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The rebranding of the Brooklyn Nets : a discourse analysis

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THE REBRANDING OF THE BROOKLYN NETS: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Mass Communication

In

The Manship School of Mass Communication

by

Michael Wunderlich
B.A., University of South Carolina, 2011
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Steve Wunderlich and Debbie Klopp. It is because of your guidance and encouragement that I am where I am today and without both of you being my inspiration to fight for my spot in life, I would never have dreamt of doing what I've done or what I will do. I owe you both everything and do what I do each day to make you proud.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the rebranding of the Brooklyn Nets. A discourse analysis was conducted that observed messages generated by the Brooklyn Nets, selected media sources and fans regarding a number of elements relating to the Brooklyn Nets' rebrand.

Branding is important to businesses and building brand equity and brand associations with the external public is important for businesses looking to succeed in a profit driven world. This is no different for professional sports franchises who also focus on building brand equity and brand associations with sports fans and other members of the general public. By first examining the methods taken and messages generated by the Brooklyn Nets regarding their rebrand and then examining the messages and discourse generated by the media and fans regarding the Nets' rebrand, this thesis was able to produce a number of best practices for sport franchises who may be looking to rebrand in the future.

Findings show that a rebranding team should place an emphasis on developing a quality product over connecting the product to noteworthy individuals. Additionally, rebranding organizations would be wise to consult individuals experienced with sport rebranding rather than enlisting the services of less qualified but more famous individuals. Rebranding organizations should also not be afraid of taking a risk (when appropriate) when developing their visual brand. Authenticity and actions consistent with an organization's own messages are important to establishing strong brand equity and brand associations. Organizations might choose to emphasize their impact in the stadium community, their potential success in that community and finally, treat employees, players and fans in a professional manor consistent with team messages.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

On April 30, 2012, the New Jersey Nets became the Brooklyn Nets. The franchise unveiled its new visual identity, complete with team colors and logo. After spending the past 35 years in New Jersey as the National Basketball Association's (NBA) New Jersey Nets, the franchise began the 2012 season in a new state, a new arena, with (since 2010) a new ownership team in Russian billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov, Bruce Ratner and rapper Sean "Jay-Z" Carter, with newly acquired players and new uniforms and logos. The New Jersey Nets rebranded themselves as the Brooklyn Nets.

The franchise's rebrand signified a new start of sorts for the organization and served to show the significance that brands can hold in the world of sports. Branding is studied in relation to mass communication and can be linked to advertising. As de Chernatony (2006) notes, advertising has been "a particularly powerful way of communicating a brand's functional values, as well as building and communicating its emotional values" (p. 6). Additionally, de Chernatony (2006) writes that the "theory of brand-building is couched within marketing theory" (p. 5). Branding utilizes aspects of public relations, visual and graphic design, strategic communication and advertising. These aspects of mass communication contribute to how brands communicate their distinct functional superiority and emotional value with their customer base (de Chernatony, 2006).

It is not uncommon for professional sports franchises and even collegiate and high school sports programs to rebrand after a period of time. Attempting to gain fan and player interest, changes in geographic location, changes in ownership and changes in player personnel are only a few reasons why teams may choose to rebrand.

The Oklahoma City Thunder of the NBA, the Miami Marlins of Major League Baseball (MLB) and the Winnipeg Jets of the National Hockey League (NHL) are examples of other sports franchises that have recently changed geographic locations and rebranded their franchises in the process (SportsLogos.net). Teams that rebrand do not always have to change geographic locations as a part of or to prompt a rebrand. The Dallas Mavericks, Atlanta Hawks and Charlotte Bobcats are all examples of NBA franchises that have, in the past two decades, rebranded while remaining in the same city (SportsLogos.net).

The Nets are now in New York, competing for fans with another team in the same city, the New York Knicks. The 2012-2013 NBA season marks the first time there will be two NBA franchises in New York since 1977 when the Nets moved from New York to New Jersey. Their inaugural season in the Barclays Center in Brooklyn began a new era for a team looking at becoming the main basketball attraction in a city that hasn't had an NBA championship since the 1972/73 New York Knicks. While the Nets possess an existing franchise history, they took steps to rebrand themselves in light of their new home.

Objectives

This thesis observed and analyzed how the Brooklyn Nets communicated their rebranding to the public and media. This thesis also observed and analyzed the nature of the messages communicated by the media in regard to the Brooklyn Nets' rebranding. Finally this thesis looked at what kinds of messages were generated by fans in regard to the Brooklyn Nets' rebranding. Ultimately this thesis discusses the themes that emerged during the Brooklyn Nets' rebranding. These objectives were met by looking at the

messages communicated by the Brooklyn Nets, the media generated by the media and the discourse amongst the fans regarding the rebranding.

Significance

Effective brand management and rebranding may have a positive financial impact for sport franchises. In 2011, Forbes.com listed the Nets overall franchise value at \$312 million dollars. In January of 2012, Forbes.com listed the Nets overall value at \$357 million dollars. The increase in overall franchise value saw the Nets move from 21st in NBA franchise value rankings to 14th. This was all prior to the actual unveiling of the Nets' new visual identity. The move from the New Jersey market to the New York market resulted in a \$12 million dollar increase in franchise value from 2011 to 2012. Overall brand value increased from \$28 million dollars in 2011 to \$33 million dollars in early 2012 with the imminent move and subsequent rebranding of the franchise. These financial figures alone highlight the significance that rebranding, or even just the notion of franchise rebranding, can have on the bottom line.

As Stuart and Muzellec (2004) noted, it is difficult to measure the success of a rebranding and "each corporate rebranding should ideally be evaluated with regards to its initial goals" (p. 479). It is with this thought in mind, the approach and goals of the Nets' rebranding, that this study is important. This study is significant because it observes the messages created by the Nets, the media and the fan discourse regarding the franchise rebrand. Furthermore, this study is significant to the field of mass communication in that it analyzes the types of messages created and communications practices undertaken in the Nets' rebranding and their outcomes and consequences. Allen and Simmons (2003) noted the value of evaluating brands and a brand's elements as they wrote, "when auditing an

evolving or merging brand, decoding these elements leads to understanding which elements are effective, which need to be altered or culled and what else needs to be developed” (p. 135).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Branding

In order to understand the Nets' approaches to rebranding, we must first understand what a brand is and the function of branding. A brand can be defined as "manufacturers' or service providers' coordinated use of design, packaging, graphics, logos, advertising, promotion, public relations, marketing, distribution, pricing, communications, and other strategies to create a durable identity and loyalty with their consumers" (Desai & Waller, 2011, p. 1425). Aaker (1991) defined a brand as a

"distinguishing name and/or symbol (such as a logo, trademark, or package design) intended to identify the goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods or services from those of competitors" (p. 7).

Despite branding research still being a relatively new concept in regard to mass media research, brands themselves have been present throughout history. Aaker (1991) wrote that "there is evidence that even in ancient history names were put on such goods as bricks in order to identify their maker" (p. 7). Historically, brands were used to show the consumer "who the maker was and prevented the substitution of cheaper products" (Aaker, 1991, p. 7). Branding has become engrained in modern marketing and research now focuses on how to "identify and develop bases of brand differentiation" (Aaker, 1991, p. 7). Aaker (1991) wrote that these brand differentiations or associations are created through "using product attributes, names, packages, distribution strategies and advertising" (p. 7, 8). Noting that brands now serve to differentiate products, services and companies from one another, de Chernatony and McDonald (2003) wrote that a *successful* brand is "an identifiable product, service, person or place, augmented in such a

way that the buyer or user perceives relevant, unique, sustainable added values match their needs most closely” (p. 26).

The importance and usefulness of brands cannot be overlooked. de Chernatony (2006) wrote that “brands are powerful entities because they blend functional, performance-based values with emotional values” (p. 5). Brands are not limited to being one aspect and de Chernatony (2006) wrote that “brands are multifaceted concepts, and to talk about ‘a brand’ sometimes overlooks the richness of this concept” (p. 11). de Chernatony (2006) described how a brand has elements that are visible to the customer such as a logo and name. There are also those elements of a brand that cannot be immediately recognized or seen, but are still part of what makes up a brand. de Chernatony (2006) listed the elements of “values,” “intellect,” and “culture,” (p. 11) as brand elements that are not immediately identifiable. Integrating these visible and unseen elements into a cohesive brand requires careful coordination and planning. de Chernatony (2006) wrote that “it is only by taking a planned perspective that the roles of those diverse domains can be integrated to ensure the brand is a holistic entity, whereby the claims implicit in the visible components are backed by the invisible systems” (p. 12).

Sports Branding

Sports teams as brands can be further defined as “a name, a word, a sign, a symbol, a drawing, or a combination of these, which aims at identifying the goods and services of a company and differentiates them from the competitors” (Richelieu, Lopez and Desbordes, 2008, p. 30). Ultimately, a sports franchise aims to change the way consumers, in this study, fans, behave toward and perceive the team. This may involve

seasonal attendance figures, merchandise revenue and fan participation at team events (Fortunato, 2008).

Executives and owners of sports teams are “beginning to view their teams, leagues, and properties as ‘brands’ to be managed” (Gladden & Funk, 2002, p. 54). Sports teams today can be “viewed as true ‘products’,” (Richelieu, Lopez & Desbordes, 2008, p. 30). The brand and being a brand has become one of the most important assets a sports team has (Richelieu, Lopez & Desbordes, 2008).

A part of a sports team brand is the “sport product” which is defined as “any form of physical activity that pits one’s talents against an opponents” (Brooks, 1994, p. 88).

When thinking about sport teams,

“the product is the actual game itself between two teams. The team sport product can be consumed by people in-person in a stadium or arena, through the various forms of media available today (television, radio, and the Internet) and after it is staged as people read newspaper accounts and watch highlights of their favorite team’s games” (Gladden, Funk, 2004, p. 56).

Rebranding

There are various components of sport brand that must be understood in order to gain a complete understanding of what a sport brand actually is and how sport teams like the Nets can create, manage and use their brand successfully. Rebranding, visual identity, brand equity, brand association and brand loyalty are all components of sport brand that must be discussed. Stuart and Muzellec (2004) wrote that rebranding takes places when a brand is “*reborn*” (p. 473). They stated that rebranding may encounter evolutionary change, or revolutionary change. Revolutionary change occurs when franchises incorporate change with their name, logo and slogan (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004).

Evolutionary change only occurs when changes are made to the logo or slogan (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004).

There are multiple reasons that a corporation or franchise may choose to rebrand. The motivations behind rebranding a company or franchise may stem from the circumstances leading to the decision for rebranding (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004). The current brand image may be outdated, or the company or franchise may wish to take a new focus or direction (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004). In the case of the Nets, the location and relatively recent ownership change signify an opportunity for the franchise to take a new direction. The change in geographic location instantly outdates the previous team name, allowing the opportunity to take any number of approaches to rebranding.

Brand Association

Brand associations are anything a consumer remembers about a specific brand and can be operationalized as “those categories of product attributes, product benefits, and attitudes towards a product” (Aaker, 1991, p. 56). Gladden and Lachowitz (2002) defined product attributes as “the features of a particular brand;” product benefits to “represent the meaning and value consumers attach to a product;” and attitudes as “the consumer’s overall evaluation of the brand, often depending on the strength and favorability of the attributes and benefits provided by the brand” (p. 318). Brand associations “work to form a brand’s image” (Apostolopoulou & Biggers, 2010, p. 232). Brand image can be defined as “the sum of beliefs, attitudes, and impressions that a person or group has of an object. The object may be a company, product, brand, place or person. The impressions may be true or false, real or imagined” (Barich & Kotler, 1991, p. 95).

Ross, James and Vargas (2006) developed a 13-item scale designed to measure brand associations called the Team Brand Association Scale. The scale “was developed by asking for associations that individuals hold regarding their favorite sports team” (Ross, James & Vargas, 2006, p. 275). The scale “can aid sport management professionals in managing their brands in a variety of ways in order to assist in the creation of favorable associations to attract or retain consumers” (Ross, James & Vargas, 2006, p. 277). The scale lists 13 factors but only four will be observed for this thesis. Non-player personnel, stadium community, brand mark and organizational attributes are items that will be observed as part of the overall content analysis.

These terms are defined as: “Nonplayer personnel: Thoughts such as individuals as coaches of the team, the team management, and the owners of the team. Stadium community: Thoughts of the stadium in which their favorite professional team calls ‘home’; community and area surrounding the stadium or arena in which the team plays its games. Brand mark: Thoughts regarding the identifying mark such as the logo, symbol, and the colors. Organizational attributes: Thoughts regarding specific attributes that characterize the sport organization as a whole; organization’s loyalty to fans, management actions, and brand personality. (Ross, James & Vargas, 2006, p. 270).

Brand Equity

Brand equity refers to “the basic idea that a product’s value to consumers, the trade and the firm, is somehow enhanced when it is associated or identified over time with a set of unique elements that define the brand concept” (Erdem et al., 1999, p. 302). Brand equity can be further defined as a number of factors connected to a brand that “add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that

firm's customers" (Aaker, 1991, p. 15). A brand has high equity levels when consumers are highly aware of the brand. The brand becomes more recognizable with higher levels of consumer awareness (Aaker, 1991). Brands also have high equity levels when the perception of the brand quality is positive and when consumers have positive reactions and interactions toward the brand (Aaker, 1991). Brand loyalty is another result of high brand equity (Aaker, 1991). Brand equity is important because consumers who think the product has a "high level of brand equity are more likely to be satisfied with the brand. The satisfied consumers will, in turn, become brand loyal or repeat purchasers" (Shank, 2005, p. 229).

Aaker (1991) listed five assets or liabilities "on which brand equity is based" (p. 16). They are: "1. Brand loyalty, 2. Name awareness, 3. Perceived quality, 4. Brand associations in addition to perceived quality 5. Other proprietary brand assets – patents, trademarks, channel relationships, etc." (p. 16). The Nets recent rebranding has seen them alter both their name and logo. Aaker writes that "if the brand's name or symbol should change, some or all of the assets or liabilities could be affected and even lost, although some might be shifted to a new name and symbol" (p. 16).

Sports franchises are ultimately businesses. Successful and profitable businesses often have prominent and well-managed brands and visual identities. The successful development and use of a sport franchise's brand may be financially motivated. Fortunato (2008) lists television ratings, event attendance and licensed merchandise sales as the "audience behaviors that a sports league carefully monitors because they have a direct impact on its economics" (p. 367). Aaker (1991) wrote that "brand equity assets such as name awareness, perceived quality, associations, and loyalty all have the potential to

provide a brand with a price premium” (p. 22). For a sports team like the Nets, this may mean being able to charge more for game tickets, more for stadium concessions and more for stadium parking, thus increasing overall revenue and profits.

Brand Loyalty

Lin and Lin (2008) asserted that brand loyalty is actually “one component of brand equity” (p. 69). Aaker (1991) wrote that “brand loyalty of the customer base is often the core of a brand’s equity” (p. 39). Aaker (1991) defined brand loyalty as “a measure of the attachment that a customer has to a brand. It reflects how likely a customer will be to switch to another brand, especially when that brand makes a change, either in price or in product features” (p. 39).

Brand loyalty in the sport brand sense primarily deals with the degree to which fans identify with a particular team (Lin & Lin, 2008). Fortunato (2008) asserted that “brand loyalty and repeat consumer purchase behavior thus serve as the ultimate goals of the branding process” (p. 367). Furthermore, cultivating and harnessing brand equity “helps produce the desired loyalty by giving a feeling to the consumer that the products from that company are better than those from a more generic competitor” (Fortunato, 2008, p. 367). In the case of sport branding, fans may be the targeted public, and the products of the company may be the team, team performance, team merchandise, players and community and media presence.

Visual Identity

Bauer, Sauer and Schmitt (2005) wrote that “sport is becoming increasingly commercialized and sport entities have become more professional over the years” (p. 496). Balmer (2008) wrote that the visual identity of a corporation is that “organisation’s

symbols” (p. 883) and that those symbols are “invested with commercial, economic and emotional value (p. 883). Allen and Simmons (2003) asserted that visual identity “is a component in branding – the part you see, obviously. As such it is an important part because what you see is more likely to influence you than what you are told or what you comprehend from an 80-deck slide presentation” (p. 113).

A franchise or corporation’s visual identity may consist of elements such as “name, logo, colour palette, font type” (van den Bosch, Elving & de Jong, p. 871). Allen and Simmons (2003) wrote that a visual identity “comprises the graphic components that together provide a system for identifying and representing a brand” (p. 114). Allen and Simmons list “Logotypes, Symbols, Colours, Typefaces,” as these basic elements (p. 114).

Another useful definition can be found with the concept of Corporate Visual Identity (CVI) which van den Bosch, Elving and de Jong (2006) defined as the “visual common thread that runs through the way an organization expresses itself” (p. 871). This definition is especially useful in this study because the Nets visual rebranding is not just limited to the team uniforms or logo. Sports franchises push their visual identities and subsequently their brands through non-athletic elements like marketing, merchandise, team communications and team-related promotional events. Brands are not limited only to these items. Visual identity and CVI play a large role in branding and rebranding, and consistency in implementing and managing must be emphasized. van den Bosch, Elving and de Jong (2006) wrote that “it is important to reach a considerable degree of consistency in the way a CVI is applied” (p. 871). Visual identity consistency is important because it provides the franchise or corporation with a degree of

recognisability (van den Bosch, Elving and de Jong, 2006). This consistency allows franchises or corporations to use their visual identity in a number of ways like applying it to “stationary, printed matter (such as brochures and leaflets), advertisements, websites, vehicles, buildings, interiors and corporate clothing” (van den Bosch, Elving and de Jong, 2006, p. 871).

There are different elements that make up a brand’s visual identity. de Chernatony (2006) wrote that a trademark is “any sign capable of being represented graphically that is capable of distinguishing one organization’s goods or services from another’s” (p. 13). Ross, James and Vargas (2006) listed the item “brand symbol” (p. 270) in their *Team Brand Association Scale*. The scale is intended to “measure sport team brand associations” (Ross, James & Vargas, 2006, p. 260). The “brand symbol” item is defined as “thoughts regarding the identifying mark such as the logo, symbol, and the colors” (Ross, James & Vargas, 2006, p. 260). Bauer, Sauer and Schmitt (2005) classified the logo as a non-athletic characteristic of the brand.

Verbal Identity

Brands develop and employ visual identities to distinguish themselves from one another, but they are not only limited to logos and colors. Allen and Simmons (2003) wrote that verbal identity is “another recent term that was coined to make it clear that identity is also expressed through words and language, whether we mean it to be or not,” (p. 114, 115).

The basic elements of a verbal identity may comprise of

“- The name

- A naming system for products, sub-brands and groups
- A strapline
- Tone of voice principles
- The use of stories” (Allen & Simmons, 2003, p. 115).

Including verbal identity is imperative in relation to understanding successful brands.

Allen and Simmons (2003) wrote, “Combining the visual and the verbal provides the means to make brands that really work” (p. 115). Verbal identity, along with visual identity, will have an effect on a brand even if it is unintentional. Allen and Simmons (2003) explained that they “exist and will make a statement even if brand owners choose to ignore them. When not controlled, they can do damage, so it is better to lock them firmly into the brand management of a business” (p. 126). Corporations that recognize the value of their verbal identity (unintentional or intentional) may be more controlled in their company language. Tight control over verbal identity does offer a drawback as “it also means that a brand’s own language does not stray far outside those narrow borders” (Allen & Simmons, 2003, p. 124). An effectively managed verbal identity further strengthens and distinguishes a company’s brand. Wilson (2012) wrote that when “created appropriately, these elements are developed by creative design agencies as a cascading series or toolkit to add meaning, recognition and resonance” (p. 134, 135).

Team Identity

Team identity is another concept that is linked to brand loyalty. The community surrounding a team may contribute to the brand and culture of the team and help fans

identify with that particular team. Heere and James (2007) claimed that “people identify not only with a team but also the community a team represents” (p. 320). For example, Pittsburgh is commonly referred to as “steel town” and the football team, the Pittsburgh Steelers and their fans, have garnered the perception of being a blue collar and tough bunch. The Terrible Towel is a common sight at Steeler home games. The Los Angeles Lakers play in a city known for glitz and glamour in relation to Hollywood and during televised Lakers games, it is not uncommon to see the cameras find celebrities (eg. Jack Nicholson, Justin Timberlake, Denzel Washington) in the stands. Because of their high-profile fans and the city’s reputation for beautiful scenery (geographical and biological) the Lakers are known as one the most high profile and most glamorous franchises in professional sports. The New Orleans Saints are cemented into the unique culture of the city of New Orleans as Lawrence (2006) wrote “New Orleans is the French Quarter and home to fine cuisine, Mardi Gras and musical innovation, second lines, steamboats, and the Saints” (p. 94).

In looking at brand loyalty and the Brooklyn Nets, the team is now situated in a city that presents various aspects that may be embraced and emphasized in attempts of establishing team and fan identity and ensuring a good chance for brand loyalty. A 2012 Amsterdam News article noted that “a prime goal is to attract a solid new fan base and turn a large number of Knicks fans in Brooklyn into Nets fans” (Carter, 2012, p. 15).

Fan Identity

At this point, it is useful to develop an understanding of fan identity and how it is related to and may possibly influence brand loyalty. Jacobson (2003) asserted that fan identity is influenced on the interpersonal or network level and symbolic level. The

Interpersonal/Network Level of Identity discusses how individuals develop fandom and loyalty and associations to brands and therefore teams, through socialization. Jacobson (2003) further stated that “it is not at all unreasonable to assume that individuals become fans through socialization, primarily by friends and family” (p. 7). This aspect of socialization and how it contributes to fandom in an individual differs between genders. Wann and colleagues (1993) noted that a 1976 study by McPherson revealed that “males were most often influenced by their peers, followed by family and school” (p. 24). In regard to females, “family had the greatest influence, followed closely by peer groups. The community was also found to have a significant impact on the socialization of females, but to a lesser degree than family and peers” (Wann et al., 1993 p. 24, 25). Jacobson (2003) noted that “individuals could become fans as a way to achieve group membership or be a part of a collective unit” (p. 7). One benefit of becoming a group member or member of a collective unit is the “sense of belonging that arises with group identification” (Jacobson, 2003).

Fan identity is also influenced on the symbolic level. Symbolic factors can be “the team’s specific and unique factors such as the team’s name, logo, color, and fight song” (Jacobson, 2003, p. 7). The Nets’ new logo and visual identity pay homage to the New York subway system with black and white colors and their new “RollSign” typeface used in their logo is reminiscent of the signage seen in on subway cars and in subway stations in New York City. Jacobson also notes that fans relate to a team through “Social Identity Theory processes known as BIRGing (basking in reflected glory) and CORFing (cutting off reflected failures)” (Jacobson, 2003, p. 8). BIRGing is defined as “the tendency of individuals to publicize their connection with successful others, when they have not

contributed to the other's success" (Jacobson, 2003, p. 8). BIRGing can be seen by observing fans associating more heavily with a team that is experiencing success. This type of action is commonly called "bandwagoning." CORFing differs from BIRGing in that CORFing refers to "the tendency of others to avoid being connected to unsuccessful others" (Jacobson, 2003, p. 8). Jacobson (2003) argues that BIRGing and CORFing are used to boost self-esteem (p. 8).

Wann and colleagues (1993) seem to confirm Jacobson's self-esteem notion as they list self-esteem as one of eight (along with group affiliation, family, aesthetic, economic, eustress, escape and entertainment) most common motives for being a sports fan. They describe self-esteem as when an "individual is motivated to participate in sport as a fan because it provides an opportunity to feel better about himself or herself" (Wann et al, 1993, p. 31).

Based on the thesis objectives and review of the literature, this thesis attempted to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How did the Brooklyn Nets communicate their rebrand through their official public statements?

RQ2: How did the media respond?

RQ3: How did the fans respond?

By answering these questions, this thesis should be able to highlight the areas of the Brooklyn Nets' rebranding that can be seen as most effective. Furthermore, this thesis will look to contribute a list of best practices that organizations can reference when implementing their own rebrand.

CHAPTER 3 METHOD

This study observed and analyzed the messages communicated by the Brooklyn Nets via their official communications media. This study also analyzed media messages and fan messages generated by selected sources regarding the Brooklyn Nets' rebranding.

This thesis looked at the discourse between the time period of April 1 and May 30, 2012 regarding the rebrand of the Brooklyn Nets. This time period was selected because it allowed for the inclusion of messages leading up to and following the Nets' official unveiling of their new team brand on April 30, 2012. The thesis attempted to observe three aspects in relation to the Brooklyn Nets' rebrand: the messages produced exclusively by the Brooklyn Nets, the media messages produced by the selected sources for observation and messages generated by fans in reaction to the team's rebranding. In this way, this thesis provides a complete overview of the rebranding of the Brooklyn Nets from a variety of perspectives and concludes in highlighting the effective rebranding points and the points that may need to be further addressed by the Brooklyn Nets.

This thesis conducted a discourse analysis as the method of data collection. Van Dijk (1993) wrote that a critical discourse analysis (CDA) "requires true multidisciplinary, and an account of intricate relationships between text, talk, social cognition, power, society, and culture" (p. 5). Filliettaz and Roulet (2002) wrote, "the study of discourse consists of analysing the traces left by such communicative practices (audio or video tapes, texts) by means of various semiotic artifacts such as transcriptions or notes" (p. 370).

The *Counseling & Psychotherapy Research* journal described a discourse analysis as a method "used to understand a wide range of texts including natural speech,

professional documentation, political rhetoric, interview or focus group material, internet communication, journals and broadcast media” (p. 1). Zellig Harris (1952) wrote that discourse analysis “is formal, depending only on the occurrence of morphemes as distinguishable elements; it does not depend upon the analyst’s knowledge of the particular meaning of each morpheme” (p. 1). Morphemes are defined as “the minimal linguistic units with a lexical or grammatical meaning” (Booij, p. 8, 9, 2005). For example, the word *buyer* contains two morphemes: “*buy*, and *-er*. The verbal morpheme *buy* is called a free or lexical morpheme, because it can occur as a word by itself, whereas *-er* is an affix (hence a bound morpheme that cannot function as a word on its own)” (Booij, p. 9, 2005).

Claims and messages directed toward the five specified categories taken from Ross, James and Vargas’ (2006) Team Brand Association Scale were analyzed for favorable or unfavorable opinions or portrayals of the team’s rebrand. A majority of articles created in early April addressed the Nets’ final season in New Jersey and had little to do with their eventual rebranding. Articles that did not address categories listed from the Team Brand Association Scale were omitted from analysis. Game summaries were the most frequently omitted articles as they summarized the game and player statistics.

This study analyzed the coverage, reaction and opinions from media outlets regarding the rebranding of the Brooklyn Nets. The analyzed media content came from online newspaper and website sources that dedicated their coverage to sports as well as more specific themed outlets that may focus on but are not limited to economics of branding, visual design of the franchise and communications practices of the franchise.

This discourse analysis observed the approaches and steps the Brooklyn Nets took to rebrand themselves as a franchise, what the media wrote about the new Brooklyn Nets brand and how the Brooklyn Nets themselves have framed their brand through their own official communications. Additionally, this thesis looked at fan response to the Nets' rebrand and their reactions to the franchise's transition from the New Jersey Nets to the Brooklyn Nets.

Official team communications

Brooklyn Nets news releases and Brooklyn Nets social media (Brooklyn Nets Facebook page) were included in data analysis. These official team communications served as the source for what the Brooklyn Nets said about their rebrand and what types of messages they were putting out from a media communications standpoint. Every single news release in the determined time period was gathered and analyzed. A total of 41 releases and posts from the Nets' official website and official Facebook page were gathered for analysis. These releases from the Nets' website and posts from their Facebook page were gathered from the time period of April 1 to May 30, 2012. Every single release and post falling within this range was collected. Releases and posts were found via the official Nets website's archive page and by scrolling to previous posts on their official Facebook.

Media Outlets: Sport media websites and blogs

ESPN.com is a news organization that solely aims to cover sports. Game summaries and coverage are common items, but commentary regarding various topics in the realm of sports are also covered. Articles were gathered by utilizing a keyword search on ESPN's article archives. The term used was "Brooklyn Nets," and the time period

specified was for articles between April 1, 2012 and May 30, 2012. A total of 133 ESPN articles were gathered and analyzed.

NetsDaily is a blog that provides a daily account of the happenings of the Nets franchise. Multiple articles are produced per day and consist of various topics, including the Nets' rebrand. A total of 41 NetsDaily articles were gathered for analysis.

UniWatch is a blog that specializes in the aesthetic evaluation of sports teams. Each season, the blog writers, lead by Paul Lukas, produce a seasonal preview for each sport league. The blog features a daily news ticker that lists mentionings and photos of uniform changes and oddities. The blog provides evaluations and critiques of uniforms and logos and can be incredibly detailed, getting down to the color of shoelaces worn by a specific athlete and if those shoelaces match the rest of the team's shoelaces. A total of two articles were gathered for analysis.

GraphicDesign.com functions much in the same way UniWatch does in that it provides commentary regarding the aesthetics of sport. This website also features a detailed analysis of the Brooklyn Nets' visual rebrand as well as breakdowns of successful and unsuccessful sports logos throughout sport history. These two blog services proved useful because they primarily address the visual identity aspect of rebranding and how that relates to fans and how fans identify with the team. This content provides both analysis and opinion and provides this thesis study with useful data to observe. A total of one article was gathered from GraphicDesign for analysis.

Media Outlets: Newspaper Websites

Articles were gathered from newspaper websites by searching for the term "Brooklyn Nets" within website archives. Articles within the specific time period of

April 1 through May 30 of 2012 were collected for analysis. It is important to note, however, that selected articles taken from USA Today and the New York Times appeared outside of the specified time period for articles to be collected from. This was done primarily to include these sources for analysis as they were considered to be valuable to the study because of their regional and national coverage of sports.

The New York Times is the third largest newspaper in the United States, behind only the Wall Street Journal and USA Today (Associated Press, 2012). The newspaper is based in Manhattan and has covered the Nets extensively since their move to Brooklyn. A total of five articles were gathered for analysis.

The USA Today is the second largest newspaper in circulation today (Associated Press, 2012) and covers sports on a national level. USA Today articles were included in data collection in order to attempt to capture a broader view of the Nets' rebrand. A total of eight articles were gathered for analysis.

The Star-Ledger is the 16th largest newspaper in circulation (Associated Press, 2012) and covers New Jersey and New York sports. The paper covered the Nets extensively in the month leading up to and following their rebranding. The paper was selected for inclusion in data collection because it provides a local perspective of the Nets' rebranding as well as the perspective of the Stadium Community that is losing their franchise, which may yield different messages than other media sources like the New York Times who are gaining a franchise. A total of 80 articles were gathered for analysis.

Fan Comments

Fan comments were gathered from the comment sections of articles gathered for analysis. Comments came from articles that primarily addressed the Nets' new brand

mark and visual rebranding. Comments were read and analyzed for remarks regarding the categories listed from the Team Brand Association Scale (Ross, James and Vargas, 2006). Fan comments served as a way to take into account the fan perspective toward the Nets' rebrand, providing valuable input from the group of individuals the Nets aim to gain with their move to Brooklyn. A total of 180 fan comments were gathered for analysis.

What was observed from content?

Ross, James and Vargas (2006) created the Team Brand Association Scale which lists 13 items aimed to measure brand associations amongst sport fans. Items from this scale were identified as categories to focus on within the content being observed. The selected items were non-player personnel, stadium community, brand mark, organizational attributes and team success (Ross, James & Vargas, 2006).

Non-Player Personnel included “coaches of the team, the team management, and the owners of the team” (Ross, James and Vargas, 2006, p. 270). This item was selected because the Brooklyn Nets ownership team is Russian billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov and rapper Sean “Jay-Z” Carter. Jay-Z has been very involved with the rebranding of the Brooklyn Nets and his own personal brand may affect the Brooklyn Nets brand. Stadium Community is defined as the “the stadium in which their favorite professional team calls ‘home’; community and area surrounding the stadium or arena in which the team plays its games” (Ross, James and Vargas, 2006, p. 270). The Brooklyn Nets moved into the new Barclays Center in Brooklyn. Brand Mark is defined as “the identifying mark such as the logo, symbol, and the colors” (Ross, James & Vargas, 2006, p. 270). Organizational Attributes are defined as “specific attributes that characterize the sport organization as a

whole; organization's loyalty to fans, management actions, and brand personality" (Ross, James & Vargas, 2006, p. 270). This item was selected primarily because it discussed brand personality. The item was also included because it tied into the perception of the team's overall brand. Finally, Team Success was defined as "thoughts such as a team's success in competition, the perceived quality of the players, and the perceived quality of the team itself" (Ross, James and Vargas, 2006, p. 270). This category was included because the most visible product of a sport franchise is the team that competes in the field of play. In this case, it was the Nets' basketball team. Teams with a history of success on the court like the Los Angeles Lakers, Boston Celtics and Chicago Bulls boast some of the most consistent and established brands in the NBA. Analysis of messages regarding the Nets' Team Success may help create a better perception of the Nets' overall brand.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The Team

Brand Mark

Two notable themes regarding the Nets' Brand Mark emerged within official Nets communications. The discourse analysis found that the Nets' team communications largely emphasized Jay-Z's influence on the creation of the team's Brand Mark. Additionally, the team attempted to push their new design as a tribute to the culture and aesthetics of Brooklyn. A May 2, 2012 article addressed Non-Player Personnel, Stadium Community, Brand Mark and Organizational Attributes and spoke of the Nets' new visual identity,

“JAY Z's design for the team's brand identity incorporates a timeless black and white color palette of the old New York subway signage system, including its clean 'RollSign' typeface. The treatment celebrates the history and heritage of Brooklyn by drawing upon the familiar classic signage from when the borough last had its own major professional team in 1957” (NETS basketball, 2012).

The passage noted part-owner Jay-Z's influence on the team's visual rebranding and described the new look as “timeless” and a celebration of “history and heritage of Brooklyn” (NETS basketball, 2012). The connection with Jay-Z and the brand mark emerged as a primary theme among Nets' team communications. Additionally, the Nets emphasized the notion that their new visual brand took aim at achieving a classic and simplified aesthetic. The previous quote mentions the “clean 'RollSign' typeface” (NETS basketball, 2012). Clean and classic were two notable elements the Nets attempted to tether their new visual brand to. The Nets' logo and uniform history, including their new logos and uniforms can be seen in Figures 1 through 5 on pages 74-76.

The Nets pushed Jay-Z's influence and connection with their new rebrand on both their official website and Facebook page. A Facebook post on May 16, 2012 quoted Jay-Z and read that the logo "was really a take off the old subway signs, if you look at the old subway signs they were in black and white. It was strong, beautiful, iconic black and white" (Brooklyn Nets, 2012). The Brooklyn Nets are actually owned by a team of three individuals in majority owner and Russian billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov, Bruce Ratner and Jay-Z but the franchise heavily emphasized Jay-Z's connection to both the team and its new brand mark. Jay-Z is a Brooklyn native and successful rapper and these two aspects may have lead the team to push Jay-Z's connection to the team and his influence on their visual brand in a more prominent way.

In connection with the emphasis of Jay-Z's influence on the Nets' new visual identity, the Nets also described their new visual brand as a nod to their new home of Brooklyn. The Nets heavily emphasized the notion that their new visual brand was a tribute to the aesthetics, culture and history of their new surroundings. In the previously quoted release from May 16, 2012, the Nets' new visual identity was described as "a take off the old subway signs, if you look at the old subway signs they were in black and white" (Brooklyn Nets, 2012). This part of the passage provides an example of another theme that emerged in relation to the Nets' Brand Mark in that the team attempted to emphasize the connection between the borough of Brooklyn and the Nets' new visual look.

An April 30, 2012 release described the new Brooklyn visual brand as "a timeless one grounded in city history: the signage of New York's unparalleled subway system" (NETS basketball, 2012). The passage once again discusses the Nets' visual identity and

the relationship with the borough of Brooklyn. Messages generated by the Nets that emphasized the connection between the Nets' visual design and the urban aesthetics of Brooklyn was repeatedly observed in the discourse analysis.

Stadium Community

Nets communications most frequently addressed the Stadium Community category in their messages. Throughout the discourse analysis it was observed that the themes emerging from most of the Nets' messages regarding the Stadium Community category addressed the positive impact that the Barclays Center, the Nets' new arena, would have on the Brooklyn area. Additionally, the Nets communications emphasized the Barclays Center's cutting edge design and features and portrayed the arena as a venue that would provide both the Nets franchise and the Brooklyn area with world-class facilities. A release quoted Nets owner Mikhail Prokhorov as saying, "Barclays Center will give the Nets a state-of-the-art new home and entertainment experience it so deserves" (NETS basketball, 2012). The quote encapsulates the themes observed in the Nets' official communications regarding the Stadium Community category. Prokhorov was quoted as saying the arena would be top of the line as well as a positive addition to the Brooklyn area.

The same release gave a specific example of the Barclays Center making a positive impact in the Brooklyn area by mentioning the effect the arena was expected to have with closely located businesses and organizations. The release portrayed the New York Marriott at the Brooklyn Bridge as an extremely high-end hotel that will contribute in a positive way toward building the Brooklyn Stadium Community. The release quotes Sam Ibrahim, the hotel's general manager as saying, "In addition to providing the best

hotel rooms, services and amenities in Brooklyn, the New York Marriott at the Brooklyn Bride has become an economic boon to the area, its residents businesses and visitors” (NETS basketball, 2012). Ibrahim added that the hotel will “achieve its next level of transformation with the opening of the Barclays Center this fall. We are proud to be part of the next great era for Brooklyn” (NETS basketball, 2012). The passage illustrates a theme present in the Nets’ communications that emphasized the positive impact on the surrounding Brooklyn area.

It was also observed that the Nets’ communications commonly praised the Brooklyn area and emphasized the culture within the borough and the people that live in it. The April 30 release that first revealed the new Nets visual brand read, “it’s hard to explain the pride native Brooklynites feel for their home (“BK,” “Bucktown,” the “Brooklyn Zoo”), how outsiders don’t get it and never really will” (Couch, 2012). The quote paints the borough of Brooklyn as a place to be proud to come from, where locals revel in recounting their geographical origins and a place most outsiders won’t ever be able to understand or experience. This quote illustrates a culture that the Nets will presumably become a part of.

Team Success

Nets communicated messages that addressed the Team Success category all generally focused on the rare instances of team success in Nets history and potential success that may be found following the team’s move to Brooklyn. The major theme observed regarding Team Success seemed to be that the Nets were highly selective in their messages regarding Team Success and those messages exclusively focused on highly positive moments in franchise history or the potential promise that lay in wait in

Brooklyn. One release wrote that owner Mikhail Prokhorov believed “the team is headed in the right direction and were it not for injuries, this year’s team would’ve made the playoffs” (Couch, 2012). While this may be seen as an encouraging statement in regard to the potential of the Nets’ roster, it also illustrates the fact that the Nets were not a playoff caliber team in 2011-2012.

Another release wrote that the team “finished out of the playoffs after an injury plagued season, but King (Billy King, Nets General Manager) is encouraged by ownership’s support and the team’s direction, which he is confident will include free-agent point guard Deron Williams” (Couch, 2012). The passage does admit that the team was unable to reach the playoffs in the 2011-2012 season but explains that injuries were to blame for that outcome rather than the actual play on the court. The passage contributes to the theme of the Nets selectively discussing their Team Success. In this instance, the team provides rationale for their lack of success on the court and the language implies that the team would have been more successful had it not been for injuries to players which were beyond the team’s control. The statement implies that had the Nets’ roster been fully healthy, they would have experienced enough team success with their quality roster to reach the playoffs.

Non-Player Personnel

The major theme in the Nets’ messages regarding Non-Player Personnel referred to Jay-Z. While Jay-Z owns less than one-percent of the Nets franchise, he is the most visible of the three owners (the others being Prokhorov and Bruce Ratner). Nets communications constantly mentioned Jay-Z’s influence in their rebranding. A May 2, 2012 release quoted Nets CEO Brett Yormark as saying, “JAY Z’s logos and color

scheme combined with our Brooklyn identity are proving to be a powerful draw for fans” (NETS basketball, 2012). The passage attached Jay-Z’s name to the brand, listing his design tastes and abilities as an asset to the franchise. As with the theme noted regarding Brand Mark, the Nets took every opportunity possible to connect the Brooklyn Nets franchise with Jay-Z. In a May 2, 2012 release, Nets CEO Brett Yormark said, “JAY Z’s logos and color scheme combined with our Brooklyn identity are proving to be a powerful draw for fans” (NETS basketball, 2012). The passage attaches Jay-Z’s name to the brand, listing his design tastes and abilities as an asset to the franchise. For the majority of the Nets’ messages mentioning Jay-Z, the theme seemed to center around the rapper’s contributions toward the team’s new visual identity and his ability to capture the essence of Brooklyn.

Messages regarding Non-Player Personnel primarily focused on Jay-Z and his connection with the team but Mikhail Prokhorov was portrayed as the financial muscle in the Nets’ front office. Prokhorov is the majority owner of the Nets but has kept a low profile since buying the franchise. Furthermore, Prokhorov is Russian and as a result may have been unfamiliar to many American sports fans. Because of this, Nets-generated messages mentioning Prokhorov most commonly seemed to introduce him to Brooklyn, and on a greater level, American fans. One release profiled the ownership team of Mikhail Prokhorov and Bruce Ratner touring a nearly complete Barclays Center and showed Prokhorov as appreciative and inviting toward the Nets’ New Jersey fans. The release read that while “this season will conclude the Nets’ 35-year history in New Jersey, Prokhorov made a point to thank the fans that have supported the team throughout that period, and invite them to join the Nets after they move across the Hudson River”

(Couch, 2012). In this passage, Prokhorov is shown as considerate and thankful toward the fans the team is leaving behind in New Jersey, with the thought to invite them to root for the team as they change locations.

The Media

As with the releases and posts taken from official Nets communications, searching for claims and messages within the text of media articles required looking at how the Nets' rebrand was portrayed. ESPN, Star-Ledger, New York Times and USA Today articles generally consisted of news coverage of the Nets and their remaining games in New Jersey. The articles were written primarily in such a style where personal opinions were scant. However, there were still ways to gather opinions from such articles in regard to the Nets' rebranding. Articles that did not feature outright opinions were, like in articles generated by the Nets official communications, analyzed for how they portrayed and addressed the categories from the TBAS scale. Language, tone and contextual details were considered when analyzing each article.

Brand Mark

Media messages regarding the Nets' Brand Mark category were observed to differ from the messages the Nets generated regarding Brand Mark. The Wall Street Journal offered their critique of the Nets' rebrand in Jason Gay's May 1, 2012 article. Gay wrote,

"I think the Nets nickname is a yawn; and I'm not so jazzed about the black-and-white color combo, which seems a little '90's passé. But it could be much worse. At least 70% of the NBA is worse. If nothing else, the low-fi Nets look is a successful break from the very bad modern habit of designing sports logos like they're for outlaw rebel Jet-Ski teams. An adult can wear one of these shirts without feeling he or she is 12, or lives in an apartment above their parents' garage" (Gay, 2012).

Gay (2012) critiqued the Nets' color scheme which the Nets boasted to be a nod to their new Brooklyn surroundings. Gay's opinion disregarded the Nets' messages concerning their visual brand attempting to connect with the surrounding area and instead remarks that the color combination is simply too boring and uninventive. This remark differed from the messages generated by the Nets.

ESPN messages concerning the Nets' Brand Mark category also differed from messages generated by the Nets. Ben Detrick's May 3, 2012 article was highly critical of the Nets' new look, emphasizing that the logo and color scheme were far too simplistic. Detrick wrote that the logo "appeared as if it were designed in MS Paint by Canal Street bootleggers. One expected a CD-ROM pre-loaded with 1,000 free hours of AOL to tumble out of Jay-Z's pocket" (Detrick, 2012). The passage critiqued the new Nets logo, joking that any amateur could have come up with something of similar taste. The passage also criticized Jay-Z's influence on the Nets' new visual identity. This directly contrasts with the way the Nets portrayed the rapper's influence on their new brand. While the Nets chose to emphasize Jay-Z's influence as a major positive factor for the direction of their new Brand Mark, this quote and others, reject Jay-Z's influence and connection to the Nets' brand mark and instead view his contributions as underwhelming and lacking.

Paul Lukas (2012) echoed Detrick's (2012) feelings that the Nets' new visual brand was too simplistic when he wrote "this logo is snoozeville. Couldn't they have at least made the "B" a bit thicker and bolder? It's just so plain" (Lukas, 2012). The passage once again disregards the themes present in Nets messages regarding Brand Mark and instead focuses on the fact that the team's new visual design is too simplistic and boring to be a finished product.

Lukas (2012) also wrote an evaluation of the Nets' Brand Mark on the UniWatch blog, which is dedicated to athletic aesthetics. Lukas wrote,

“Here’s what I like about the logo: It isn’t overdesigned; it doesn’t try to look macho or fierce or intimidating; it doesn’t make use of gratuitous digital tracks like beveling; it doesn’t feel ‘extreme.’ In other words, it avoids many of the pitfalls of modern sports logo design. But avoiding weaknesses is not the same thing as having strengths, and I don’t see much in the way of strengths here. The typography feels so wan, so generic – come on, make that ‘B’ a bit thicker, a bit bolder! And I think a bit of gray or silver trim would help a lot. The whole thing feels more like an Old Navy knockoff than an NBA logo” (Lukas, 2012).

The passage pointed out elements of the Nets' new Brand Mark that were frequently discussed by other media sources in that the new visual identity of the Brooklyn Nets was most noticeably plain and generic. The fact that Jay-Z was primarily behind the design and that they were supposed to reflect the aesthetics of Brooklyn were disregarded and only the product, the actual logo and colors themselves were the focus of the criticism from the media members.

Stadium Community

Media messages regarding the Stadium Community category were both similar and different in comparison to themes present in messages generated by the Nets. Star-Ledger coverage that mentioned the Stadium Community category featured vastly different messages and themes than those found in content generated by the Nets. The Star-Ledger was highly critical of the Nets' Stadium Community, however it should be noted that most of these messages were associated with the Nets' stadium community in Newark. In an article published on April 22, 2012, D'Alessandro wrote, “They have had four homes in the state of New Jersey – in Teaneck (1967-68), Piscataway (1977-81), East Rutherford (1981-2010) and Newark” (D'Alessandro, 2012). The Nets frequent moving throughout the state hindered the team from ever truly developing a solid

franchise identity or cultivating a loyal, homegrown fan base. This passage chooses to focus on the fact that the Nets failed to establish a stable physical place to play during their time in New Jersey and never were able to find a permanent home in the state.

Even when discussing a sellout in New Jersey, the Star-Ledger depicted the Nets' New Jersey stadium community in a negative light. An April 23, 2012 article described the Nets as a team that was "accustomed to playing in half-full arenas and barely-there crowds" (Vorkunov, 2012). The comment referenced the fact that the Nets' final game in New Jersey was a sellout, a rare occurrence for the team in recent years. This passage differs from the themes and messages the Nets generated that addressed the Stadium Community category. Again this was mostly due to the fact that the Star-Ledger chose to focus on the franchise's time in the state of New Jersey and not the upcoming arrival into Brooklyn.

ESPN's messages regarding the Stadium Community category differed from those generated by the Star-Ledger and the themes found in ESPN coverage were more similar to those themes and messages produced by the Nets. Like the Nets' messages regarding Stadium Community, many of ESPN's messages referred to the Nets' new arena, the Barclays Center. Early articles discussed how the arena's construction was progressing and the impact its arrival would have. An article on April 4, 2012 noted NBA Commissioner David Stern's perception of the arena and said, "Stern also spoke glowingly of the ongoing construction of the team's new home in Brooklyn, the Barclays Center, which is set to open this fall. 'It's going to be on time, [and] it's going to be a spectacular addition to the New York entertainment scene'" (Bontemps, 2012). The passage echoed messages communicated by the Nets that the Barclays Center would have

a positive economic impact on the surrounding Brooklyn area and that the arena would be a world-class venue that would give the Nets a place to play basketball that rivaled arenas of other teams around the league.

The arena was also portrayed as a venue that was of such a quality that top-tier talent would look to play for the Nets upon their arrival into Brooklyn and the Barclays Center. Mike Mazzeo's May 1, 2012 article discussed how the Nets needed to add veteran talent to their roster in order to entice All-Star Deron Williams to stay with the franchise. Mazzeo noted that doing so "should be easier now, with the team slated to move into the \$1 billion Barclays Center before the start of next season" (Mazzeo, 2012). The passage once again discussed the overall price of the arena and in doing so insinuated the venue was of a quality that would impress and attract talent of a high caliber. These types of themes and messages fell into line with the types of themes and messages communicated by the Nets.

The USA Today also echoed the themes communicated by the Nets regarding Stadium Community. Jeff Zillgitt wrote in his September 29, 2012 article,

"the lights go back on in state-of-the-art \$1 billion, 18,200-seat Barclays Center when the NBA's Nets settle in to Brooklyn's Prospect Heights. It's an area of modern amenities (Best Buy, Starbucks, Target, new condos, homegrown shops, restaurants) and antiquated charm (brownstones, places of worship, family-run corner markets, bars)" (Zillgitt, 2012).

The passage touched on both the positive impact the arena will bring to the area as well as the impressive physical and financial details that make up the Barclays Center. These themes were evident in the Nets' messages regarding the Stadium Community category as well.

It is worthy to note that Paul Lukas (2012) vehemently differed in his UniWatch assessment of the Nets' Stadium Community category in comparison to the messages the Nets generated. Lukas wrote,

“I’ve been very, very opposed to the new arena (about nine blocks from where I live) and its associated development project. It’s in a terrible location that will bring loads of traffic and congestion to a spot that’s already overburdened, it’s a financial boondoggle, it has forced people out of their homes, it’s not providing as many jobs as had been promised (happy May Day!), and on and on. It’s a fucking disaster, and I get sick to my stomach just thinking about it” (Lukas, 2012).

The passage completely differed from the Nets' messages regarding Stadium Community and decreed that the Barclays Center was actually a catastrophe for the Brooklyn area and the citizens of Brooklyn. Unlike other media outlets, Lukas's (2012) take on the Nets' Stadium Community category completely disagreed with the themes the Nets presented and in essence spoke disapprovingly of the construction of the Barclays Center in Brooklyn.

Team Success

On the whole, media messages regarding the Team Success category differed from the messages generated by the Nets. As previously noted, the Nets appeared to pick and choose selective moments in their history that painted the team in a successful light. On the contrary, a number of media outlets appeared to note the entire Nets basketball history and gave a much different picture of the team. David D'Alessandro wrote in the Star-Ledger on April 23, 2012,

“there is no time machine to erase all the mistakes – not 35 years of ‘em anyway – and if you’re honest with yourself today, you can admit that some of the blunders they made around here lodged like harpoons in a Jerseyan’s soul” (D'Alessandro, 2012).

The passage painted the Nets' Team Success in a very different light than the Nets chose to and seemed to focus on the history of mistakes the Nets made in New Jersey as well as the fact that the team's ineptitude was impossible to ignore. Messages generated by the Nets did not mention any sort of historically poor success and this quote appears to negate the claims and themes generated by the team by labeling the franchise as an organization that experienced success only on rare occasions.

ESPN coverage and messages regarding the Team Success category also differed from the themes and messages observed in the messages generated by the Nets. The Nets ended their final season in New Jersey with a poor record and poor attendance numbers at their home arena. ESPN's coverage of these occurrences may have contributed a negative portrayal of Team Success that differed with the messages generated by the Nets. In one article, Henry Abbott (2012) detailed how the Nets never truly found success in New Jersey. Abbott wrote, "the Nets in New Jersey ... something about it just never worked" (2012). Abbott continued, "I live in New Jersey and I love New Jersey. But I can't shake the feeling that this is like the end of a bad marriage. Maybe some other team would be happy here. But this team? It's probably right they move on and try somewhere else" (Abbott, 2012). These passages illustrated the Nets' tenure in New Jersey as a tumultuous one, marked with disappointment and lack of achievement. The departure of a more successful franchise may have brought about a feeling of sadness of the team leaving, but Abbott's attitude toward the Nets leaving New Jersey illustrates a negative perception toward the Team Success in New Jersey.

Ohm Youngmisuk (2012) wrote on April 24, 2012 that the Nets’

“history is well-documented. The past three-plus decades have been filled with losses – 1,635 defeats, to be exact – some tragic moments, too many injuries to remember, and enough drama to make the Nets the longest-running NBA reality show before there were even reality shows on TV” (Youngmisuk, 2012).

The statement gives a statistical account of the Nets’ failures in New Jersey and examples of mishaps that hindered the team’s on-court and off-court success. The specific mentioning of the Nets’ wins and losses was never mentioned by the Nets in their own communications and this theme of focusing on the franchise’s history of losing was evident only outside of Nets’ media messages.

Organizational Attributes

Messages generated by the Nets regarding the Organizational Attributes category were largely different than messages generated by the media. While most of the Nets’ messages were related to Stadium Community and focused on the positive impact the Nets would have in arriving in Brooklyn, constructing a state-of-the-art facility in the area and bringing professional sports back to the borough, different themes emerged in messages generated by the media.

Messages generated by the Star-Ledger all seemed to focus on how the Nets were abandoning the state and fans of New Jersey and bolting for a more lucrative place to play home games. This may have been because one of the elements described under the Organizational Attributes category of the TBAS scale is “a team loyal to its fans.” An article published on April 25, 2012 reported on the Nets and their actions following the last home game in New Jersey. Almost immediately following their last home game in New Jersey, the article reported that “the Nets’ team website had a plain black home page

with the outline of a shield and the words #HELLOBROOKLYN” (Stephenson, 2012). This passage showed the Nets with one game still remaining as the New Jersey Nets (it was played in Toronto) already reaching out to the Brooklyn area. While the Nets messages celebrated their time in New Jersey by way of highlighting select instances of team success, this passage showed a team disconnected from their home of 35 years, eager to defect to a new home and a new group of fans. Another article quoted New Jersey governor Chris Christie, saying “That’s one of the most beautiful arenas in America that they got a chance to play in. It’s in one of the country’s most vibrant cities and if they want to leave here and go to Brooklyn, good riddance” (Portnoy, 2012). The quote taken from the article portrays the Nets as a team abandoning an enviable stadium and community of fans to move elsewhere. Such a comment portrays the Nets as a less than loyal franchise and differs from the themes emphasized in the Nets’ messages.

The USA Today shared similar themes with the Nets in their coverage of the Nets’ Organizational Attributes. Jeff Zillgitt wrote in an April 29, 2012 article that the

“Nets are reconnecting Brooklyn fans to the borough’s sports history and introducing generations to what used to be and what will be. A standard 6-3 groundout in 1957 marked the end of major team pro sports in Brooklyn. A Deron Williams three-pointer is about to bring it back” (Zillgitt, 2012).

The passage depicted the Nets as good stewards, bringing back pro sports to a borough of New York City that has not had a professional team since 1957. This passage also fell in line with the themes present in the Nets’ messages regarding Stadium Community that emphasized the Nets’ arrival into Brooklyn was going to be a positive impact on the area.

The New York Times generated messages regarding the Nets’ Organizational Attributes that featured similar themes found in USA Today coverage and in messages generated by the Nets.

The majority of the messages in the New York Times regarding the Nets' Organizational Attributes category were found to be positive. In one article, Joseph Berger wrote,

“A number of fans buying team memorabilia expressed optimism that the combination of a new owner, a new arena and a new hometown might overcome the history of futility. Jeff Noel, 22, of Bedford-Stuyvesant, who was carrying a half-dozen knit Nets shirts, was excited about the impact on the community. ‘A lot of kids will be inspired to play in their hometown of Brooklyn,’” (Berger, 2012).

The passage illustrated the impact of the Nets' arrival in Brooklyn and how the team will lift the spirits of the locals. Once again, this type of theme was evident in messages generated by the Nets as well.

The Fans

Brand Mark

Themes found in discourse amongst fans largely differed from messages generated by the Nets regarding the Brand Mark category. One of the most common claims by fans regarding the Brand Mark category was that the logo was too plain or too boring. One fan wrote that the logo “looks like it was designed by a 13 year old in middle school graphic arts class” (KnightRave, Star-Ledger). A number of comments referenced the team's black and white color scheme. One commenter remarked that the colors were a “lack of a color scheme” (homersleeps, Star-Ledger). Another commenter simply wrote, “Black and White? Seriously? Terrible choice in my opinion” (njpolwatcher, Star-Ledger).

Among the teams in the NBA, the Nets are the only team that exclusively uses black and white as their team colors. There are a number of other NBA teams that do employ black and white in their color schemes, but a third color is present. For instance,

the Miami Heat have both white and black jerseys but the team also features red as a primary color and yellow as an accent color. Teams that have recently rebranded like the Oklahoma City Thunder (who were previously the Seattle SuperSonics) have also employed accent colors. The team has a white home jersey and blue away jersey, and features orange and yellow colors as accents. There are teams in the NBA that do have only two colors as a part of their visual identity but once again do not employ the combination of black and white. The Los Angeles Lakers and the Boston Celtics, two of the most historic and celebrated franchises in NBA history, both feature only two colors as a part of their visual identity. However, the Lakers' purple and gold and the Celtics' green and white both differ from the Nets' identity.

Even though a major theme among fan discourse was the fact that the Nets' visual brand was too simplistic and plain, a great deal of discourse also embraced the rebrand for the exact same reasons. comments also focused on the simplicity and color scheme of the Nets' new brand, much like unfavorable commenters did. In one instance, a commenter noted, "the simple and clean look helps the Nets to give off an appearance of a fresh new start" (RnSaga, ESPN.com). This quote in particular is worth noting because the commenter discusses how the look contributes to the new era for the Brooklyn Nets. This is important because it ties in with themes observed in messages generated by the Nets regarding other categories from the TBAS.

Another aspect to note is the fact that opinions may change over time. The fan comments gathered may have only reflected their opinions upon initial unveiling of the new Nets identity. The reason for this mentioning is because there were also a number of fan comments that discussed how the logo gradually became more likeable. One

commenter remarked, “my initial reaction was ‘meh,’ but it grows on you” (rdobrenski1, ESPN). Another commenter wrote, “I actually like the logo even tho (sic) its pretty plain and simple.. it grows on you” (tasnyc, ESPN.com). Chung, Su and Su (2012.com) write that “one’s personality traits influence both his or her attitude toward organizational change” (p. 736). One individual may be more welcoming of a team rebranding than another in some instances. Over time, opinions may change and it may be interesting to see after the 2012-2013 season if there is a difference in fan opinion regarding the Brooklyn Nets brand when compared to the data collected for this study.

Non-Player Personnel

Themes found in fan discourse regarding Non-Player Personnel also seemed to differ from the themes observed in the Nets’ official communications. Fans were highly critical of Jay-Z’s connection to the franchise and denounced his influence on the Nets’ new visual brand. In one instance, a commenter dismissed Jay-Z’s designs as amateur, saying, “it looked like a 5th grader drew it during English class.....leave it to the pros Jay-Z” (ManUtdRule68-Glasgow Rangers4life, ESPN.com). The comment presented a number of themes found in messages generated by both media and fans regarding multiple categories. The comment remarked that the designs Jay-Z produced were amateurish and could have been achieved by an elementary school student. The themes of over-simplification and amateurish appearance differed from the messages and themes portrayed by the Nets.

Summary

The nature of the messages communicated by the Nets regarding their rebrand largely differed when compared to the messages the fans and media communicated about

the rebranding. Several themes emerged in messages generated by the Nets and were analyzed in this discourse analysis.

Themes observed in messages generated by the Nets focused on Jay-Z's connection to the team as partial owner, his influence on the team's new visual brand, the positive impact the Nets' arrival would have on the Brooklyn area, the quality of the Barclays Center and the rare moments of success seen in franchise history.

Themes observed in media and fan messages regarding the Brand Mark category were largely different than those found in messages generated by the Nets. While the Nets stressed Jay-Z's influence on their new look and the concepts of simplicity and timelessness, fans and media members took the same talking points and responded in a largely different manor. Fans and media both shared opinions that the Nets' new design was too simple and that such a look could've been accomplished by lesser skilled individuals than Jay-Z. Jay-Z, directly linked with the visual rebranding, was critiqued by fans and media alike for his influence on the design, with fans calling for the rapper to leave the design work to more qualified individuals. The colors were compared to other teams such as the San Antonio Spurs and were criticized for failing to differentiate the Nets from other teams. The only media source that appeared to generate messages similar to those of the Nets was the blog GraphicDesign which saw the Nets' new look as superior to a majority of other NBA franchises. Mirko Humbert wrote in a July 27, 2012 article, "it changes from those horrible funky animals and 3D type with 200 gradients in it. It's clean and refreshing to see such a cool logo. Most important, the new logo feels brooklynish, and that's important. Last thing, once you see the logo, and its adaptations, you can only love it" (Humbert, 2012). This statement seemed to be the only message

found in media or fan commentary that embraced the simple and clean look that the Nets celebrated in their own messages.

Aside from Star-Ledger coverage and the UniWatch blog, media and fan commentary regarding the Stadium Community category seemed to touch on themes similar to those that were present in messages generated by the Nets. The new arena and excitement surrounding the team's arrival to Brooklyn saw both the media and fans perceiving the new developments as positive. The stadium was portrayed to impact the Brooklyn area in a positive way and be a highly influential selling point for enticing other players to sign with the Nets. One notable dissention in regarding Stadium Community was the previously noted Paul Lukas (2012) article written for the UniWatch blog. Lukas's choice of graphic language brutally described his opinion of the new arena and impact on the surrounding area and his distaste for both the arena and the effect it would have on Brooklyn. Star-Ledger coverage addressing the Stadium Community category focused more on the disappointing years the Nets spent in New Jersey, along with the fact that the team never could find a permanent home during their 35 year stay in the state.

The Organizational Attributes category was the subject of mixed opinion. The Star-Ledger painted a largely negative picture of the Nets as an organization and often portrayed the Nets as a moribund franchise, escaping a place they never fully embraced for a more lucrative offer. As previously mentioned, the USA Today differed in their portrayal of the Nets' Organizational Attributes, instead describing the franchise as revitalizing a basketball hungry borough and benevolently bringing back pro sports to a place that had been abandoned since the 1950's.

Unsurprisingly, media and fan messages addressing the Nets' Team Success were largely different than those generated by official Nets communications. The Nets turned in a poor season on the court in the 2011-2012 season and failed to make the playoffs. The team was depicted by media and fans as having been plagued by bad management and sporadic marginal success. Nets' official communications constantly emphasized the rare franchise highpoints and were negligent in mentioning the majority of the Nets' ugly history in New Jersey.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

The discussion section discusses the notable themes that emerged over the course of the discourse analysis. Observations of responses both similar and different to the themes present in messages generated by the Brooklyn Nets regarding their rebrand are discussed and the concluding portion of the section discusses the implications of the Nets' rebrand and what methods may be effective or ineffective for franchises looking to rebrand in the future.

Brand Mark

The Nets constantly stressed the notion that their new visual brand was an ode to the borough of Brooklyn and a look that captured a clean and timeless appearance. Additionally, the team often noted that Jay-Z had a heavy hand in developing the Nets' new look. From the perspective of the Nets, choosing to develop a new visual identity based on these themes seems logical and almost obvious. Jay-Z has experienced a large degree of success as a rapper and is a native of Brooklyn. Furthermore, he is the most recognizable face out of the Nets' ownership trio of he, Mikhail Prokhorov and Bruce Ratner. The presence of Jay-Z within the organization may have appeared to be a built-in marketing opportunity for the franchise and they chose to take advantage of this by connecting him with the team's redesigned brand.

The team was also moving into a new area and made an attempt with their new look to establish a connection with the borough of Brooklyn. Again, this may have been a priority for the franchise, considering that the greater metropolitan area of New York City already has an NBA franchise in the New York Knicks. The Nets may have felt that they would have to compete for fan interest with the Knicks and chose to market themselves

as “Brooklyn’s team.” The color scheme, logos and typefaces used in their new visual identity all attempted to connect with the Brooklyn area and the team constantly mentioned their new look being a tribute to their new surroundings. This may have been done to help establish an initial connection with Brooklyn residents and fans.

The combination of Jay-Z presented as the driving force behind the design, emphasis on connecting the look to the borough of Brooklyn and the blatant departure from the previous look of the New Jersey Nets appeared to be an obvious group of elements that would result in a resoundingly successful visual rebranding. However, this was not the case.

It appeared that fan and media messages for the most part addressed similar themes that the Nets addressed regarding the Brand Mark category. In a surprising development, a large amount of messages concerning the Brand Mark category were highly critical of the same elements of the Nets’ rebranding that the team communicated in their own messages. The Nets emphasized Jay-Z’s influence on their new look, while fan comments chided Jay-Z to stick to music and leave graphic design and logo implementation to professionals. This was surprising because as previously noted Jay-Z is not only a part owner of the franchise, but also a Brooklyn native and a highly successful rapper.

The Nets made Jay-Z a highly visible part of their rebranding and in large part his influence on their visual identity was criticized. This may have been for a myriad of reasons. Media and fans may have perceived the focus on Jay-Z’s connection with the team as a ploy to gain attention and favor among fans and citizens both inside and beyond the Brooklyn area. Additionally, fans and media members appeared to focus solely on the

actual aesthetics of the rebranding itself, disregarding Jay-Z's connection to the rebranding and ignoring the design's nod toward the Brooklyn area. The reaction from the fans and media shows that the Nets' focus on Jay-Z may have been wasted energy that should have instead been directed toward further developing the actual aspects that make up the team's visual identity. Instead, it appeared that the Nets may have focused instead on connecting their team to high-profile names and worrying about their new home rather than actually developing a polished product that the public would embrace.

Another interesting theme that emerged particularly among the fan discourse was that the Nets' new color scheme was similar to that of other NBA teams. The Nets are the only team in the NBA that have strictly black and white as their team colors. The San Antonio Spurs sport uniforms that feature black and white as the dominant colors as well but also utilize silver as an accent color. A number of fans remarked that the Nets' new visual design reminded them of the Spurs and they felt the two teams looked too similar. The remarks critiquing the Nets' redesigned look as too similar to another NBA franchise goes against de Chernatony and McDonald's (2003) assertion that a *successful* brand must be perceived by the consumer as unique and identifiable. Critiques comparing the Nets' new look to the San Antonio Spurs showed that the Nets' new visual design failed to be uniquely discernable and identifiable, thus becoming a less effective element of their overall rebranding effort. From a theoretical perspective, the disconnect from the themes present in Nets' messages and media and fan messages signifies that the Nets initially failed to begin establishing brand equity with the general public. Erdem and colleagues (1999) noted that brand equity required consumers to associate a brand with a set of unique elements and the messages communicated by the fans and media illustrate

that the Nets' Brand Mark is lacking in unique and discernable traits. Once again, this goes back to the idea that the Nets may have spent too much effort in focusing on the connection between the team and Jay-Z and introducing themselves to Brooklyn rather than focusing primarily on the development of their actual visual identity.

However, Ben Detrick's point in his May 3, 2012 ESPN article that the Nets may have just been looking to shoot for a safe design that would not sabotage their expected profits from new merchandise sales may hold weight to it. Perhaps the Nets, expecting to be widely accepted and celebrated upon arrival to Brooklyn, chose a visually subdued look so as not to risk alienating potential fans and consumers upon first look. It would not be surprising if the primary motivation for a simplified and toned down brand was financially motivated. To add to this point, both Nets official communications and national and regional media articles reported Brooklyn Nets merchandise being a high seller upon initial unveiling.

Additionally, the Nets' simplistic visual redesign may have been an attempt to focus the attention of the public on the team's verbal aspect of their Brand Mark. The Nets focused a large amount of effort in communicating the return of pro sports to Brooklyn via their official team communications. The fact that a professional sports team now called Brooklyn home again after decades was viewed as a significant achievement and the stripped down look may have been in an effort to keep attention primarily on that aspect of their rebranding. This approach speaks to Allen and Simmons' (2003) assertion that the verbal aspect of an organization's identity is tethered to their visual identity and if managed properly, can be highly beneficial to the franchise. Allen and Simmons' (2003) assertion that effective management of verbal identity helps identify and

distinguish a brand may be a clue as to why the Nets adopted such a simplistic and clean look. The emphasis may have always been intended to be on the Brooklyn aspect of the Nets and their return to the borough. In doing so, the toned down visual aspect of the Nets' brand may have been intentionally done to keep more attention on the verbal aspects of the Nets' new brand. It is noted in this discussion section that the Nets' return to Brooklyn was largely perceived in a positive light by fans and media and their Organizational Attributes were perceived in a positive way for it. The verbal emphasis of their Brand Mark may have been aimed at creating a Nets brand that spans beyond mere logos, with words being the vehicle.

A major point to note is that these reactions were taken from comments and articles on the day of or within days of the team officially unveiling their new visual identity. Initial negative reactions may have been more pronounced than they will be in the future after fans have had a chance to see the team play over a period of time in their new uniforms and logos.

Stadium Community

Noting that the Nets appeared to make a large effort to connect to the borough of Brooklyn with their Brand Mark designs, it was not surprising that the Nets also heavily emphasized the impact their arrival into the borough would make. The team's arrival into Brooklyn meant they would now be sharing New York City with the Knicks and in essence, competing for fans and attention with the team based in Manhattan. The team chose to portray their arrival into Brooklyn and the construction of the Barclays center as both the rebirth of professional sports in Brooklyn and a positive impact on the area due to a state-of-the-art facility being constructed.

Brooklyn had been without a professional sports team since the Brooklyn Dodgers left for Los Angeles in 1957. The Nets chose to capitalize on the absence of professional sports in the borough and portrayed the Barclays Center as a symbol of the return of professional sports to Brooklyn. The team has a considerable adversary in the Knicks who play in Madison Square Garden, known as “The World’s Most Famous Arena.” The Nets’ emphasis on the positive aspects of the Barclays Center may have been in an effort to establish themselves as a franchise on equal footing with the Knicks. The Nets played in four different arenas in their time in New Jersey and several articles indicated that fan support and arena atmosphere was largely inferior to Knicks crowds. Additionally, the final Nets home game versus the Knicks in New Jersey saw Nets fans being largely outnumbered by Knicks fans, indicating that the Nets struggled to fill their own arena in New Jersey against the Knicks. The Nets chose to portray their new arena as a technological marvel that would serve as the symbol of the return of professional sports to Brooklyn. In doing so, the team may have been attempting to stand as an equal to the Knicks in the eyes of New York fans, helping to establish a fan base.

Additionally, the Nets may have needed to establish a relationship with the surrounding citizens and fans and the emphasis on the positive impact their arrival would have on the Brooklyn area may have been with the idea of garnering initial support from the local population. From a theoretical perspective, these messages and approaches the Nets took in regard to communicating about the Stadium Community category may have been aimed in the team establishing early brand associations with potential fans, Brooklyn locals and media members. As Aaker (1991) noted, brand associations can be anything a consumer recalls about a specific brand. If a fan or member of the media

potentially remembered that the Nets' arrival into Brooklyn was heralded as a positive development for the area and brought the borough a spectacular new venue for the rest of the country to covet, the Nets may stand to benefit from such associations.

Media and fan messages regarding the Stadium Community category for the most part echoed the themes communicated in the Nets' messages. The Nets often mentioned that the arena cost over \$1 billion dollars, highlighting the amount of money that went into creating such a venue. Media coverage often mentioned this as well and connected the cost of the arena to its quality. Media coverage seemed to marvel at the building and portrayed it as an impressive addition to the Brooklyn community and New York City. It is possible that the Nets' Non Player Personnel of Mikhail Prokhorov, Jay-Z and Bruce Ratner benefited from the media's positive reception regarding the Stadium Community. The trio owns the Nets and multiple articles linked the Barclays Center with the owners, especially Jay-Z and Prokhorov. With the franchise's arrival into Brooklyn and ensuing impact on the area being discussed as a positive development for the borough, the ownership group may have gained some goodwill among fans and the public for reinvigorating the Brooklyn professional sports scene.

The one major dissenting opinion came from Paul Lukas's (2012) UniWatch article. In it, Lukas condemns the Nets' new arena and its construction, calling it a tragedy to the area (Lukas, 2012). Lukas is a New York resident and lives near the Barclays Center and runs his own blog and may have more freedoms in writing what he wants than other media members. While other outlets like ESPN and the New York Times saw the arena as a visually pleasing structure that would have a positive impact on the Brooklyn area, Lukas expressed extreme displeasure with the arena's location and

construction. Lukas being entrenched in the day-to-day life of New York may have had an effect on his opinion regarding the Nets' new arena. Lukas saw the arena as a fiasco for the area that pushed people out of their homes and did not create as many jobs as initially expected. While only a single opinion, it should be noted, as these negative aspects were largely unseen in other media coverage. The effects of the Nets in Brooklyn may take time to see, but Lukas's sentiments are worth remembering for future evaluation of the Nets' Stadium Community success and perception.

Organizational Attributes and Team Success

Themes present in messages communicated by the Nets regarding the Team Success category seemed to be vastly different compared to the themes present in messages generated by the fans and media. The Nets were at a disadvantage in terms of communicating elements regarding the Team Success category due to the previous brand associations people already held toward the team. Media members and fans were able to recall the Nets' history of failure and losing seasons during the team's tenure in New Jersey and ignored the messages generated by the Nets. The Nets appeared to focus on the rare instances where the team historically had achieved success. This may have simply been because the Nets would have had to discuss their years of disappointment had they chosen to include their entire team history in their messages. The team generally focused on how those rare instances of success in the past like the back-to-back NBA Finals appearances in the 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 NBA seasons would become more commonplace following the move to Brooklyn. In short, the team focused on past successes that happened to be few and far between and spoke of the promise the future held once the team began play in Brooklyn.

The Nets as a franchise may have been attempting to end their time in New Jersey on a positive note by highlighting their pinnacle moments in the state but the Star Ledger instead opted to show the Nets as a franchise that struggled to succeed on the court. The franchise had the luxury of focusing solely on the positive aspects of team history in their rebranding while the newspaper portrayed them as more of a failed experiment. The Star Ledger may have simply chose to tell the entire account of the Nets in New Jersey and that account included a history of ineptitude. It may also have been because the paper, like the state, was losing “their” team to New York and may have chosen to cast a more negative light on the franchise for leaving them behind empty handed.

The Nets emphasized the fact that they were bringing professional sports back to Brooklyn and focused on the idea of reviving professional sports in Brooklyn in their messages regarding Organizational Attributes. This may have been because the team once again was attempting to establish brand equity with the general public, especially the citizens of Brooklyn. Furthermore, these messages that showed the Nets as an organization revitalizing Brooklyn’s sports scene may have been attempting to cultivate a degree of fan loyalty among Brooklyn citizens. The idea may have been that the team would be met with greater support and attention by locals if they were perceived as more than just a sports team; that the team was also a cultural and economic positive for the borough of Brooklyn.

The themes present in the Star-Ledger’s coverage concerning the Nets’ Organizational Attributes differed from the themes present in the Nets’ messages. A large amount of Star Ledger coverage saw the Nets as a team abandoning the state of New Jersey for a more lucrative scenario in Brooklyn. The negative coverage encountered in

the Star Ledger articles was expected. The majority of the coverage focused on the final days of the franchise in New Jersey and the history leading up to the move to Brooklyn. Once again, this may have simply been because the Star-Ledger, a New Jersey-based newspaper, was losing their professional basketball team to the city of New York and opted to focus on the other side of the Nets' move to Brooklyn; the city that they left.

The team received more positive coverage from ESPN, the New York Times and USA Today. This may have been related to the perception of and coverage of the Barclays Center and the type of impact those outlets expected the arena and team's arrival to have on Brooklyn. While the Star Ledger was losing a team, the New York Times was gaining a rival for the New York Knicks and national outlets USA Today and ESPN gained another major market team that was seen as returning professional sports to Brooklyn. These types of messages and themes were consistent with those observed in Nets' communications regarding Organizational Attributes.

Non-Player Personnel

Most messages generated by the Nets concerning the Non-Player Personnel category involved Jay-Z and his influence on the team's rebranding. This made sense because the other two members of the team's ownership team, Mikhail Prokhorov and Bruce Ratner, are significantly less marketable than the star rapper and Brooklyn native. Jay-Z may have been the most identifiable member of the Nets' Non-Player Personnel and his recognizable persona and face may have been a desirable beginning for the team to begin to build their team identity as the Brooklyn Nets. Associating Jay-Z with the team may have been in attempts to give the organization star power and recognition, putting the team in the public eye.

Messages regarding Non-Player Personnel aspects of the Nets' rebrand were rare in media and fan discourse, but the messages that were observed did not emphasize Jay-Z's link to the team. ESPN chose to publish an article on Mikhail Prokhorov, the majority owner of the team and Russian billionaire. This may have been in an attempt to educate the public on the Nets' most powerful executive, not their most culturally influential in Jay-Z. The messages that did address Jay-Z seemed to focus primarily on his contributions to the Nets' visual branding or the Stadium Community. As previously noted, Non-Player Personnel, and in this case Jay-Z, were a higher point of emphasis for the Nets than for media and fans. This may have been because Non-Player Personnel aspects simply were not very important or influential to the media and fans in regard to the Nets' rebranding.

Summary

The most effective messages produced by the Nets regarding their rebrand addressed the Stadium Community category. The themes present in the messages generated by the Nets regarding the Stadium Community category seemed to be similarly present in the messages and discourse from the media and fans. While there were a few negative portrayals of the Barclays Center and the surrounding Brooklyn area, the media largely reported the construction of the Barclays Center and the Nets' move to Brooklyn as a positive development that would benefit both the team and the borough. The technological aspects and expensive cost of development and construction were often emphasized by both media members and Nets communications.

The most surprising finding involved the Nets' Brand Mark. Throughout their time in New Jersey, the Nets had gone through a series of different visual identities

and on-court looks (see **Figures 1 & 2**). The researcher expected this visual rebranding of the team to be met with praise by the fans and media alike. The themes and messages communicated by the Nets emphasized a highly successful and influential individual in Jay-Z and a classic and timeless look influenced by the rapper and the backdrop of Brooklyn. A majority of fans and media alike criticized the design and the influence of Jay-Z, arguing that the new look was far too simplistic and dull. The Nets were aiming for a clean and toned down approach compared to their previous look that featured the three colors in red, white and blue. Additionally, the Nets appeared to employ a new visual identity that would function as a symbolic sign, described by Smith and colleagues (2005) as something that can function as a flag symbolizing a country (p. 281).

Instead, it appears the Nets, according to media and fan reaction, may have missed the mark by oversimplifying their look and bearing a striking resemblance to the NBA's San Antonio Spurs. This goes against Aaker's (1991) idea that a brand separates a product or in this case, a team, from another competitor (p. 7). Recognizing Aaker's assertions and the messages made by the fans and media, the Nets were largely ineffective in visually rebranding their team to be distinct and unique.

Messages and themes communicated by the Nets regarding their Team Success failed to resonate with the media or fans. The Nets chose to choose only the most successful moments in Nets history to discuss in their messages. Additionally, the team focused on the potential future success that would be enjoyed once the franchise had arrived in Brooklyn. This was not seen to be very effective when evaluating the portrayal of Nets Team Success by media sources. The truth of the matter is that the Nets constantly struggled to make the NBA postseason in their time in New Jersey and failed

to win an NBA championship. The team was marked with controversial players such as Kenny Anderson and Derrick Coleman and the most prolific Nets in New Jersey history, Jason Kidd and Vince Carter, both left the team in order to pursue success elsewhere, further denting the perception of Nets' Team Success. In essence, it seemed impossible for the media to ignore the overall mediocrity the Nets experienced in New Jersey. The positive messages communicated by the Nets' official communications could not overcome the brand associations that the media and fans have previously made during their time in New Jersey. While there certainly were moments worth remembering such as the back to back NBA Finals appearances and multitude of playoff appearances, ultimately, the media could not avoid portraying the Nets' Team Success as disappointing in New Jersey. The arrival of the Nets to Brooklyn, coupled with an arena being lauded by the franchise, fans and media as world class and interest in talented players seeking to play in a historically basketball-rich area like Brooklyn, serves to provide a hopeful future for the Nets' future success in the NBA.

The Nets chose to largely focus on Jay-Z in messages regarding Non-Player Personnel. This may have had to do with the fact that Jay-Z was the most recognizable individual among he, Bruce Ratner and Mikhail Prokhorov. Any time the Nets did produce a message involving Non-Player Personnel, those individuals were shown to be active and enthusiastic in bring a team to Brooklyn, highly involved in the rebranding of the team, constructing a successful franchise and having a positive impact on the Brooklyn community. In large part, media coverage seconded these messages generated by the Nets. The owners can easily be seen as a group determined to bring a winning team to the Brooklyn area, and the opportunity to deliver a professional franchise back to

the borough is a great public relations opportunity. Prokhorov's considerable wealth and attitude towards pursuing quality roster talent further contributes to the perception of Non Player Personnel and Jay-Z's influence, although criticized in regard to Brand Mark, can not be ignored due to his ties to the Brooklyn area and his sprawling cultural influence as a vastly successful rapper.

The Star-Ledger appeared to be the most critical towards the Nets in most of the observed categories, but the newspaper's messages were especially inconsistent with Nets' messages when they discussed the franchise's Organizational Attributes. While the Nets themselves attempted to focus on connecting to their new home in Brooklyn, the Star Ledger portrayed the Nets as a team spurning the state of New Jersey. Interestingly enough, this was the only media source that was highly negative towards the Nets regarding Organizational Attributes. USA Today was actually found to be highly positive in their portrayal of the Nets' Organizational Attributes. This may have been because the team was seen to be reviving professional sports in Brooklyn. This theme was evident in other media outlets as well, where the coverage portrayed the team as bringing both a competent team to rival the New York Knicks and excitement and intrigue to Brooklyn that had not been felt since 1957. The Nets' communications regarding their Organizational Attributes is slightly difficult to analyze because the team's move to Brooklyn means different things to two different communities. The Nets identified their new home in Brooklyn and portrayed their franchise as bringing back professional sports to the borough. The positive reactions from the media sources outside of the Star Ledger shows that the Nets were effective in attempting to establish both brand loyalty and brand equity with their new fans in Brooklyn. However, the largely negative portrayal of the

Nets' Organizational Attributes from Star-Ledger coverage illustrates the fact that the Nets' messages regarding their Organizational Attributes were not as effective in their previous home in New Jersey. The departure of the team to another state may have destroyed any brand loyalty with fans and media in New Jersey. However, the team's brand equity may not have been as negatively affected. As Aaker (1991) noted, a brand has higher equity levels with increasing awareness of the brand. The Nets' move to Brooklyn garnered attention from media across the country and increasing visibility and awareness of the franchise may have positively contributed to the Nets' brand equity. In this case, any press may have been good press for the Nets. Additionally, the team may not have been able to avoid their brand loyalty being negatively affected by their move to Brooklyn. Recognizing that New Jersey media and fans would be largely disenchanted with the team's move to Brooklyn, the Nets were effective in focusing their messages regarding their Organizational Attributes in a positive manor toward their new home.

Implications and Best Practices

Based on the findings from this discourse analysis, the following measures are recommended for sports franchises considering rebranding in the future:

Focus on product quality first. The Nets attempted to heavily emphasize Jay-Z's connection to their team rebrand. The thinking may have been that if the team tied itself to a famous face, it would result in instant credibility, respectability, admiration and ultimately brand equity from fans, media members and other franchises. On the contrary, it appears that the Jay-Z's connection to the Nets' Brand Mark was criticized for being unnecessary and out of place. Teams looking to rebrand in the future may choose to focus more on the actual product they are producing rather than the names and faces they

connect to it. In this specific case, it would be the actual visual identity of the Brooklyn Nets. The Nets should have focused more on the development of their visual rebrand and the quality of the Brand Mark rather than emphasizing Jay-Z's connection to the design. Additionally, it may be beneficial to ensure that the visual brand of the team was distinctive and separated that particular team from all other teams. The Nets failed to do this, as both media members and fans noted that the Nets' new visual brand was reminiscent of the San Antonio Spurs.

Consult individuals with experience in sport branding. This is not to say that the Nets simply handed Jay-Z the responsibility of creating their new visual identity and stepped away. But in looking at the case of the Nets, it may be wise to consult more qualified group of individuals with experience and knowledge both in the worlds of sports branding and visual design. Media and fan messages focused primarily on the underwhelming aspects of the Brand Mark, giving the notion that Jay-Z's influence meant the Nets' new look came from amateur origins. Individuals and organizations with experience in branding sports organizations may be able to implement a rebrand in a more effective and well-received fashion.

Do not be afraid to be unconventional in developing your Brand Mark. Sports visual identities vary from the outrageous and unconventional like the University of Oregon Ducks' football team, to the classic and intentionally reserved like the Los Angeles Dodgers. Teams opting to tread towards the territory of flashy and daring visual brands often garner mixed reviews while the classic and timeless approaches seem to bring about consistently more positive reception. The Nets' rebrand shows that it is possible to take the simplistic and timeless approach too seriously. Franchises seeking to

rebrand in the future may look to the Nets as an example of a team oversimplifying their new look. It may be useful to include a visually more distinctive element to a team's visual identity. This does not mean a team has to adopt neon colors and a startling new logo. It may be that the answer lies somewhere in between. Increased focus on developing a visual identity or Brand Mark that resonates with the surrounding Stadium Community and strikes a balance between classic and modernized may prove to yield more positive reception for teams looking to rebrand in the future.

Authenticity is important to establishing brand equity and brand association. Furthermore, actions resonate more with fans and media than words. Underneath the excitement and energy doled out by the Nets regarding their rebrand, there needed to be an actual team with distinctive logos and colors and an arena and relationships between fans, media and organizational members. In some cases, this was achieved as fans and media members produced messages about the Nets' organizational attributes that were similar to those the Nets produced. Essentially, organizations looking to rebrand must make an honest attempt to produce a quality product both on the court and in and around the Stadium Community. Words and slogans generate interest at first, but the actual product and actions of the organization are what ultimately resonate with the media and fans. The Nets moving to Brooklyn generated great excitement and interest from media outlets and fans alike and the franchise was lauded as revitalizing the professional sports culture in Brooklyn. This is an example of an organization that emphasized bringing professional sports back to an area, following through and being celebrated for it by fans and media members. This may help develop brand equity with

the surrounding fans and media members and contribute to increased fan loyalty over the years.

Emphasize making an impact in your Stadium Community. Connect with your hometown and promote your actions within that community. The Nets' messages regarding their Stadium Community were well received by the media and fans outside of the Star-Ledger. A sports franchise may be highly visible and noticeable and is capable of making an enormous impact on its surrounding area. A team looking to rebrand or moving to a new city like the Nets did, may choose to use their arena and organization's arrival or presence into that area as a positive development for fans and business owners alike. Teams may choose to communicate the positive aspects of their arrival into a new area as well as the future aspirations of that team in connection to their Stadium Community.

Emphasize potential success. Organizations looking to rebrand may be attempting to essentially reboot their franchise. In the case of the Nets, they were moving into a new arena in a new city with a new visual identity. The team chose to highlight previous successes in team history but this proved to be largely ineffective when looking at the messages generated by the media and fans. Franchises looking to rebrand in the future should choose instead to focus on the potential success that the change and rebranding will bring about. This is not to say that a team should forget their past, but a rebrand affords an organization an opportunity to essentially start fresh and if that team has rarely experienced success, it can be a chance to change the culture. This may include emphasizing that good fortune may come with change.

Treat your employees, athletes and fans in a professional manor and strive for organizational stability. The Nets attempted to select certain instances regarding their Team Success to discuss in their messages. This proved ineffective as media members and fans pointed out the historical ineptitude of the franchise, including how players were previously subjected to sub-par practice and locker room facilities. This discourse analysis showed that aspects of a franchise such as sub-par facilities can affect the perception of that team and that team's brand in the eyes of the media and fans and with even greater consequences, players in that particular league. In the age where emerging social media has ensured that no detail about anything goes unnoticed anymore, it is important to operate like a world-class organization behind the scenes as well as in the spotlight. The Nets communicated messages regarding their organization that displayed them as a world-class organization with top-of-the-line facilities and a fresh new visual identity. Due to the team's history as a mediocre and poorly-run franchise, these messages were not always well-received by the media and fans. Organizations looking to rebrand in the future may choose to take into account how they operate behind the scenes as well as during game time and ensure that treatment of franchise employees, players and fans is of a quality that reflects positively on the franchise's brand. In turn, those organizations should stress in their messages that their organization is run in a professional and competent manor. Once again, these messages mean nothing if the organization does not follow through with actions that reflect their messages. The most important thing a rebranding sports franchise must do in rebranding is ensure that the messages communicated are actually acted upon.

CHAPTER 6

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study was limited in several ways. As previously mentioned, the study took into account the portrayals of the Nets' rebrand from a specific period of time. Since that time period, the Nets have donned their new uniforms and as of this writing, currently hold a 38-27 record in the 2012-2013 NBA regular season. The study gathered the messages generated by fans and media prior to the Nets' inaugural season in Brooklyn but failed to account for opinion change over the course of time. As previously noted, opinions of media sources and fans may change over the course of a season, and the Nets' potential playoff appearance for the 2012-2013 regular season may contribute to a more positive perception of their rebrand. Future studies may choose to evaluate the rebranding of a professional franchise following the initial season after the team's rebranding has taken place. Doing so may account for opinion changes over time.

Also, this thesis was limited in the fact that it observed only one team and how they approached rebranding. The Nets' rebranding is a unique occurrence in that it sees a team bringing professional sports back to a storied Stadium Community while at the same time heralding a new era for a franchise commonly associated with mishap and mediocrity in their previous home. Future studies may choose to evaluate the rebranding of multiple teams in different sports. By doing so, researchers may gain greater insight into what types of rebranding approaches work and if there are certain approaches that are more or less effective for particular sport franchises. For example, it may be interesting to see how effective the Nets' rebranding was compared to the rebranding of the Houston Astros. The Astros moved to the American League from the National League in Major League Baseball in the 2013 season and changed their visual identity to

mark the occasion (Snyder, 2012). The team did not move into a new playing venue, but there are elements of their rebranding that may be observed and compared to the Nets' rebranding to see what type of messages are more effective and what type of approaches may be better suited for each sport.

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APPENDIX 1: NETS LOGO HISTORY



1968 – 1972



1972 – 1977



1977-1978



1978 - 1990



1990 – 1997



1997 – 2012

Figure 1: Logo history of Nets franchise leading up until Brooklyn rebranding (Logo History, 2012).

APPENDIX 2: NETS UNIFORM HISTORY



Figure 2: History of Nets Uniforms leading up to unveiling of Brooklyn Nets uniforms (Uniform History, 2012).

APPENDIX 3: BROOKLYN NETS CURRENT VISUAL IDENTITY



Figure 3: Brooklyn Nets 2012-2013 Logos (Armin, 2012).



Figure 4 (left): Brooklyn Nets away uniforms (Theodorakis, 2012).



Figure 5 (right): Brooklyn Nets home uniforms (Antonelli, 2013).

VITA

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