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The Effect(s) of Media on the National Football League

Christian J. Bunce
cjb7762@rit.edu

Rochester Institute of Technology

College of Liberal Arts

School of Communication

The Effect(s) of Media on the National Football League

by

Christian J. Bunce

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The members of the Committee approve the thesis of

Christian J. Bunce presented on December 12, 2016.

_____

Andrea Hickerson, Ph.D.
Associate Professor and Director
School of Communication

_____

Grant Cos, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Director of Graduate Programs
School of Communication

_____

Rudy Pugliese, Ph.D.
Professor
School of Communication
Thesis Advisor

_____

Clyde Eiríkur Hull, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Saunders College of Business
Thesis Advisor

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Christian J. Bunce

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Abstract

Exemplification theory states that the sample is applied to the whole. This paper specifically look into how the media's coverage of certain high-profile National Football League (NFL) cases may have created a negative perception about the NFL. Specifically, this paper will compare exemplars and the effects they have. The media play a large role in how players, leagues, and teams are perceived. However, our results do not support this idea. Both groups were asked the same questions, the questions were designed to gauge subject's opinions of the NFL. After analysis, there was not a significant statistical difference in the responses of the exemplar group and the non-exemplar group. The results could suggest that the media is not as powerful as it once was.

Keywords: NFL, media, exemplification, arrest

The Effect(s) of Media on the National Football League

The NFL has had a number of publicity incidents over the years ranging from domestic violence issues to officiating blunders. However, it is the player arrests and judicial cases that are of the most concern for the general public, as these events involve the safety and well-being of people. The NFL has had to address a number of high-profile cases over the years, and this paper will examine the effects these cases have had on the public, using exemplification theory.

This is an important problem to consider because the NFL has had a number of public relations (PR) issues lately involving player arrests, as well as long-term health problems related to the game. If the NFL is to stay as popular as it currently is it will need to address domestic violence, drug use, and concussions.

NFL Perceptions

High-profile NFL cases are covered by a number of major news outlets, not just sports networks. The question is whether or not these high profile cases affect individuals regarding their opinions on the league as a whole. Some believe there is a public perception that the NFL has too many players running into trouble with the law (Piquero, 2015). The problem is defining what exactly is too many. High profile cases, viral videos, and the 24-hour news cycle may make it appear that the NFL has a crime issue (Piquero, 2015). However, there are numerous other judicial cases that happen but do not catch the attention of mainstream media. These incidents are well known by avid football fans but not the general public. So the perception that NFL players are arrested too often could be the result of media attention.

Piquero (2015) found that from 2000 to 2013 the arrest rates among men in the United States aged 20 to 39 was higher than that of NFL players. Additionally, in every year from 2000 to 2013 the arrest rate was higher among U.S. men aged 20 to 39 than NFL players (Smith,

2015). This study does not address the nature of the crimes however. The NFL most recently has

had its problems with domestic violence cases, and this study is unable to address the rates of

domestic violence. People who are critical of this study, and NFL players overall will say that

NFL players have a lot more to lose and are far wealthier than a majority of those who are

committing crimes. This is true, but what they do not take into account is that some of these

players come from the very same neighborhood where these crimes are taking place. While this

is not an excuse for this behavior, it can still be a reason as to why it is happening.

The previous study suggests that the NFL does not necessarily have a problem with its

players and arrests. The issue then becomes the number of different demographics that the NFL

can be compared against. In order for the NFL to have a negative perception that means people

must have a standard as to what it is being compared to. It can be compared to American males

between the ages of 20 to 39, but in this instance the NFL has lower arrest rates. This means that

the negative perception of the NFL would be wrong. Two other options would be to compare the

NFL's arrest rates among other professional leagues or against people with equal income levels.

The NFL's arrest rates could also be compared with people who are in the public eye such as

government officials, musicians and public figures.

High-Profile Cases

It is understandable why these high-profile cases have led to a negative perception of the

NFL as a whole even if the numbers do not support that. The Ray Rice case is an emotional

example of this. The video of Ray Rice striking his fiancée in the elevator is likely to get some

sort of emotional reaction from the consumer (Belson & Eder, 2015). This video was hard for a

lot of people to watch for a number of reasons. The way he struck his fiancée, also the way that

he dragged her limp body out of the elevator (Belson & Eder, 2015). He has since married his

fiancée, Janay Palmer, but a team has yet to sign Ray Rice in free agency and at this point

probably never will. What Ray Rice did is obviously inexcusable; however, the reason many feel

that he did not get signed by another team is that there was video of the incident. There have

been other players accused of crimes like this who have been released and signed by a new team,

but in those cases there was no video evidence. The debate as to whether Ray Rice was not

signed to a new team because of the video is complicated as his numbers had dropped in

previous years. In 2011 Rice had 291 carries in 16 games with 1,364 yards, 4.7 average yards per

carry, and 12 touchdowns ("Ray Rice," n.d.). In 2012 he had 257 carries in 16 games for 1,143

yards, 4.4 yards per carry, and 9 touchdowns ("Ray Rice," n.d.). In 2013 he had 214 carries in 15

games with 660 yards, 3.1 yards per carry, and 4 touchdowns ("Ray Rice," n.d.). The decrease in

yards per carry is most concerning to NFL teams. He is also nearing the age of 30, which is

generally considered the age where running backs begin to see a decline in on-field production

(Redemann, 2015). So the matter of Ray Rice not being signed to a new team comes down to a

number of issues. However, there is some evidence to support that the video is what ended Ray

Rice's career to this point. Running backs near or over the age of 30 do sign in free agency, so

while there may be a perception that it does not happen, it still occurs. Examples of this in the

past 2015-2016 season would be Frank Gore (age 32 at beginning of season; "Frank Gore," n.d.)

and Fred Jackson (age 34 at beginning of season; "Fred Jackson," n.d.). Another reason is that

players' statistics decrease for any number of reason(s), and almost any player of Ray Rice's

caliber would be given a second chance. An example of this would be running back Justin

Forsett. His last season with over 100 carries came in 2010, that was until 2014 ("Justin Forsett,"

n.d.). In 2010 Forsett as a member of the Seattle Seahawks played in 16 games, had 118 carries,

523 yards, 4.4 yards per carry average, and 2 touchdowns ("Justin Forsett," n.d.). During the

following three seasons from 2011 to 2013 he played for the Seattle Seahawks, Houston Texans, and Jacksonville Jaguars ("Justin Forsett," n.d.). In those three years he had 115 carries, 550 yards, 4.8 yards per carry, and 2 touchdowns ("Justin Forsett," n.d.). Then in 2014 Forsett broke out as a member of the Baltimore Ravens at the age of 28 turning 29 in October. He had 235 carries, 1,266 yards, 5.4 yards per carry average, and 8 touchdowns ("Justin Forsett," n.d.). This works both ways however, in 2014 as a member of the Dallas Cowboys running back Demarco Murray played in 16 games, had 392 carries, 1,845 yards, 4.7 yards per carry average, and 13 touchdowns ("DeMarco Murray," n.d.). In 2015 as a member of the Philadelphia Eagles he played in 15 games, had 193 carries, 702 yards, 3.6 yards per carry average and 6 touchdowns ("DeMarco Murray," n.d.). A player can change teams, and for any number of reasons, see a decrease or increase in on-field production such as playing time, supporting cast, offensive or defensive scheme, or organizational structure. A third reason is Greg Hardy, former defensive end for the Dallas Cowboys, who was suspended by the NFL for domestic violence issues while with the Panthers and yet the Cowboys still signed Hardy (Sharpe, 2015). The reports of what Hardy did are quite disturbing and if there was video of what Hardy has been accused of doing it would seem a guarantee that no team would have signed him. For the 2016 season Hardy has yet to sign with a new team as the Cowboys let him go to free agency. Hardy allegedly wore out his welcome in Dallas as he showed up late to team meetings, and reportedly slapped a clipboard from an assistant coach's hands (Edholm, 2016). Originally the Cowboys were willing to let his domestic violence charge slide, but with his additional problems it was no longer beneficial to keep him. To this point no team has signed Hardy and his refusal to admit any wrongdoing in relation to the domestic violence charge is probably not helping.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) can significantly affect the way people view a business, or in this case a league. Russell and Kennett-Hensel (2016) studied the relationship among corporate social responsibility and the impact it has on fans of the National Basketball Association (NBA). Russell and Kennett-Hensel found support for both of their hypotheses, the first one being most salient for this article. They found that overall fan perceptions of the team's CSR positively and significantly affect the strength of the fan relationship with the team (Lacey & Kennett-Hensel, 2016). They also found that participants who have low overall CSR perceptions, expectations, and performance beliefs are less likely to have a strong relationship with an NBA team (Lacey & Kennett-Hensel, 2016). Conversely, participants who have high overall CSR perceptions, expectations, and performance beliefs are more likely to have a strong relationship with an NBA team (Lacey & Kennett-Hensel, 2016). Even though fans expect teams to be socially responsible and engage in socially responsible activities these acts can still improve fan relationships (Lacey & Kennett-Hensel, 2016). Their findings suggest that a team's on-court or on-field performance must be accounted for as a winning team is much more marketable than a losing one (Lacey & Kennett-Hensel, 2016). This relates back to the earlier discussion regarding Greg Hardy and Cowboys Owner Jerry Jones who weighed the benefits and costs to signing such player. It would seem that he believed Greg Hardy's on-field play would be able to make up for his off-field incidents. Therefore, lending support to the idea that winning plays a large role in fan's perceptions of their team.

A study by Kim, Goldsmith, Walker, and Drane (2014) analyzed people's perceptions of the National Hockey League (NHL). The study gauged people's perceptions of organization credibility, level of media consumption, word of mouth, and merchandise consumption. The participants were administered a fake press release regarding the NHL lockout. One group

received a press release discussing the lockout and a donation made by the NHL to a youth

hockey league team, and the other release discussed only the lockout. The study found that those

who were exposed to the negative and positive information found the NHL more credible than

those exposed only to the negative information (Kim, Goldsmith, Walker, & Drane, 2014).

There was no statistical difference regarding word of mouth, suggesting that neither group was

more likely to positively speak about the NHL with others. Both NHL media consumption and

merchandise consumption were higher among the positive and negative information group

compared to the solely negative information group (Kim et al., 2014). This study suggests that

positive information within a negative press release can help mitigate the negative perceptions

that a person may have. While, a solely negative press release will lead the person to having a

more negative perception of the league.

The two previous studies discussed fans' perceptions of an entire league. A study by Lee,

Kwak, and Braunstein-Minkove (2016) examined fans' attitudes toward a specific athlete and

endorsed brand. The study used a real life example being Ray Rice. One of the findings suggests

that identification increases the likelihood of fans being more forgiving to the athlete and the

endorsed brand (Lee, Kwak, & Braunstein-Minkove, 2016). Specifically, the findings show that

highly identified fans are able to regulate their negative emotions, and select moral reasoning

strategies which help them view the athlete in a positive light (Lee et al., 2016). Simply, that a

fan of a particular athlete will be more willing to look past the athlete's transgressions.

Conversely, less identified fans are more emotionally sensitive than highly identified fans (Lee et

al., 2016). This research shows the role that "fandom" can play in moral decisions. It appears that

a fan of a certain player will be more forgiving than someone who is not a fan of the same

player. This is generally supported through live sports viewing as well. Athletes involved in

incidents are routinely booed on the road, but rarely booed by their own fans.

Suspension duration is a major factor in the perception of the NFL, and it is clearly an

area where the NFL has fallen short. Hardy, who was originally suspended for 10 games in the

2015-2016 season, had it reduced to four (Hanzus, 2015). Then there are players such as Josh

Gordon and Justin Blackmon who have had repeated suspensions for violations of the league's

substance abuse policy. These involved alcohol and/or marijuana. As repeat offenders both of

these players have received numerous suspensions and some season-long suspensions. Josh

Gordon has recently been reinstated by the league. This is where the league loses touch with

people; while alcoholic issues are not to be taken lightly there were no victims in these crimes.

As for marijuana, many people feel the league is too strict on this as marijuana is already legal in

certain states. That right now is not the issue, however. The issue is how a substance abuse

violation regarding marijuana, albeit multiple violations, is a season long-suspension while

domestic abuse is merely four games. This is where the league received most of it negative press

over the years and it is rightfully deserved (McCann, 2014). Roger Goodell, the commissioner of

the NFL, has since enacted a six game suspension for first offenders of sexual assault, domestic

violence, and battery (McCann, 2014). A second violation results in a lifetime ban with a chance

for reinstatement after one year (McCann, 2014). These punishments are hard to uphold,

however, as Greg Hardy's suspension was reduced to four games from 10. The changes Goodell

has made to the personal conduct policy have been well received by much of the public and the

media (McCann, 2014). Any change that increased punishment was going to be viewed as a

good one. This policy is not as cut and dry as it appears however. In the 2016 season Giants

kicker Josh Brown was suspended only one game for a 2015 domestic violence arrest (Raanan,

2016). It has been reported that Molly Brown, the ex-wife of Josh Brown, told police that her former husband had been physically violent with her on more than 20 instances (Raanan, 2016). She had a protection order against Josh Brown in 2013 (Raanan, 2016). This was later dropped because of progress they had made in counseling (Raanan, 2016). The 2015 case was eventually dropped due to insufficient evidence (Raanan, 2016). The reason the NFL gave for its one game suspension is that law enforcement and Molly Brown would not cooperate with the investigation therefore, the NFL was unable to gather information. This was not a good look for the NFL but for whatever reason this case has not caught the national attention like Ray Rice or Greg Hardy.

Popularity of NFL

One point of interest here is that the two most popular sports leagues in America, the NBA and NFL, also happen to have the highest arrest rates among professional sports leagues. Of the top 50 most watched sporting events, 46 (92%) were NFL games (Paulsen, 2013). Of the four that were not NFL games, one was the National Championship in college football, two were NBA Finals games, and one was the men's college basketball National Championship game. The NFL generally has stronger television ratings when compared to other professional sports. This is not to suggest that the other sports are not doing well, but that the NFL is a notch above the rest. Having the fewest games per season among professional sports most likely helps by creating a sense of urgency. Comparing championship games/series is a good measure to determine the popularity of a league. Television ratings refer to the percentage of households that own a television and tune into the program. Game 1 of the 2015 NBA finals drew a rating of 12.9 while game 1 of the 2015 NHL Stanley Cup finals drew a 5.463 (O'Donnell, 2015). Game 1 of the 2014 World Series drew an 8.0 rating which is the lowest ever for a World Series game. While Game 7 of the World Series saved it from being the lowest rated World Series ever (ESPN,

2014). This supporting evidence suggests that the NBA is the second most popular sport in America, with the NFL easily being first. What really drives this point home is that the NFL draft drew higher ratings than NBA and NHL playoff games that same night. The 2014 NFL draft had a 6.8 rating while the two NBA playoff games scored a 2.7, and 2.6, and the two NHL playoff games scored a 1.2 and 0.7 (Rudnitsky, 2014). The fact that the NFL draft can get a higher rating than live playoff sports shows the popularity of the NFL.

One would surmise that with all of the negative press and attention the NFL has been getting that it would lead to a decrease in television ratings. There have been numerous groups and organized rallies bringing people together to boycott the NFL. Recent developments in the NFL, such as arrests, concussions, and accusations of teams cheating have hurt the brand image. However, they have yet to affect NFL television ratings or finances (Daniel, 2015). Large groups have boycotted the NFL for a variety of reasons whether it be PETA over the Michael Vick case (Sager, 2015), or domestic violence groups over Ray Rice. When Michael Vick signed with the Pittsburgh Steelers, over 20,000 people signed a petition to get him cut (Sager, 2015). Fans burned their Steelers memorabilia and threatened to never watch another Steelers game again (Sager, 2015). These boycotts, however, have not had an impact on the NFL so far. They are reported in the news, and the media goes into great detail about how it is hurting the NFL's image, but it has yet to hurt the NFL's bottom line. The NFL's revenue for the 2010 season was about $3 billion, and in the 2014-2015 season it was up to $7.24 billion (Daniel, 2015). After everything the NFL had experienced it still brought in $7.24 billion and those numbers are expected to increase next season (Daniel, 2015). Another example of how well the NFL is doing would be the ratings for the Thursday night opening game in 2015, which attracted 27.4 million viewers (Patten, 2015). This was the second most watched opening Thursday night game in NFL

history, and viewership was up 1% from the previous year (Patten, 2015). Not only did the bad

PR have no effect on the NFL, but the ratings actually went up. That game involved the Patriots

and Steelers, two teams involved with off-season scandals, and they had no effect on the ratings.

The boycotting that was planned for Steelers games because of the Mike Vick signing was

unnoticeable, and that is to assume it even happened because the ratings suggest otherwise. It

could also suggest that those who are most effected or more likely to be swayed are not NFL fans

to begin with.

Arrest Rates in Professional Sports

Tracy (2014) compared the NFL's arrest rates to the other major professional sports

leagues, such as the NBA, Major League Baseball (MLB), and NHL. Based on sole arrest

numbers, the NFL would be higher because it has a significantly larger number of players when

compared to the other leagues. With 53 players on NFL rosters the actual number of NFL players

is around 1,696 (Davis, 2014). This study accounted for that by taking the number of reported

arrests for each professional league and dividing the arrests by the number of players in each

league. Then this number was multiplied by 100,000 to account for variance, a method

commonly used in crime statistics. The study collected professional athlete arrest data from

January 2010 until September 2014. It found that the NFL had the highest arrest rate for

professional sports at 2,466 (Tracy, 2014). This provides support for the claim that NFL players

are arrested too often. However, most people do not know this information and are making

claims based on the high profile cases they have seen. The NBA average arrest rate for this time

period was 2,157, MLB was 553, and NHL was 175 (Tracy, 2014). This information could be

troubling for the NFL as it suggests that the NFL has the highest arrest rate among the major

professional sports.

Effect of Media Coverage on Sponsorships

The bad PR has not shaken the confidence of most of the NFL's sponsors, however. During the Adrian Peterson child abuse case Radisson decided it was best to drop its sponsorship with the Minnesota Vikings (Stone, 2014). This way its decal would not be seen on the banner behind the press conferences taking place at Minnesota's facilities while Vikings executives and Adrian Peterson discussed the child abuse case. This, however, is an anomaly and not the norm. Ray Katz, executive VP for sports marketing at Source Communications and adjunct professor of sports marketing at Columbia University, suggests that Radisson most likely dropped its sponsorships because it did not have great financial ties ("Why (most),", 2014). Katz essentially states that Radisson does not sponsor many events or teams and that Radisson most likely saw this as an easy way to get out of the contract rather than what was perceived as taking the high road. This argument is consistent with the events to follow as most major sponsors did not drop the NFL.

A number of companies such as PepsiCo, Anheuser-Busch, McDonald's, and Visa have threatened to pull sponsorship (Siemaszko, 2014). The companies threatening to leave release public statements about how disappointed they are in how the NFL handled the situation. The company does not drop sponsorship, however. It releases similar PR statements that every company before it has released and waits for the storm to pass and the media to pick up on the next big story. Despite whatever statement a company makes, everyone assumes that it will not drop sponsorship of the NFL. Dropping the NFL might see a short-term burst in positive buzz around a company, but over the long-run being able to advertise to the millions of people watching NFL games will be more desirable. Eventually, people will forget that the company dropped the NFL and the buzz will be lost. *Covergirl*, a brand that targets women, did not even

drop the NFL (TIME, 2014). *Covergirl* is most likely the one and only company that could have

reaped some long-term rewards from dropping the NFL, and it still decided not to drop despite

some of the domestic violence issues. This is not to suggest that all companies should drop the

NFL based on a few cases. Also, this is not to suggest that fans should feel obligated to boycott

the league. It is actually the opposite. If every organization or group of people were judged by

the few bad apples among them then everyone would be seen in a negative light. This merely

presents the perspective that it is hard to imagine PR for the NFL ever being worse than it is right

now, and if sponsors are willing to stick it out now then it is hard to imagine sponsors ever

dropping.

Literature Review

Exemplification theory is a little used theory in media coverage (Zillmann, 1999). It

holds that media's high involvement coverage of certain stories creates a misconception about

the whole (Zillmann, 1999). The coverage of the case typically does not report on the broad

statistics and focuses more on the individual circumstances and details of the case. The theory

attempts to explain how this high involvement coverage can manipulate the views of those who

consume the media. Media can focus on one topic and drive it into the minds of the viewer, and

before the viewer realizes it they now develop a misconception towards a larger group based on a

sample, if not an anomaly. Exemplification covers a wide range of categories (Cumpa, 2012) and

it has been applied in many fields.

Exemplification theory examines the influence that exemplars such as opinions in a news

report can have on a person's view of the issue (Zillmann & Brosius, 2000). One example would

be the narrative given along with a news report. There are a number of major news networks

such as Fox News, MSNBC, and CNN that report on the same stories but have different

narratives to go along with the story. This illustrates the network's intentions or ability to report

a story in a way that may shape the views of those who are watching. Additionally, the 24-hour

news cycle has created a media environment where everything is being discussed. People can

view the same story multiple times while the station looks for new news (Agudelo, 2015). Thus,

once a "worthy" story finally makes its way into the mainstream media, it will be overanalyzed

by everyone in the business (Sambrook & McGuire, 2014).

Zillmann, Perkins, and Sundar (1992) found that subjects exposed to the article

containing exemplars relied more on the exemplars to make their judgments rather than the base-

rate information. In this study, the base-rate information was a summary of the success of a

dieting program while the exemplar was a series of testimonials from participants of the

programs. The results show that personal narratives or opinions can overshadow facts in some

cases. Relating this to the NFL, the study or base-rate information would be the arrest and

punishment taking place while the exemplar would be the medium putting its own opinion in the

story. The independent variable would be whether or not the participant was exposed to the

exemplar, and the dependent variable would be the reaction the participant has to either the base-

rate information or the information with exemplars.

Another factor that has been determined to play a role in exemplification theory is

emotional appeal (Zillmann, 1999). Cases that appeal emotionally to the consumer are able to

affect the consumer's view/beliefs (Zillmann, 1999). It is believed that over time the emotionally

laden appeals are able to gain strength (Zillmann, 1999). This makes sense as emotional appeals

are usually the best way to appeal to people whether it be in marketing or trying to gain support

through the media (Ellens, 2015). Emotional appeals are expected to use effective text or speech

that will activate emotions of the audience to accept an idea (Christopher & Jabbar, 2012).

Emotional appeals can be both positive and negative; the topic being discussed here will focus

on negative emotional appeal. In this study, two articles will be employed, one with negative

commentary and one that presents only the facts of the case. The negative commentary will serve

as the independent variable, and the dependent variable will be reactions to the two articles

which will be gauged by a short questionnaire following the reading.

Once individuals become emotionally involved in a case it affects their decision making

and in the end makes it easier for the media to shape their views (Ellens, 2015). Christopher and

Jabbar (2012) analyzed emotional appeal on attorney's websites and how attorneys appeal to

potential clients. The study found that attorney websites use words such "stressful,"

"frightening," and "anxiety" to persuade people to use their services. The use of these negative

words serves as a motivator for the consumer to hire the attorney.

Exemplification theory addresses opinions and experiences that people have about an

issue and how these opinions/experiences shape their viewpoint on the issue (Peter, Rossman, &

Keyling, 2014). Recent developments in technology (i.e., Internet and social media) have caused

exemplification theory to become a more relevant theory. "Research on this topic has

consistently shown that people tend to form their judgments based on this single-case

information, which often means that they ignore the more valid base-rate information available"

(Peter et al., 2014, p. 20).

Exemplification as Persuasion

Exemplification has been viewed as a very powerful tool of persuasion (Goddu, 2012). A

key concept in exemplification is that facts are sometimes distorted or ignored, which can cause

misleading or irrelevant premises (Goddu, 2012). This causes the argument to become skewed

which on principal affects the validity of the argument (Goddu, 2012). However, one may argue

that the argument may in fact become more persuasive (Goddu, 2012). The argument in

academic terms has lost some of its value, but in persuasive terms it may have become greater

(Goddu, 2012). This is done more often than not on purpose for media outlets to shape the views

of their consumers. Those who are uninformed about a topic will be unaware of the information

given to them and have no reason to doubt it. Therefore, it is easier to persuade an ill-informed

person with inaccurate information based on the idea that the individual has no prior knowledge

or experience to compare with it (Eysenck, 2004). Exemplification can be a powerful tool of

persuasion, but it can depend on the amount of information the audience possess.

Exemplification Theory and News Credibility

Exemplification theory has been used to analyze the perception of news credibility.

According to Arpan (2009), "The use of examples (or exemplars) to illustrate an event or issue

that is the subject of a news story is a highly prevalent journalistic practice evident in both print

and broadcast stories" (p. 249). Her experiment tested both quotes and anecdotes' effects on the

perceptions of news story credibility. Studies of U.S. magazines have found that 93% of the

stories used exemplars (Gibson, Gan, Hill, Hoffman, & Seigler, as cited in Zillmann & Brosius,

2000). Of each story, 44% was used solely for the purpose of exemplification, and 54% of

television news used exemplars (Gibson et al., as cited in Zillmann & Brosius, 2000). These

exemplars were used to draw attention to the stories by making them more interesting. More

often than not, exemplars tend to be extreme when compared to the average of the particular

industry (Arpan, 2009). This leads the viewer to forget the actual data and statistics used in the

media's presentation of the story and focus on the over-the-top exemplars instead. This idea is

exactly what the exemplification theory is based upon.

Arpan (2009) showed that exemplars shaped perceptions of news stories. Articles with more negative quotes were associated with lower credibility ratings and a lower view of the group being tested. The negative quotes and narrative would be the independent variable in this case, while credibility ratings and personal views would be the dependent variable. Her findings showed that the overwhelmingly negative quotes led to the participants being unable to recall the statistical elements of the article. This left only the negative quotes as a means to define the group. It appeared that negative public opinion had the largest effect on perceptions of the group. One area where this research was affected was whether or not the participant had previous knowledge of the event. Considering that this experiment used college fraternities and sororities, it is plausible that college students had previous knowledge about these groups. This leads to one of the negating factors of exemplification theory.

In previous research, consumers were less affected if they had no previous knowledge of the situation (Arpan, 2009). Someone who is knowledgeable about the situation is less likely to be affected by media and how it presents the story. Simply put, consumers have done their research on the phenomena and are informed on the subject. This means that consumers are more likely to trust the information they have gathered rather than the media who puts their own spin on the information. The idea of having previous knowledge of the phenomena works conversely as well. Someone who is less knowledgeable about a phenomenon is more likely to have his/her opinion shaped by the media due to the fact that they have little to no knowledge of the situation (Eysenck, 2004). The consumers have no baseline of information to compare with what the media are presenting to them and therefore are more susceptible to having their views changed. This research illustrates the idea of this paper: that the exemplification of NFL judicial cases has created a mass misconception that the NFL has a crime issue. These stories constitute negative

publicity which Arpan found to have a greater effect on the consumers, than positive publicity. It demonstrates how previous knowledge made it more difficult for the media to shape opinions, while little previous knowledge made it easier for the media to shape opinions.

An example of exemplification in a NFL case would be the media's coverage of Ray Rice. Before a network would play the video of Ray Rice, the announcer would warn that the content is graphic and that viewer discretion is advised. This in itself can be considered an exemplar as it is shaping the viewer's opinion of the video before it plays. Additionally, correspondents who are on after the video plays discuss how the NFL has completely mishandled the situation and that the suspension originally given to Ray Rice was not sufficient. The action itself was indefensible, but I would imagine this did not have much of an effect as most people already believed that his behavior was intolerable. I doubt that after watching the Ray Rice coverage people were just becoming aware that domestic violence is unacceptable.

The previous literature displayed how exemplification can take place and the effects that it can have. The potential negative ramifications have yet to hurt the NFL but it is something worth monitoring. It is important to remember that at one point MLB was the most popular sport in America. This is no longer the case and while it may seem implausible to imagine a situation where the NFL could not be the most popular sport in America this is exactly the attitude that could lead to such events occurring. It is unlikely that a negative perception regarding NFL arrests could take down the NFL by itself. However, combine this with increased public awareness of health concerns, the NFL could have problems down the road.

It is hypothesized that individuals exposed to the exemplar document will report significantly higher numbers of NFL players arrested every year than those who are not exposed

to the exemplar. Additionally, they will be more negative in their evaluation of the NFL and how it hands out punishment than those not exposed to the exemplar.

Hypothesis 1: Participants exposed to the exemplar article will significantly overestimate the number of players arrested per year when compared to those exposed to the non-exemplar article.

Hypothesis 1A: Participants exposed to the non-exemplar article will significantly underestimate the number of players arrested per year when compared to those exposed to the exemplar article.

Hypothesis 2: Participants exposed to the exemplar article will be significantly more negative in their opinions of the NFL when compared to those not exposed to the exemplar article.

Hypothesis 2A: Participants exposed to the non-exemplar article will be significantly more positive in their opinions of the NFL when compared to hose not exposed to the exemplar article.

Hypothesis 3: Those who perceive NFL players as more criminal will be significantly less interested in the NFL.

Method

Participants

Subjects will be drawn from at random by Qualtrics representing a range of different interests, hopefully ensuring a diversity of interests and backgrounds. There is no a reward or stipend offered for completing the experiment. This experiment will have a smaller sample size when compared to a survey, but it has the possible advantage of determining casualty. The

sample size for this experiment will be 300 with 150 assigned the exemplar article and 150 assigned the non-exemplar article (see Appendix).

Variables

The independent variable in this case would be the exemplar used or not used, and the dependent variable would be the subject's emotional responses to the material which is gauged by the questionnaire filled out after reading the material. The base-rate information is the same in both articles, but one article will have a negative narrative and will be administered to the experimental group. The control group will be exposed only to the base-rate information. It is anticipated that reactions will be more negative for those exposed to the exemplar than those who are not. This is a one-factor design experiment with control versus experiment group.

Materials

There are two groups in this experiment. Both groups will be exposed to the same fake case involving an NFL player. The difference is in the wording of each case. The control group, or non-exemplar group, will be exposed to an article that discusses the nature of the crime, player name, and suspension or looming suspension for the player. This article focuses specifically on the facts and does not have narration. The experimental group will be exposed to the exemplar version of the case which will criticize the player and NFL for allowing such things to occur. The added negative criticism should facilitate any exemplification factors that are taking place.

Procedure

The participants will be exposed to the reading material randomly and then given a questionnaire. The questionnaire will distinguish between those who are and are not NFL fans. It will specifically ask participants to estimate the number of players arrested per year, have them evaluate how the NFL handles these arrests, and whether changes are needed. It is expected that

those exposed to the exemplar article will be more negative in their evaluations when compared to those exposed to the non-exemplar article. It is important to make sure that the participants given the exemplar article read the exemplar lines in the text. Both articles mention that NFL players can appeal suspensions with the NFL. The corresponding question in the survey is a simple "yes" or "no" question, asking if NFL players can appeal suspensions. If the participants answer "yes" we will assume that they have read the article; if the participants answer "no" they are excluded from the analysis.

Results

Questions one through four were analyzed using a *t*-test, while questions six through 10 employed the Mann-Whitney U-test. Both tests were used to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups, those who read the exemplar article and those who read the non-exemplar article. These two-tailed tests did not provide any significant results. Question 10 regarding how the public perceives the NFL approached significance with a *p*-value of .055. None of the hypotheses presented in this study were supported. Therefore, these results do not support the idea that exemplars effect the way people view a topic or issue.

While the results did not support the hypotheses posed there are possible explanations for why that may be. Success of exemplars can vary based on longevity and exposure. For the sake of this study, the exemplars were reduced to a few sentences in a paragraph. In retrospect, the exemplars may not have been enough to provide any significant results. Previous studies reviewed in this paper have demonstrated significant results to support exemplification. Another possible explanation could be the topic itself. The NFL and third party organizations have

conducted many studies into the way people feel about the NFL and their willingness to watch

football. These studies have produced inconsistent results.

Limitations

Exemplars can vary based on longevity, and for the sake of this experiment it was limited

to a number of comments interjected. Based on the depth of negative the narrative that was

given, the results could vary. Questionnaires also do not go into great depth such as an in-depth

interview would be able to do, which in this case may be more useful to evaluate the opinions of

the participants. Some participants may also have preexisting attitudes or knowledge that are

resistant to change and may affect their answers.

Future Research

A possible area of future research could be taking this topic and using contextual analysis

to discover which words or phrases are being using most often in the media's coverage of NFL

cases and the tone of the cases. For the most part it will obviously be negative, but there may be

varying degrees of negativity among the various media coverage.

Secondly, instead of articles being the treatment, the experiment could expose

participants to television coverage of NFL cases to see what effect this may have. Having facial

cues and context along with the negative exemplars could add another variable into the equation.

Another possibility would be to cite the source of the information in the questionnaire.

This might test whether source credibility has an effect on audience. Additionally, the

differences between the influences of professionalized media versus social (or user-generated)

media could be tested.

Conclusion

Exemplification theory has been supported in previous research, but not in this study. There are a few possible reasons why. The NFL is a company that depends on ratings for much of its profits, and with the number of issues the media reports on, the perception of the NFL is an issue worth monitoring. It is something the NFL is clearly aware of, conducting its own surveys and focus groups. It also addresses unfavorable coverage by producing its own media with a website (NFL.com), a Twitter account (twitter.com/NFL), and Facebook pages for each of its teams. The NFL's use of media may counter adverse publicity, thus blunting the exemplars' effects.

Another explanation could be the passionate nature of the NFL. While NFL fandom probably is not as intense as international soccer's, it still maintains strong loyalty. Some fans undoubtedly dislike the NFL, often referred to as the "no fun league." The NFL restricts player celebrations and has a strict uniform policy as well. Despite some fans dislike of the league and Roger Goodell, they do support their own teams. This could possibly lead to decreased ratings in nationally televised games, but the local games would still maintain the same ratings.

It is possible that the media may not be as powerful they once were. In the 2016 Presidential election, every media outlet predicted a Clinton victory. This did not happen. People may be more skeptical of the media than ever, believing that each outlet is pushing its own agenda. There are a great number of media outlets now as well. While not everyone may consider the new online services credible, it is still another source that traditional media must compete with. With these number of outlets almost everyone can find one which will match their own personal views; by doing this people will have their views reinforced but never challenged. Whether is it the number of new outlets or people's increased skepticism, it is possible that the media may no longer have as important a role.

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Appendix

The Following are the Articles and Survey Used

Introduction

The following is a study to determine the effect(s) that media has on the National Football

League. You will be asked to read a short paragraph about the NFL and then answer a few

follow-up questions. If you decide to participate it should only take a few minutes of your time.

If you decide not to participate it will not hurt your relationship with the Rochester Institute of

Technology.

Risks

There are no risks in this study that involve anything beyond minimal risks. The questionnaire

will ask a few questions regarding feelings and attitudes towards the NFL. It will also ask a few

general questions such as age.

Confidentiality

The data from this study will only be accessed by the investigator and faculty advisors.

Participants' names will not be asked for in the study.

Right as A Research Participant

Participating in this study is optional. You are not required to participate in it. If you choose not

to participate there will be no penalty or loss. If you do choose to participate you may become

more knowledgeable of the role that media plays in our daily lives. Specifically, how it can play

a role in the attitudes or beliefs we have on a topic or issue.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or comments please contact Christian Bunce at cjb7762@rit.edu.

Exemplar

The following paragraph is the exemplar article used in the questionnaire.

On May 27th, 2016 at 1:14 A.M. Jason Smith defensive end for the Cincinnati Bengals of the NFL, was arrested on South St., Cincinnati for driving while impaired (DWI). According to public records this is the first time Jason Smith has been arrested. It is also the first time this month that an NFL player has been arrested. Yet another PR disaster the NFL has had to deal with in recent months. Smith joins the long line of current NFL players who have been arrested over the years. Smith's trial date is set for June 4th where he is expected to fight the charges. If Smith is convicted or enters a plea agreement the NFL will give him a two game suspension which is league protocol on issues that involve alcohol and driving. The NFL is well known for bending the rules and suspending a player for as many games that it feels necessary. If Smith is suspended, he will be provided the opportunity to appeal his suspension with the NFL. Numerous players have appealed however, and have had to take the NFL to court over what they believe is unfair treatment. This latest issue provides the NFL yet another opportunity to prove it is the worst run league in professional sports.

Non-Exemplar

The following paragraph is the non-exemplar article in the questionnaire.

On May 27th, 2016 at 1:14 A.M. Jason Smith defensive end for the Cincinnati Bengals of the NFL, was arrested on South St., Cincinnati for driving while impaired (DWI). According to public records this is the first time Jason Smith has been arrested. It is the first time this month that an NFL player has been arrested. Smith's trial date is set for June 4th where he is expected to fight the charges. If Smith is convicted or enters a plea agreement, the NFL will give him a two-

game suspension which is league protocol on issues that involve alcohol and driving. If Smith is suspended, he will be provided the opportunity to appeal his suspension with the NFL.

Questionnaire

1. On average, how many hours of news content (print, online, television, and radio combined) do you consume per week?

2. On average, how many hours of NFL content (talk shows, talk radio, online, and print combined) do you consume per week during the NFL offseason?

3. On average how many hours of NFL content (talk shows, talk radio, online, print, games) do you consume during the NFL season?

4. How many NFL players do you believe are arrested per year?

5. The NFL offers players a chance to appeal suspension. Yes or No.

Please answer the following questions with (1) being strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neither agree nor disagree, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree.

6. The NFL Commissioner is consistent with the punishments he assigns to players.

7. The NFL offers players a fair chance to have their suspensions reduced or rescinded.

8. Cases such as Ray Rice and Aaron Hernandez are outliers and not the norm for the NFL.

9. The NFL is portrayed negatively by the media.

10. The NFL is perceived negatively by the public.