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Abstract
The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of the media contributing to the national dialogue involving rule changes in the NHL (National Hockey League). Reporters in the media choose what is published on day to day press releases. What is released is what the consumers are taking in, using various mediums of social media, television, internet, etc. and that is the only knowledge the consumers are getting surrounding a developing story or topic.

This was an important topic to research because discussion in the media, and the way they speak on different topics and news stories is the first impression the common sport fan gets while tuning in, or doing research of their own. The media attempts to create this type of frame and storyline around stories that consumers buy into and jump on board with. The media continuously turns to the negative side of breaking news topics to stir up different types of controversy around the sports world.

This study gathered 30 news articles from 10 different secondary qualitative data sources. The articles were then analyzed for variables including the author, the tone of the article, the description of the article, the length of the article, and quotes in the article. The data were recorded using a spreadsheet instrument. Based on the variable and category each article fell into, data were translated to categorical code to easily run cross-tabulation on statistics, producing the results of this study.

Based on the results from this study, it seemed to appear that nearly 50% of articles regarding rules changes in the NHL possessed a negative tone, as well as being an article that was based off of commentary on fact or opinion. 40% of articles possessed a neutral tone, and roughly 13% of articles possessed a positive tone. The results of the study showed that media crafts a narrative in the news, or in this case, NHL rule changes, that seem to be discussed in a negative way giving the consumer a negative view to refer to, affecting national dialogue.

The results of this study were important because it demonstrated the way that today's media was able to put a message out there in a certain way, which would be negatively, and get that message into the consumer’s head, and quite possibly influencing their feelings on the topic or issue at hand.

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NHL Rule Changes in The Media

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of the media contributing to the national dialogue involving rule changes in the NHL (National Hockey League). Reporters in the media choose what is published on day to day press releases. What is released is what the consumers are taking in, using various mediums of social media, television, internet, etc. and that is the only knowledge the consumers are getting surrounding a developing story or topic.

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**Introduction**

In recent content analysis, past studies focused mainly on identifying the trends that were present in sport related messages, which were disbursed by the media (Duncan, 1986; Rintala & Birrell, 1984; Whisenant & Pedersen, 2004). The speculation of media effects were based on the views that the media could build a social reality and have a stronger influence “by framing images of reality..in a predictable and decorated way” (McQuail, 1994, p. 331). Framing of media is a direct way of combining an idea, problem, or headline, which allows systematic delivery to audiences (Gitlin, 1980). The setting “provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p.143).

At the media level, the structure of a problem may be shaped by a variety of individual, ideological, or organizational variables which can be explored as a dependent variable based on a quantity of independent variable contributions (Scheufele, 1999). In order to reach the stage of investigation at the media or independent level, media frames must first be well known in association to a precise event, or problem (Entman, 2004).

The objective of this research was to study the contribution of the media surrounding the national dialogue and rule changes in the National Hockey League. There have been several opinions from players, coaches, and media insiders published in magazines, scholarly articles, and social media platforms. These are things that fans pay attention to. There has been a lack of research on what the media decides to put into headlines, and what they choose to talk about on a day-to-day basis. The media and those they work for, choose what is said on TV, and written about on websites, or in magazines and newspapers. It was recently discovered that NHL rule changes and enhancements brought excitement to the game, along with improve the safety for players of the league. The purpose of this research was to look into whom, how, and why
contributes to the national dialogue along rule changes in the NHL. This research attempted to answer how the media mainly contributes.

This research had a practical application because it provided the NHL with a deeper understanding of how the media contributes to the national dialogue involving rule changes. This research provided examples of the positive and negative sides tied to rule changes in the NHL, which is perceived in different ways by the media.

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of the media contributing to the national dialogue involving rule changes in the NHL. The research question of the study was:

How has the media contributed to the national dialogue around rule changes in the NHL?

The aim of the research was to present a deeper understanding of the media’s message, and their impact on others when discussing rule changes in the NHL.
Background Information

Why do leagues change rules?

Professional sports leagues are always trying to grow their sport, looking into things that can increase the fan experience, along with finding ways fans and people at home can view the game. Over the past 10 years, there has been a lot of instances where the safety of players is an issue, and a concern in professional hockey (Farber, 2006; Farber, 2011). For example, Sidney Crosby and Clarke MacArthur’s concussion issues, along with the deaths of Derek Boogaard, Rick Rypien, and Wade Belak back in 2011 all within a 4-month span (Farber, 2011). These concerns are mainly surrounded around concussions, other injuries, and mental health issues suffered from head injuries. Player safety officials look at head injuries to determine disciplinary actions, as well as monitor in game scenarios for unseen or undiscovered head injuries. Along with safety concerns, the NHL looks at possible improvements of equipment enhancements from a player safety point of view as well as a technological aspect in the sense of lighter sticks or skates, and smaller padding for goaltenders. One rule worth taking an interest in, is icing. Icing is when one team possesses the puck in their own zone or side of the ice, and sends the puck to the opposite side of the ice making the puck cross the goal line without anyone on their team touching it. A team that is shorthanded (a man down because of serving a penalty) they are allowed to “ice” the puck without it being icing because of the shorthanded situation. There have been tests that put players in shorthanded situations, which do not allow the team to “ice” the puck (Halpin, 2011). Additionally, penalties are something that the league may want to look into changing. During a penalty, if a goal is scored for the team on a power play, the player serving a penalty is allowed to leave the penalty box. There have been discussions suggesting a team must serve a penalty for the full time that it was assessed. (McDonald, 2017) This tactic could also
generate more scoring opportunities. Rule changes and changes to other aspects of the game could increase fan retention, allowing fans to stay engaged throughout the entire game.

**Media Framing and Crafting a Narrative**

In past content analysis research within sport management literature, scholars have focused a great deal on the identification of trends that exist in sport related messages that were distributed by the media (Duncan, 1986; Rintala & Birrell, 1984; Whisenant & Pedersen, 2004). The theory of media effects was based upon the concept that the media can construct a social reality and therefore, have a strong impact “by framing images of reality in a predictable and patterned way” (McQuail, 1994, p. 331). A media frame is simply a way of packaging an idea, issue, or storyline to allow efficient relay to audiences (Gitlin, 1980). The frame, therefore, “provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p. 143). In terms of a broad based approach, there has been research dedicated to analyzing the themes or messages present in media coverage as it relates to sport (Bianco, 2006; Chen, Colapinto, & Luo, 2012; MacAloon, 1991; Pantagiotopoulou, 2009). While previous research has been useful in advancing sport management literature and practice, there are clear limitations when it comes to content analysis research examining sport media messages in non-sport-specific publications that reach casual non-sport fan observers. The current study explored how the contribution of media shapes the national dialogue surrounding rule changes in the NHL.

**Who wants the rule changes?**

Players, coaches, and GMs have weighed in on thoughts and suggestions of possible rule changes to grow the sport. Some rule changes involve larger nets, or a larger ice surface, in hopes of increasing scoring chances, improving the offensive side of the game, and altering the speed of the game (Prewitt, 2015). Naturally, offensive players want to see more offense
generated in a game by game basis, while goalies want little to no changes on the offensive side, but to give themselves more freedom in the crease, or behind the net (ESPN, 2017). Different rule changes will change different parts of the game. Things will not change all at once, but tests have been done during team mini camps and prospect camps to evaluate how players adapt to different playing styles if change does happen at one point in time (Farber, 2006). While waiting for the lockout to end during the 2004-2005 NHL lockout, NHL Hall of Famer Brendan Shanahan took what he heard from other players around the league, and turned those thoughts and comments into reality while presenting it amongst 26 individuals that included players, coaches, general managers, owners, agents, and television executives (Farber, 2006). His main goal was to make things better for the game of hockey as a whole. Players and members of the hockey community not only recognized him for the great player that he was for the Detroit Red Wings, but also the impact he had on the rules in the NHL. He lived and played the game in different eras through equipment advancements and rule changes to really see things from different angles, allowing him to propose his ideas, and theories. What is now known as the “Shanahan Summit” can show how change is possible (Farber, 2006).
Methods

Restatement of purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of the media contributing to the national dialogue involving rule changes in the NHL. The research question of the study was:

How has the media contributed to the national dialogue around rules changes in the NHL? Qualitative research was conducted during this study.

Desired Sample

The best types of writers that were used include writers from the highest part of the national media totem pole on the national aspect of things, and writers around the media who wrote for cities with a high profile in pro hockey who discussed the rule changes. The best types of articles included news or discussion surrounding hockey in the past 10 years from national news sources along with writers or columnists from other cities with a high profile in hockey discussed in the sampling method.

Sampling Method and Procedure

Taking a look at 30 articles, there were 10 different sources accessed online. Each secondary source had 3 articles. 5 of the sources were national media sources while the other 5 were from sources that were from writers from cities with a high profile in professional hockey. National news sources were selected based on their national notoriety, local sources were selected based on the relationship between the cities, and their relationship/profile surrounded around professional hockey in their specific city.

Data Collection Procedure

Articles pertaining to NHL rules changes were collected from online qualitative secondary sources online. These local and national news sources were selected based on the
following criteria: author, news source, content of the article, and publication date. Each article was read in completion before any coding or analysis took place. Basic information for each article was recorded in a spreadsheet. These variables include the selection criteria. Then each article was examined and coded. The variables that were assessed were the source of the article, the tone of the article, length of the article, description of the rule, quotes from players, coaches, GMs, and alumni.

**Analysis**

While reading each article, and using the spreadsheet data instrument, each article was analyzed for the tone, length, article, description, and 2 separate categories from quotes from players and alumni, or coaches and GMs. The tone of the article was measured by positive, negative, or neutral view. The length of the article was measured by word count which would portray the extensity of the article and rule. The description of the rule was measured as either being a detailed description or facts and commentary on opinion. Lastly, as mentioned, quotes will be broken down into two categories featuring players and alumni in one and coaches and GMs in another. The scale will be the same for both as either being an endorsement or rejection.
Results

Description

Data were collected from online articles from national levels of media sources as well as lower level local writers around the league who wrote for cities with a high profile, or those of whom had a professional team in close proximity in professional hockey who discussed the rule changes. The most valuable types of articles included discussion around rule changes in the NHL from the past 10 years. There were 10 different sources. Five sources were on a national level while five sources were on a lower media level with a high profile in professional hockey. Each source had 3 articles that were examined. This sample was a representation of the population because of the rate of frequency in which rule changes in professional hockey occurred throughout each source during data collection.

Codes

Codes were used to determine each category for each variable during data collection. The data represented themes for the study.

Themes

One variable that was examined was tone and description. 21 (70%) of the articles were commentary on facts or opinion. 9 (30%) articles were articles containing a detailed description of the rule. Out of the 21 (70%) commentary articles, 12 (40%) of them were negative, 2 (6.67%) were positive, and 7 (23.33%) were neutral. Out of the 9 (30%) articles that were detailed description, 2 (6.67%) were positive, 2 (6.67) were negative, and 5 (16.67%) were neutral. Therefore almost 50% of the articles examined turned out to be negative commentary on facts or opinion.
Another variable that was examined referenced the tone and length of the articles. Out of the four positive articles, two of the articles possessed lengths closer to the minimum word count length while the other two were closer to the maximum word count length. The strong majority of negative and neutral articles had article lengths that were closer to, and more than the median, which is also the mode (641). The median was focused on more than the mode or average so that there could be two distinguishable sides pertaining to a “shorter” or “longer” article.

The last variable that was examined was the length, measured by word count, associated with the author. The median word count was 641 words. Some sources had lengths that were all close to the maximum, some sources all had lengths that were spread out in length meaning spread out amongst the minimum (300) and maximum (1,764) word count. Other sources had two articles that were long in length yet one that was short in length based on the minimum and maximum scale created by the data. Some sources all around had articles that were the shortest in length.
Discussion

The data that were collected over the course of this study shows how the media contributed to the national dialogue around rules changes in the NHL. This study concluded that the media contributes to the national dialogue in a neutral or even more common negative way when discussing rules changes in the NHL.

The way that writers in the media wrote and created stories are based upon a concept in which the media constructed a reality which impacts fans by “framing images of reality” (McQuail, 1994, p. 331). That created a meaning that led to other events (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987). The data produced themes of how the media takes a story line, along with the information they gather, and put their own take and opinion on it. This opinion and tone in which the reporter or media discuss, more times than not, point to something in a negative way.

Previous studies had looked into the practice of literature in sport management. These studies used content analysis research that examined sport media messages that reach non-sport fan observers. The current study explored the media and the way they shaped the national dialogue around rule changes in the NHL. Scholars have been centralized on identifying the trends that are present in sport related messages that are relevant and distributed by the media (Duncan, 1986; Rintala & Birrell, 1984; Whisenant & Pedersen, 2004). This study found three main trends that connect to previous studies which include the relationships between description and tone of the article, length and tone of the article, as well as the length and author. The trend that stood out the most was the theme surrounding description and tone. Readers and researchers can read articles similarly to what this study had done, and be convinced by what an article written by a reporter is saying. The negative take that reporters use puts that alternative in the readers mind when it comes to every day news. This negative take created pertains to crafting a
narrative, and the shaping of the narrative for the reader. The negative take on rule changes in the NHL contributes to the common or non-common sport fans opinion because of the secondary or alternative opinion and literature from the writer.

Limitations and Delimitations

A limitation to this study was the validity and the reliability of the sources that are out there on the internet. Based on the results of the study, the themes seemed to be consistent. There were two articles that had the same word count so if a different source was used there is a chance that the word count numbers relating to the mean, median, mode, etc. could have been different.

A delimitation to this study was the sources that were chosen. The way that the sources were chosen as well as what sources were chosen could have been different in past, present, and future studies. This study also looked at the past 10 years. More extensive research could be done going back even further into the past, from secondary sources.

Summary and Recommendations Moving Forward

Sometime in the future five to ten years down the road from now, the same type of analysis could be conducted to see if any other rules changes have been made, and how the media and people react to the change. Primary data would be able to be used in this study with access not only to reporters and writers, but also to the fans and how they react to media, through a survey. The study would have to be done using subjects from a variety of areas to avoid any type of biases, and to strengthen the data. A study group could also be conducted with subjects being given a thought-out amount of media articles, pictures, videos, and other mediums pertaining to NHL rule changes, to generate discussion and reaction to categorize how they [as a
fan or not], are influenced by the media. The NHL rules will continue to change as time goes on, and the media will also continue to impact the national dialogue surrounding those changes.
References


Chicago Tribune. from http://www.chicagotribune.com


Houston Chronicle. from http://www.houstonchronicle.com

This week's Big Question: Bigger nets, smaller goalie equipment among changes players want.

Three points for a win, serving the entire penalty, shorter schedule among our proposed changes.


Toronto Sun. from http://torontosun.com

USA Today. from https://www.usatoday.com