. As shown through the reviewed existing research, after years of the Washington Football Team owner fighting to keep the name, the sudden changing of the name and implementing the temporary name did not go over well with the true Washington Football Team fans. Based on the majority of fan perspectives, the changing of the Washington Redskins to The Washington Football Team was not shown as a respectful measure to Native Americans, but rather a financial gain. The decision to immediately change their longstanding name created further disappointment in the fans because they only saw this move as a way to appease society and the media. The results also showed that some fans do understand and respect the opinions Native Americans have regarding the name. From the gathered research, it seems that if the

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leadership of the Washington Football Team truly changed their name because of what is communicated, the fans would have been more accepting of this. The frustration of the entire process has been mainly directed towards the nature of the leadership and media influences during the process.

The majority of sports fans from all the analyzed teams did agree that if Native Americans are truly bothered and insulted by the use of Native American symbols and names in the sports industry, then the teams should respect this. The results indicate that the fans are more upset by the teams succumbing to political, financial, or mediated pressure than the actual name change. If a team name and symbol is considered offensive, the team must still choose a name and communicate the process so the fans will receive it as something positive rather than a financial, political, or social agenda. This information can give teams a better understanding of how to discuss the topic with their fans, the public, and the media.

During this study, the sports fans that completed the questionnaire were asked if they have noticed other fans react to and discuss the topic of the name changes. The majority had noticed other fans, especially family and friends, heavily discuss the topic. It was interesting that when the participants were asked what they have heard from other fans, the results were fairly negative and seemed to portray that the other fans were disappointed in the potential of a name change due to a possible agenda. The themes from the sports fans' answers regarding if they have noticed other fans discussed the issues were heavily focused on words such as forced, negative and disappointed. These themes showed that the majority of fans could see the name change as something not truly accepted or understood but rather fulfilling a specific agenda.

However, the sports fans that participated in the questionnaire were more accepting of the viewpoints of the affected parties, Native Americans. When asked what the current names

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communicate, there were more themes focused on hate, racism, insensitivity, and derogatory implication. This could suggest that initially, sports fans view a potential name change as being forced upon the team rather than willingly chosen, which has seemed to be the case. However, as shown in the collected data from the participants, when sports fans were specifically asked what they believe the name communicates, they had to truly think about this question. This resulted in many of them agreeing that they could understand why the team names and symbols could come across as disrespectful and harmful towards Native Americans. Many of the participants mentioned they personally do not have a problem with the names or logos as they view the names as an honorable symbol and representation of strength. However, their responses included their understanding that as they are not Native American, they do not have the right to truly determine that.

Throughout the evaluation of previous research and the data from this study, there have seemed to be certain financial influences as a factor in deciding to change or not change a team name. A large number of participants agreed that finances do play a role in the final decisions. Many elaborated on their responses explaining that the leadership has seemed to simply succumb to pressure placed on them by the media and public eye which began to affect financial support or gain. Once there is a chance of financial loss, leadership must take action. On the other hand, there were also participants who agree that finances are a deciding factor, but they believe it influences the decision to not change a name. They expressed that a name change could potentially lose a team money because of the time and effort in rebranding. When the funds for new logos, merchandise, apparel, names, etc. are considered, this could greatly impact a team's financial situation. From either end, when deciding to change a team name or not, the leadership of the sports team must consider the financial aspects involved in the process.

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If a team has been pressured to change their name and chooses to not change it, the reasoning should be communicated to the public and media. This reasoning should be pitched in a manner that shows support for the fans and Native Americans. If a team truly researches and evaluates the effect of their name and understands it is not offensive, this should be communicated to the public. Even having Native Americans speak on the subject and explain why it is not offensive, but rather honorable, could shift the cultural views of those in opposition. This communication to the public and more specifically the sports fan can also improve how the media frames the team and the decision to change the name or not. If done correctly and communicated properly, the media can view this as honorable and positive.

After evaluating all five teams and their fan base, it seems quite clear that the fans truly do want to honor tradition and Native Americans. Their adamancy for keeping the names is rooted in their loyalty to their team and their view that the names bring history, strength, honor, and respect for Native Americans. However, as discussed above, sports fans seemed very willing to accept a name change if they know that the Native Americans are the ones who desire this change. The frustration comes when the fan base sees non-Native American individuals attempting to remove the names instead of the affected parties. In order to bring further clarification and understanding to the public, and specifically, team leadership, sports teams should better understand the best method for communicating why they would keep or change their name.

Based on the research above, it seems the sports teams should make the effort to bring in Native Americans and determine if the names are truly derogatory and seemingly racist towards them. If so, this gives the team leadership guidance in respectfully changing their team name as well as communicating the why behind it to the public, and more importantly, their fans. If, after

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meeting and learning from Native Americans, there is no need to change the name, this also must be communicated in order to avoid further political and media attention. Sports teams must understand how to communicate why the name is not offensive through their supported research from Native Americans. This seems to be the most acceptable method for communicating a name change or lack thereof to the public, sports fans, and all affected parties.

Previous research had shown that sports fans were dedicated to the team name no matter what. However, after analyzing the data of this study, it showed differently. It still showed the loyalty of the sports fans, as well as their dedication and desire to keep their name. The difference was that it did prove that many were willing for a name change if it was implemented and communicated properly. The lack of communicating the true reason for a name change has shown to be the main issue for sports fans.

Discussion of Affected Parties Findings

It can be challenging to determine if the encouragement for name changes is due to societal pressure or if there has been valid reasoning shown. This was one of the goals for the research, and the data collected from the questionnaires of the affected parties was very telling. In previous research, it was mentioned that complaints were mostly made by those without Native American heritage. The study suggested that one of the main arguments for changing these names was individuals trying to adjust to societal issues, without truly understanding why. Even the media has not seemed to portray an understanding of the impact of these team names. Most of the arguments are based on assumptions rather than information straight from the affected parties.

From the results, it seems that the affected parties understand the original intention may have been to honor their heritage, but it has not been executed appropriately, showing honor

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towards Native Americans. All of the participants in the study agreed that certain Native American sports team names were/are very derogatory towards Native Americans. While others may see the names and symbols and think Native American heritage, strength, and honor, Native Americans look at the same names and symbols, and it communicates something completely different to them.

There has been such an increase in discussion regarding the topic of team names in the sports industry and what they communicate to the fans, public, and those impacted. It seems to be a simple method to go straight to the affected parties to determine the best path for change or adjustment. However, this has not been properly executed. Through this study, the goal was to gain a perspective that had not been expanded on by receiving insight on what the names truly communicate to those influenced by them. The responses received from the affected parties gave additional insight on how they themselves, and even their friends and family, view the use of Native American names and symbols in sports teams. The majority seemed to agree that most individuals are not educated enough on the matter or have a true understanding of the culture and history of the Native American influences. Very few participants believe that the names and symbols are seen as something honorable to their culture.

If sports teams take the time to go straight to those they claim to be honoring, this could greatly impact how the teams communicate the meaning behind their name or the purpose for changing or keeping their current name. This route seems to be the best method for showing respect and honor towards Native Americans while also creating valid arguments that could be more easily accepted by the sports fans, professionals, and the media. Those who choose to keep their original team name can have more confidence and backing to what their name communicates and how it represents the entire team and culture. This could limit

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misinterpretation or inaccurate portrayal of the teams and fans within the media. This could also give the team and fans more confidence as they represent their team.

At the beginning of the study, two research questions were asked. What message is communicated through the chosen names and logos of sports teams? What are the effects of financial, political, media, and fan base influences on team name changes in the sports industry? The data received clearly shows what sports fans believe is communicated through team names and logos as well as what the affected parties (Native Americans) believe is communicated. Based on the gathered data and previous research, sports fans have a mixed view of what is communicated through Native American names and symbols within the sports industry. Most remain truly dedicated to their team while many still understand the potential impact and communication of the names towards Native Americans.

The majority of Native Americans strongly believe most of the sports teams using Native American influences should change their name out of respect for Native American heritage. The research shows strong opposition to how Native Americans are portrayed through these sports team names. Overall, the way a sports team communicates their choice to change their name or not change their name should be evaluated and adjusted. Talk to Native Americans. Understand their views on the name and determine the best route for deciding for a name change or not. Based on the given research, this understanding can help sports fans accept the decision to change a team name while giving the sports industry further insight on how to communicate their decisions. Communicating this to the fans, as well as the media, can greatly improve overall sports communication and any future changes to team names, logos, and symbols.

Theoretical Implications

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Specific results of this research showed relevancy to two specific theories, agenda-setting theory and framing theory. The previous research showed that over the years the perspectives of how sports fans view team name has changed. As media influence and social issues have increased, there have been further discussion and viewpoints regarding what sports team name communicate. The media's agenda very often becomes the public's agenda (McCombs & Ghanem, 2001). The study utilized the agenda-setting theory as well as framing theory to guide the understanding of the perspectives of sports fans and affected parties in relation to media influence on team name changes.

As shown through the gathered research, multiple sports fans responded that they do believe certain social, financial, and political influences have been persuasive in what is portrayed regarding team name changes. As mentioned, many participants expressed they would want to hear from Native Americans themselves and not just the media and teams. The responses and research showed sports fans do believe there are influences from how the information is presented in the media. Agenda-setting and framing bring further understanding to media impact on the public, validating the use of these theories. There have often been two sides to the use of Native American names and symbol, those that view the use of Native American influences as representing bravery and honor and those that view it as representing disrespect and negative (Billings & Black, 2018). These opposing views often depend on how the information is framed, shown in various responses from both sports fans and players.

Limitations of the Study

No prior research exploring what sports team names communicate, especially through the lens of the sports fans and affected parties, could be found. This being so, this study offers a unique perspective and additional insight towards a topic that has become extremely relevant.

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The data collected through the research contributes scholarly research that can be evaluated by multiple sports teams, professionals, and even media outlets. However, this study still comes with limitations.

Due to the time constraint from waiting for the International Review Board's approval and certain procedures for contacting tribal members, the amount of time to collect respondents for the questionnaires for the affected parties was limited. This resulted in answers from a limited group of Native Americans rather than more intensive results. Because studies such as this have not been thoroughly conducted previously, further research expanding the views of sport team professionals, fans, and the affected parties could be beneficial to the topic.

Because of the desired results and direction of this research, the researcher did not explore each individual team name and how the affected parties have responded to this. The five teams were grouped together for the sake of time and more concise questions were asked. Developing specified questions for each individual team and gaining insight on how Native Americans view each team name rather than the team names overall, could be relevant in further contributions.

Recommendations for Future Research

It is a desire that this research has been a solid beginning and an inspiration for others to further explore the topic and gain additional perspectives that could bring even more clarity to the impact team names communicate within the sports industry. This topic has only been touched on, leaving room for further research on the topic. Additional research can be conducted specifically focusing on sports professionals and players and how they have viewed the impact of team name changes in the sports industry as well as what they believe the names communicate.

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This could offer further insight on how the professionals, fans, and affected parties differ or agree on the specifics of team name changes and what it communicates.

Future studies should include a greater number of responses from the Native American communities. With the knowledge gained during this study, it is now understood that it is an extensive process and substantial time will need to be devoted to this effort in future studies.

While the media influence was also touched on with this study, further evaluation and even reaching out to media personnel could be insightful. Truly evaluating engaging responses from all parties impacted by or influencing these team names and what they communicate could greatly improve or change the impact of team names and name changes in the sports industry. This could ultimately continue to change sports communication overall and be a direction for how sports teams can communicate the reasoning behind their names or the reasoning behind the name change to the public and more importantly their fans.

Conclusion

The results of this study provided further clarity and insight on sports team names and gave a better understanding of the communication involved. The research contributed to understanding what the chosen names and symbols communicate to the fans and the affected parties and how this has influenced or been influenced by political, financial, or media agenda.

This research shows how a team should communicate a team name change or potential change, especially to the fans and through the media. There can be ways to change the team's name and logo, or not change them, while communicating the reason in a manner that the fans and media would accept and even agree with. Once this is evaluated and understood by sports fans and professionals there should be a less negative connotation to the process. From the

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results of this study, the research questions have been answered, and a direction for improving what a team name or name change communicates is shown.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Letter

Influence of Sports Team Name Changes – Recruitment Letter

Dear Recipient:

I am a graduate student in the School of Communication and the Arts at Liberty University, and I am conducting research for my master's thesis. The purpose of my research is to evaluate the effects of financial, political, and fan base changes on team name changes in the sports industry and what the chosen team names and logos communicate to the public. The research can provide new contributions to an area of sports communication that has previously been overlooked. It can also provide teams an idea of how to communicate future name changes to their fans and the public.

The evaluated teams will be the Washington Redskins (Washington Football Team), Chicago Blackhawks, Cleveland Indians, Atlanta Braves, and Kansas City Chiefs. In order to participate, you must be a sport professional or player within one of these teams, a sports fan of one of these teams, or an impacted party (Native Americans) of one of these teams. Participants must be 18 years of age or older. Participants, if willing, will be asked to answer seven to eight open-ended questions. This questionnaire will take about 15-20 minutes to complete. Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal identifying information will be collected.

If you would like to participate or have any questions, please contact me at 702.773.2111 or bdlewis5@liberty.edu. Once you're eligible to participate, I will email you a link to the survey that coincides with your role (e.g., sports professional or player, sports fan, or Native American).

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A consent document is provided as the first page of the questionnaire. The consent document contains additional information about my research, but you will not need to sign and return it.

Sincerely,

Bridget Lewis

Graduate Student Assistant

bdlewis5@liberty.edu

702.773.2111

Appendix B

Consent Form

Influence of Sports Team Name Changes – Consent Form

Project: Master's Thesis

Principal Investigator: Bridget Lewis, Graduate Student, Liberty University

Invitation to be part of a research study

You are invited to participate in a research study. The evaluated teams will be the Washington Redskins (Washington Football Team), Chicago Blackhawks, Cleveland Indians, Atlanta Braves, and Kansas City Chiefs. In order to participate, you must be a sport player or professional within one of these teams, a sports fan of one of these teams, or an impacted party (Native American) of one of these teams. You must also be 18 years of age or older. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effects of financial, political, and fan base changes on team name changes in the sports industry and what the chosen team names and logos communicate to the public. I will be evaluating the effect of team name changes or potential changes by the Washington Redskins, Chicago Blackhawks, Cleveland Indians, Atlanta Braves, and Kansas City Chiefs.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will send you an online questionnaire with seven to eight open-ended questions for you to respond to. Answering the questions should take anywhere from 15-20 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. The benefit of this research is that it can provide new contributions to an area of sports communication that has previously been overlooked. It can also provide teams with an idea of the effect of their name on the public and how to communicate future name changes to their fans and the public.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Participant responses will be anonymous. Data will be stored on a password-locked device and may be used for future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you wish to withdraw from the study, you do not need to submit your responses and you can exit the questionnaire and close your internet browser. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study prior to submitting the questionnaire.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Bridget Lewis. If you have any questions you are encouraged to contact her at 702.773.2111 or bdlewis5@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Marie Mallory, at mmallory13@liberty.edu.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, please contact the Intuitional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Your consent

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You can print a copy of the document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher/study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. By taking the online questionnaire, I consent to participate in the study.

Appendix C

Questionnaire for Sport Fans

(Fans of teams that have already changed their name)

Please answer the following questions.

1. Has the team name change influenced your support of the team?
2. If the team did not change their name, would your support of the team change?
3. Do you believe the name change was due to financial reasons?
4. Have you noticed other fans discussing or reacting to the name change?
5. What do you think the name communicated before?
6. What do you think the current name or potential name change communicates?

Questionnaire for Sport Fans

(Fans of teams that are being encouraged to change their name)

Please answer the following questions.

1. Has the potential for a team name change influenced your support of the team?
2. Will your support of the team change if the team does change their name?
3. Will your support of the team change if the team does not change their name?
4. Do you believe financial reasons will be a factor in deciding to change the name?
5. Have you noticed other fans discussing or reacting to the potential name change?
6. What do you think the current name communicates?
7. What do you think a name change would communicate?

Team Professionals or Players

1. How have the fans changed pre- and post-name change?

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2. Before the name change did you notice any tension related to the name? What about after the change?
3. Do you believe the name change was due to financial reasons?
4. Have others involved with the team mentioned the conflict among the name change?
5. Did the owners feel media pressure to change the team name?
6. What do you think the name communicated before?
7. What do you think the current name communicates?

Questionnaire for Affected Parties

Please answer the following questions.

1. How have you viewed the use of Native American names, logos, and symbols by sports teams?
2. Do you hope other teams follow suit and remove all Native American references from sports teams?
3. Some teams claim their name is a sign of honor and respect for the traditions and values of Native American culture. Do you agree with this?
4. There have been a couple of teams that have named their teams after influential Native Americans. Do you think this should be changed?
5. What do you think the names communicate?
6. What do you think a potential name change would communicate?
7. Do you think a name change was or is needed? Why or why not?

Questionnaire for Team Professionals or Players

(Teams that have already changed their name)

Please answer the following questions.

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8. How have the fans changed pre and post name change?
9. Before the name change, did you notice any tension related to the name? What about after the change?
10. Do you believe the name change was due to financial reasons?
11. Have others involved with the team mentioned the conflict regarding the name change?
12. Did the owners feel media pressure to change the team name?
13. What do you think the name communicated before?
14. What do you think the current name communicates?

Interview Questions for Team Professionals or Players

(Teams who are being encouraged to change their name)

Please answer the following questions.

1. How have the fans reacted to a potential name change?
2. Have you noticed any tension related to the name?
3. Do you believe the name may be changed for financial reasons?
4. Have others involved with the team mentioned the conflict regarding the potential name change?
5. Have the owners felt media pressure to change the team name?
6. What do you think the current name communicates?
7. What do you think a name change would communicate?