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No Change No Gain: A Comparative Framing Analysis of the NFL's Inspire Change Campaign

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No Change No Gain: A Comparative Framing Analysis of the NFL's Inspire Change Campaign

by

Kia K. Cannon

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
with a concentration in Strategic Communication Management
Zimmerman School of Advertising and Mass Communications
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my loved ones, my unwavering supporting cast!

To my Mother, Dr. Tashanda Brown Cannon, PhD, and Father, Sean. Thank you guys for your unwavering support, love, and sacrifices. Your belief in me, even during moments of self-doubt, has been a constant in my life. Words cannot describe how lucky I am to be your daughter.

To my Brother, Sean Chandler. It is because of you that I strive to always be exceptional. My goal is to always provide you with an example of what putting God first and a strong work ethic can do for you. I am proud to be your big sister and hope to always be a role model you can emulate.

To my Grandparents, Pastor Larry C. Brown and Co-Pastor, Dr. Barbara L. Brown. Thank you for continuously lifting me up in prayer and answering every phone call in my time of need. Without your love and support, this would not have been possible.

To my Aunt & Partner in Crime, "KK." Thank you for being one of my biggest supporters. I can always depend on you to be a shoulder for me to lean on.

To my Best friend, Kennedy. For always reminding me that God is the author of all of my steps. Thank you for bearing with me through this process. Without your love, encouragement, and support, this would not have been possible. Love you, Kenni!

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To my Favorite Person, Jojo. For your love and comforting spirit.

To my Little Bestfriend, "Hurricane Nash." For always giving me a mental break and making me smile in the midst of adversity.

To my Cousins. For always having high expectations for me and pushing me to be the best version of myself to set an example for you all.

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ABSTRACT

This research provides a basis for understanding how public relations practitioners should present CSR initiatives in their organizations and how the media may interpret its initiatives. The researcher analyzed how the NFL framed its Inspire Change campaign and how it was translated in the media. First, a qualitative textual analysis determined how the NFL strategically framed its newly founded social justice initiative. Then, another textual analysis examined how the media framed the Inspire Change initiative and if the NFL's preferred frames were reflected in the media. The results reveal that while two out of three of the NFL's frames of Inspire Change were successfully translated by the media, the narratives were not a direct reflection of the NFL's preferred frames. The results additionally revealed three new frames emerged from the media's perspective on Inspire Change. Two of these frames conveyed contrasting narratives from the NFL framing of the social justice initiative. In order for consumers to maximally understand the message, goals, and objectives of a CSR initiative, organizations are advised to implement CSR communication tactics. Additionally, to enhance the success of optimal media coverage that reflects the organization's goals, organizations are advised to not only produce content around them but seek to develop a range of consistent and focused material that hones in on what they want to convey about the CSR initiative.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The last few years have seen an increased interest in strategically establishing corporate social responsibility (CSR) within organizations. Studies suggest that corporations are moving from “traditional charity” perspectives to strategic internal corporate social responsibility, which will create a positive impact while maintaining accountability (Babiak & Wolfe, 2006). CSR is established through a continual commitment from a business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large (Asemah et al., 2013). After the death of George Floyd, in the summer of 2020, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement gained a tremendous amount of support throughout the United States. During this time, there were protests around the country as a public outcry against social injustice and police brutality. In the wake of this, different brands and corporations were determined to support social justice promising to do their part by creating more diverse and inclusive workplaces (Saksith, 2021). To do this, some companies comprised corporate social responsibility campaigns to show their support and move in the direction of making positive change.

The media plays a vital role in the impact of CSR initiatives because of its ability to influence public opinion by selectively choosing what to highlight in a campaign. Scholars believe, “whether a corporation’s CSR activities are covered positively or not will correspondingly influence its reputation” (Vogler & Eisenegger, 2021, p.1). The media can either serve as an ally and use its resources such as visibility, influence, and engagement to help drive the social change an organization is trying to accomplish or hinder it. As the media uses its

platform to highlight CSR campaigns and initiatives from organizations, it is important to evaluate and analyze the framing of these campaigns to determine how it translates into the media.

The National Football League (NFL) has adopted CSR campaigns throughout its organization to communicate certain messages to its consumers and stakeholders. Professional sport executives indicate that external pressures from stakeholders are the driving factors for these organizations to participate in CSR (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009). Examples of CSR initiatives previously adopted by the NFL include Crucial Catch, Salute to Service, and Play 60. Crucial Catch aimed to support health care through breast cancer awareness, Salute to Service focuses on veteran care, and Play 60 raises awareness for physical education to fight against obesity (Rugg, 2016). What these campaigns have in common is that they are each positioned to create positive societal change. However, some of these practices have faced scrutiny in the media based on how genuine the organization is with program implementation (Devlin & Sheehan, 2017; Rugg, 2020). Recently, the NFL launched a new CSR initiative, Inspire Change, which was made to address the social justice issues and events that took place in 2019 across the United States. The NFL's platform as a prominent sports league gives them greater visibility and reach, credibility, influence, and many resources. As the NFL uses its platform to communicate these messages, it is vital to understand how they strategically implement this CSR initiative to their consumers to ensure the most effective way for societal impact.

NFL Inspire Change Campaign

The NFL's "Inspire Change" campaign was launched on January 11, 2019, as a part of the league's social justice efforts. The NFL invested \$89 million toward a social justice partnership with the players, launching a website, hashtag rights, commercials, and a documentary series

(Rugg, 2020). According to the NFL, “The purpose of the campaign is to support player-led efforts to engage with team owners, public officials, law enforcement, academic institutions, community partners and others to identify meaningful ways to strengthen local communities and the greater society” (NFL Operations, 2023a, para. 1). Rugg (2020) argued that this campaign was made in a response to the players’ call for the NFL to address social justice strategically to capitalize on the activist movement by building the leagues brand as an inclusive American organization.

In 2019, the NFL revealed four priority focuses for this initiative (1& 2) education and economic advancement, (3) police and community relations, and (4) criminal justice reform (NFL Operations, 2023a). The campaign utilized teams and players to carry out these messages. Since 2019, all 32 teams made a commitment to social justice initiative messaging by implementing stadium activations and spreading awareness (NFL Operations, 2023a). The in-stadium activations included end zone stencils with social justice messaging, goal-post wraps and banners, helmet stickers, wristbands, branded towels, and patches for the players to wear throughout the games (NFL Operations, 2023a). Members from the Players Coalition believed that this approach would be the most effective to produce a community wide impact (NFL Operations, 2023a).

Since the establishment of the campaign, over \$300 million in grants have been awarded to social justice organizations as a part of the initiative (NFL Operations, 2023a). Partnerships between the NFL and these organizations have helped expand the initiative's reach and impact throughout the community. An integral part of the Inspire Change campaign involved the national grant partners comprising players, renowned football legends, and NFL owners. The owners are Michael Bidwill (Arizona Cardinals), Arthur Blank (Atlanta Falcons), Gayle Benson

(New Orleans Saints), Dee Haslam (Cleveland Browns), and Shad Khan (Jacksonville Jaguars). The current and former players are Kelvin Beachum (Arizona Cardinals), Anquan Boldin (NFL Legend), Demario Davis (New Orleans Saints), Josh Norman (NFL Legend), and Aeneas Williams (NFL Legend) (NFL Operations, 2023a). In 2020, the league extended its commitment to \$250 million for the campaign over a 10-year period to help advance social justice efforts (NFL Operations, 2023a). NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell stated:

We are proud of the work we've done across the league to help build lasting change that supports the most under-resourced and vulnerable people within our communities. Every single day, we are committed to working with our clubs, players, and social justice partners to build a more equitable and just world. It is up to all of us to inspire change. (NFL Operations, 2022, para.2)

The purpose of this study is to analyze and examine how the NFL strategically presented its newly founded Inspire Change initiative and to determine how it was framed in the media. Understanding the effectiveness of the NFL's communication mechanisms through a CSR lens can provide future insight to help drive social change in old or new CSR initiatives that they produce.

This research is organized to reflect how each part contributed to the study. In Chapter 1, a background is provided on the NFL's social justice initiative "Inspire Change." In Chapter 2, a survey of existing literature on corporate social responsibility and the theoretical framework, framing, is discussed emphasizing their significance to this study. Next, a detailed process of textual analysis is clarified in Chapter 3 to provide a rationale for steps taken in the data collection and analysis process. The findings of this study are provided in Chapter 4. Finally, in Chapter 5, a synthesis of the results is presented to provide insight and rationale. This section is followed by future recommendations and how this research can be applied.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Corporate Social Responsibility

Scholars suggest that CSR is an important area to study due to its ability to bring awareness to the ongoing social issues in the world (McGowan & Mahon, 2009). According to Reckman (2023), CSR is defined as a management concept that describes how a company contributes to the well-being of communities and society through environmental and social measures. Because companies were scrutinized for certain labor practices in the 1960s and 1970s, the idea of CSR evolved to regain favor with the public (McGowan & Mahon, 2009). CSR became the solution for organizations to deem themselves socially responsible to help re-establish old relationships and create new ones among its primary stakeholders. Aside from keeping a company socially responsible, CSR can also be used as a business strategy. Scholars have argued, “firms should be socially responsible without expecting to be rewarded, others argued that it is wrong for firms to do anything without the intention of reaping benefits from their actions” (Wan-Jan, 2006, p.179). By implementing CSR in forms such as initiatives and campaigns, with a certain strategy in mind, companies can attain a good reputation and attract others who want to be part of a likeminded organization.

CSR is used by companies for various reasons. Professional sports organizations are using CSR by making efforts to expand and promote their core values in business operations (Han et al., 2020). These organizations in the sports industry are increasingly incorporating CSR into their operations because it can positively impact the organization (Godfrey, 2009). Incorporating CSR into business practices requires a commitment from multiples levels of the

organization for it to be successful. Studies have sought to determine the stakeholders' role in a company's approach to CSR (Kim et al., 2018). Key findings indicated that primary stakeholders, such as employees and consumers, are imperative in generating, implementing, and developing organizational CSR strategies (Kim et al., 2018). For this reason, it is critical to implement executive-level leadership who will set the tone of corporate responsibility efforts. Researchers stated that to carry out CSR initiatives successfully, organizations must establish a supported work environment to further develop their efforts and practices (Kim et al., 2018).

CSR In Sports

CSR in relation to sports has only recently been studied. Researchers have sought to explain the rising interest to include CSR within these professional sports organizations. Scholars McGowan and Mahon (2009) stated, "Corporate social responsibility in professional sports first emerged from the idea that charitable endeavors and community outreach programs could help boost fan support and increase revenues" (p. 2). The incorporation of these programs provides an opportunity for stakeholders to see the organizations carry out these endeavors. CSR in sports typically involves efforts made by an organization to make a positive impact on society or the environment. The focus on CSR in sports research was to better understand organizational motives to support social involvement, how CSR-related information is implemented, the outcomes of the implemented CSR information, and how CSR-related initiatives and information are communicated to the public (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2014). How these organizations implement and communicate their CSR to the public is important because the true motives for incorporating CSR begin to show.

Implementing corporate social responsibility is a commitment from a company to act in a social, environmental, and ethical manner. Organizations incorporate CSR initiatives throughout

programs, campaigns, and actions into their business operations to carry out these promises. Some argue that CSR initiatives are explicitly adopted to relieve external pressure. Because sports organizations have famous public figures among their teams, these corporations often face blowback. To counter, organizations incorporate CSR practices to be deemed socially responsible. Corporate social responsibility is essential in prominent sports organizations because they have the power to recognize their influence and use it to make a positive impact on society. The concept of CSR to organizations such as the NFL, National Basketball Association (NBA), Major League Baseball (MLB), and National Hockey League (NHL) is not newly found. For decades, these organizations have had their teams involved in community initiatives, positively influencing social impact (Godfrey, 2009). Pro-social physical activity community programs, such as NFL Play 60, were created to encourage kids to maintain a healthy lifestyle (Kyungyeol, 2018). Likewise, MLB launched Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities, which allowed underprivileged children to play and learn baseball and softball (Kyungyeol, 2018). In addition to campaigns, leagues have employed CSR through grants, gifts, cause-related marketing, sponsorships, financial contributions, and employee volunteering (McGowan & Mohan, 2009).

According to scholars, CSR initiatives are able to "generate intangible strategic assets such as reputational capital, employee commitment, acquiescence among key regulatory institutions or legislative bodies, the development of the firm's business and institutional environments, and help mitigate negative media scrutiny" (Babiak, 2010, p. 2). The NFL's Crucial Catch campaign is a staple for one of their most widely known CSR efforts for breast cancer awareness month in October. By partnering with the American Cancer Society, they raise money through donations, sell merchandise, and increase awareness with stadium imagery, activities, and fundraisers (Devlin & Sheehan, 2017). Crucial Catch allows each NFL team to

form their own campaign for a game that usually involves players wearing pink, commercial breaks with personal cancer stories, half-time shows involving breast cancer awareness, and survivors honored throughout the game (Devlin & Sheehan, 2017). Despite the perceived good cause, the NFL's campaign has received negative backlash from researchers for “Pinkwashing” because the majority of the profits do not directly go towards the American Cancer Society (Devlin & Sheehan, 2017). The director of Breast Cancer Action, who coined the term in 2002, defines pinkwashing as "when a company uses that recognizable pink ribbon symbol or signature shade to market a product or service without meaningfully supporting breast cancer research or awareness" (Schumer, 2022, para. 2). Research revealed that the NFL takes 25% of sales from breast cancer awareness games (Devlin & Sheehan, 2018). In addition to this, Business Insider concluded, "For every \$100 in pink merchandise sold, only \$11.25 is donated to the American Cancer Society, \$37.50 is paid toward the manufacturer, and the NFL keeps the remaining amount" (Devlin & Sheehan, 2018, p. 478).

Scholars also argued that the NFL’s launch for the Crucial Catch campaign was used as an antidote to bevy the controversies in the 1990s known as the “crimewave” (Rugg, 2020). Equally important, scholars have correctly shown that black athletes are presented with narratives of criminality (Rugg, 2020). As of 2023, 56% of the players in the NFL were African American, (Gilmore, 2023). Therefore, researchers believed the implementation of this campaign sought to not only use players as spokespeople to boost the league’s goodwill with fans, but to reassure them that black players were upstanding corporate citizens (Rugg, 2020). Organizations caught engaging in CSR for selfish or disingenuous reasons damage the company's reputation. This impacts the future of all other CSR initiatives a business may produce because people may

not trust that it's in the best interest of the community. The social activism organizations engage in needs to reflect a genuine commitment to CSR.

Activism in Sports

Although activism in sports has been a prevalent topic in recent years due to some organizations choosing to speak out on recent social movements, it is not a new concept. During the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and 1970s, prominent athletic figures such as Muhammad Ali, Jim Brown, Bill Russell, and Arthur Ashe were advocates during a time when the movement was receiving a lot of attention (Brown & Brison, 2018). Athlete activism continued in the 1990s and 2000s, but because of the fear of repercussions, athletes shied away from supporting social movements, and activism within sports died down (Brown & Brison, 2018).

Activism is defined as:

Involving local instigations of new series of elements intersecting the actual, generating new collective enunciations, experimentations and investigations, which erode good and common sense and cause structures to swing away from their sedimented identities. (Svirsky, 2010, p. 1)

Activism in the NFL has gained significant attention in recent years involving players, coaches, teams, and owners (Rugg, 2023). In 2016, Colin Kaepernick, the quarterback of the San Francisco 49ers, took a stand against police brutality. On August 14, 2016, Kaepernick started his protest in a pre-season game by sitting on the bench, out of uniform, during the national anthem, but it went unnoticed (Boren, 2020). On August 26, a journalist asked why he was kneeling, and Kaepernick stated, "I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses Black people and people of color" (as quoted by Khabbaz, 2021, p. 1).

Kaepernick received backlash for his actions in and outside of the sports world because it was believed that he was disrespecting the flag and the United States military. Numerous times

throughout his protest, Kaepernick stressed that it was not aimed towards the military (Rugg, 2020). Equally important, a consultation with military army veteran Nate Boyer is what ignited Kaepernick from sitting during the national anthem to kneeling (Rugg, 2023). Researchers stated that athlete activism is often met with immediate, intensive backlash that potentially compromises the athlete's career (Brown & Brison, 2018). At the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, American sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos were expelled from the games due to raising a “Black Power Salute” at the medal podium (Vooris, 2017). Schmittel and Sanderson's (2015) work demonstrated that these adverse outcomes stem from individuals believing athletes should stick to playing their sport instead of participating in and involving social activism within sports.

Kaepernick made it clear that his goal of the protest was to bring systemic racial and ethnic inequality closer to the front of American minds in the hope that such evils would be eradicated (Poole, 2021). Athletes across different leagues began echoing Kaepernick's behavior by speaking out and supporting him (Khabbaz, 2021). When the National Basketball Association's (NBA) season started, players and coaches from four teams knelt during the national anthem (Brito, 2020). Along with this, players wore Black Lives Matter t-shirts and locked arms (Brito, 2020). In a post-game interview, LeBron James said, "It's always been bigger than just the ball and ten guys on the floor" with referees. "It's an opportunity to use this platform and be able to spread a lot of positive, much love throughout the course of the whole world" (as quoted by Brito, 2020, p. 1).

Activism in major sports leagues such as the NFL and the NBA is essential because of the large platforms these teams provide. In addition to this, the public figures among the teams have the power to influence behavior change and relay critical social messages. In response to finding a way to support Kaepernick's cause without kneeling, the Inspire Change social justice

initiative campaign was created by the NFL (Rugg, 2020). The league wanted a way for the players to be able to support the cause that they were passionate about while finding a way to respect the flag (Rugg, 2020). In addition to this, there was an opportunity for the NFL to capitalize on and communicate its CSR efforts by adding this cause.

Strategic Communication

In the literature on strategic communication, there seems to be a general agreement that organizations and individuals utilize it as a tool to achieve their goals (Thomas & Stephens, 2015). Because the literature on strategic communication is still emerging, this results in several similar but different definitions. The earlier definitions stem from communication scholars Argenti and colleagues (2005) who defined strategic communication as ““aligned with the company’s overall strategy, to enhance its strategic positioning” (p. 83). Newer definitions emerged from Hallahan and colleagues (2007) who defined it as “the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission” (p. 3). While different meanings of strategic communication continue to emerge, the strategies of how to implement it into research along with the lenses it can operate within are being structured as well (Thomas & Stephens, 2015).

Strategic communication plays an integral role in organizations because of its purpose to execute plans put in place to fulfill a cause (Falkheimer, 2014). It is often used as an asset to improve the effectiveness of communication throughout an organization. Scholars suggested that strategic communication is motivated by organizations as a tool for enforcing, enhancing, or changing the organization’s identity among employees and the organizational culture, strengthening their image among stakeholders, and improving the transparency between members of the organization and between the organization, stakeholders, and the public

(Alvesson, 1990; Falkheimer, 2014),). Ultimately, this mechanism helps employ organizational change by changing the organization's culture or influencing a new perspective for consumers to achieve a specific goal. It is noted that in strategic communication, it is imperative to focus on the “strategic” component, often neglecting the communication aspect (Hallahan et al., 2007). Following the fundamental roots of communication within this practice preserves the methodological integrity of true public relations tactics.

In corporate organizations, public relations professionals find numerous ways to construct and communicate messages to their audiences. In the NFL’s case, they utilized the campaign Inspire Change to launch their take on a social justice initiative. Scholars have started conducting research on strategic communication that is utilized by sports organizations (Pedersen, 2013). The research revealed that the type of communication from and within the team can affect the success of an organization (Pedersen, 2013). The launch of any campaign by an organization typically involves the use of a strategic platform to ensure that the messages are communicated effectively. The messages that are launched are often seen in CSR practices. Common strategic communication practices have been used among these professionals for quite some time to help implement the messages aligned with an organization's values, objectives, and goals. With the use of strategic communication, organizations should be able to effectively communicate.

CSR Communication

CSR communication is a subset from strategic communication within the realm of corporate social responsibility. It is becoming increasingly important to companies and organizations due to its primary focus of communicating the company’s values and commitment to increase social responsibility. CSR communication is defined as, “The implementation of CSR

initiatives within organizations calls for effective CSR communication. CSR communication is important because the research suggests that it can affect how stakeholders perceive an organization and impact their relationships with the organization” (Huang & Wang, 2018, p.331). Without active and successful communication about a company’s CSR activities, scholars found the stakeholders may not acknowledge the company’s CSR endeavors so will not be aware of the company’s CSR initiatives (Kim & Ferguson, 2014). Effective CSR communication is an integral part of the success of initiatives that will assure mutual benefits for the social cause and the business organization (Gligor-Cimpoieru & Munteanu, 2014).

CSR communication can be utilized internally and externally. Internal communication of the execution of CSR communication to its consumers is vital to ensure the success of an initiative. Externally, research in the field suggests, “the success of a CSR communication campaign is choosing the right channel of communication” (Gligor-Cimpoieru & Munteanu, 2014, p.282). The first part of this study examines the message of the Inspire Change campaign in its channels of communication. Studies have shown the most effective communication channels for external CSR communication are dedicated web pages, CSR annual reports, media reports, campaigns on products and packaging, television advertisement, promotions, partnerships with mass-media representatives blogs, (Gligor-Cimpoieru & Munteanu, 2014). In CSR communication, it is important for the executers of the initiatives to be aware of the fact that “what companies think they are saying may be quite different from what stakeholders are seeing and hearing” (Gligor-Cimpoieru & Munteanu, 2014, p. 281). If the goal is to make a certain type of change, but is misconstrued in the process of CSR communication, then communicators must evaluate its strategies. Understanding this is critical as this study analyzes if

and how the NFL communicates its Inspire Change social justice initiative based on how it's reflected within the media.

Theoretical Framework

The origination of framing theory is from a combination of researchers starting with Bateson (1972), who developed the concept of framing as "a spatial and temporal bounding of a set of interactive messages" (Parveen, 2017, p.7). Framing theory was rooted in sociology and was later translated into communication and media studies because framing has the power to influence the way people perceive and interpret topics, issues, or events, often as they are presented in the media. Framing theory is often seen throughout media practices to consider how media constructs meaning to issues and frame them in a specific way. Entman (1993) felt frames served as a function to identify root causes, make moral judgments, and suggest solutions to solve problems. Framing has the premise that issues can be presented from several different perspectives to display the point of view the writer chooses. Scholars Chong and Druckman (2007) stated, "Framing refers to the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue" (p. 104). The framing of these issues or problems to an audience can affect how a person receives and processes this information. Research shows us that humans naturally tend to do as little research and thinking as possible in situations, making framing influential (Parveen, 2017).

Gitlin (1980) proposed the idea of media framing in news gathering studies. Gitlin focused on the failed 1968 revolution, and he attributed the failure to the way the movement was framed in the media (Matei, 2022). Entman studied framing in his media work as well. He examined contrasting news frames from U.S. media outlets covering the Korean Air Line (KAL) and Iran Air Coverage misapplications of military force (Entman, 1993). Entman described

framing as a tool to examine how media presents information on a specific issue (Entman, 1993). He believed that framing involves salience and selection. Entman stated, "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interoperation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation for the item described" (1991, p.52). Choosing what to frame in a text is essential due to the mass audiences it may reach.

Media Frames

Media frames serve as an avenue to tell people what to think. According to Parveen (2017), "News is a window whose frame limits the perception of reality by limiting the perception of different realities and focusing on a specific piece of it" (p. 6). Communication and media in framing are crucial because they often affect the attitudes and behaviors of those exposed to them (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Framing can sway an individual's opinion by interpreting specific information and eliminating certain details. Chong and Druckman (2007) believed, "Frames in communication organize everyday reality by providing meaning to an unfolding strip of events and promoting particular definitions and interpretations of political issues" (p. 12). Heffernan and Maxwell (2019) agreed with Entman's (1991) suggestion that "media sources can take pieces of information to promote a problem and causes of their choosing relating to an issue" (p. 934). The media plays a significant role in critical issues because the public relies heavily on it for understanding and information. This gives media outlets power to push topics that are considered important by the general public and get them to see issues from their frames. Research shows that media plays a role in determining what issues people see as significant through the amount of coverage and the way they are discussed (O'Brien et al., 2019).

When the media frames issues negatively, it produces bias where others could perceive issues as an unfair portrayal and shape public opinion (Kernochan, 2004).

In framing, the media binds together chosen ideas, information, judgments, arguments, claims, and value statements into a narrative that interprets the perspective of the frame holder (Waller & Conaway, 2011). Furthermore, the media operates framing cognitively, rhetorically, and ideologically. On a cognitive level, frames help us understand and interpret information. The literature suggests that frames can also help us focus on certain aspects of a conversation or topic while ignoring others that do not fit the frame (Waller & Conaway, 2011). Because of this, the media can influence decision-making by shaping public understanding. On a rhetorical level, the inclusion of metaphors, specific language, and rhetoric can shape the narrative. Ideologically, the research pointed out, “frames function to emphasize the importance of an issue, to promote a specific interpretation of an issue in terms of causal factors, to introduce evaluative judgments on the parties to an is” (Waller & Conaway, 2011, p.87). This is important because these components contribute to how messages are framed.

Message Framing

Message framing served as a tool for public relations professionals to advance their organizational interests and sometimes the public (Knight, 1999). Scholars suggested that message framing occurs strategically in political communication and campaigns due to its nature being employed throughout social movements and advocacy activities (Stromback & Kioussis, 2011). According to Hallahan (2009), framing is used by public relations professionals as a paradigm for understanding and investigating communication and related behavior in a wide range of disciplines. The literature indicated that the goal of these communicators is to gain a favorable response to their messages from the audience. Similarly, multiple studies have offered

direction about how practitioners can construct frames to accomplish their objectives (Knight, 1999). In 2008, there was a study conducted by a group of communication professionals to examine how public relations professionals in an organization frame their messages for a public crisis. The researchers analyzed message frames used by the Kraft Heinz Company in its response to an obesity crisis. Looking at how the message frames presented by Kraft were reported in the media helped define newfound effective framing practices (Fitzpatrick et al., 2008). Upon reviewing the literature there is little research on the strategic communication practices used by sports organizations as they implement their CSR practices. By employing framing theory while analyzing the Inspire Change campaign, the results of the study will open new avenues for future research.

Purpose of the Study & Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to examine the NFL's Inspire Change campaign with a focus on how this initiative was strategically framed and communicated in the media. Examining the media framing surrounding the NFL's Inspire Change campaign is important for several reasons. The Inspire Change campaign is influential because it is at the forefront of the league's corporate social responsibility campaigns. Also, this campaign was motivated by the NFL wanting to take a stand of support after social justice events around the country. While there has been prior research surrounding the NFL's CSR campaigns, to date, no study has explored the strategic communication practices of the Inspire Change campaign. Also, there was yet to be an examination into how these initiatives are being presented in the media. This study fills both gaps in the literature. Furthermore, through framing theory, the research assessed how frames can be used to explore more strategic communication methods to frame CSR efforts. The media reception to these frames could be detrimental or positively affect how others receive the

initiatives set by the organization. Through textual analysis, the following research questions will be answered:

RQ1: How does the NFL strategically present the Inspire Change campaign through a CSR lens?

RQ2: Do the media frames reflect the NFL's underlying strategic initiatives in the Inspire Change campaign?

RQ3: What other media frames emerge in reporting about the Inspire Change campaign?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The research questions sought to answer how the NFL's Inspire Change campaign was framed strategically by the league and subsequently how it was framed by media. The study employed a qualitative approach that included two parts. First, a textual analysis of the NFL's Inspire Change campaign was conducted. The purpose of doing this first was to understand how the NFL positioned themselves strategically through CSR practices. After understanding how this campaign was constructed by the league and how they define social justice, the second part of the study employed another textual analysis, with the found frames in mind, to explore what major frames reflected the NFL's promotion and were present within the media coverage of the Inspire Change campaign. Understanding how the social justice initiative's framing translated in the media helped explain how effective the NFL's strategic practices were in this campaign. Additionally, it showed how the media tends to frame campaigns.

A textual analysis is defined as "A rigorous, in-depth, and systematic analysis and interpretation of textual material that allows for the emergence of patterns and themes" (Yang, 2019, p. 4). According to Fürsich (2009), "Textual analysis allows the researcher to discern latent meaning, but also implicit patterns, assumptions, and omissions of a text" (p. 241). By inheriting the language, texts, and visuals, it allowed a deep understanding of the material presented. Based on the stated definition, research question one was best answered through conducting a textual analysis because of the type of material presented by the Inspire Change campaign. Additionally, it served as the best method because it allowed a better understanding of how written, visual, and spoken languages help create social realities (Brennen, 2012). With the goal of a textual analysis

being to bring out a range of meanings from a piece of text by deconstruction, this best helps researchers understand the NFL's CSR tactics for their campaign. This analysis aimed to provide an understanding of the text's underlying meanings, which can give a complete understanding of what an author is trying to convey. To answer the research questions, a media framing study was constructed to explore how the underlying meanings are reflected in the media by using textual analysis. Examining the content and language used throughout the NFL's texts produced by the NFL around its Inspire Change campaign helped identify the patterns and themes, which answered RQ1. In RQ2, the same concept was applied to answer if the found media frames in the analysis reflected the NFL's underlying strategic initiatives in the Inspire Change campaign. Analyzing those found frames in comparison to the NFL's original frames helped identify what new frames emerged in the media surrounding the campaign addressed RQ3.

Sample and Data Collection

For the campaign's analysis, the sample criteria included press releases about the Inspire Change campaign, an audit of the website Inspire Change, and the video commercial which launched it. The press releases were collected from NFLCommunications.com after searching for "Inspire Change" to identify any available press releases related to the initiative. All the releases in English between the launch date for Inspire Change (January 11, 2019) to the first game of the season (September 5, 2019) were included. If the press releases vaguely mentioned the Inspire Change campaign, then it was not included. In total, five press releases were analyzed. Additionally, the Inspire Change homepage on NFL.com was analyzed by combing through the page and taking thorough notes. It was necessary to examine the homepage because it gives a summary of what the campaign is, provides updated information on what the NFL is doing for the social justice initiative, and content from the campaign. Lastly, a textual analysis of the video

that launched the Inspire Change campaign was conducted. The video is titled “NFL Super Bowl 2019 TV Spot, 'Inspire Change' Ft. Brandon Marshall, Sam Acho,” is a total of 23 seconds, and collected on Ispot.tv. The size of the sample proved to be sufficient as saturation was achieved. The first part of the analysis explored pre-constructed frames of what the NFL’s social justice initiative sought to accomplish.

The second part of the methodology determined whether the NFL’s preferred frames identified were present in media news coverage. For the analysis, the sample drew newspapers from the databases Nexis Uni and Access World News. There was no exclusion to articles found from newspapers outside of the United States due to the type of data bases that were utilized for the search. However, the data set did exclude press releases, wire copies, and blogs. The sample also included three articles from Sports Illustrated and four from ESPN. The time frame for articles was from January 11, 2019, to September 12, 2019. These dates were specifically chosen from the day the campaign was launched a week into the 2019-2020 football season. The scope of the search was filtered to the first three weeks the campaign was launched because there was a large amount of data during this time period. Additionally, looking at the articles in the beginning will help us understand how the campaign was received initially by the media directly after the launch instead of over time. In total, 31 articles were considered for this data set. This sample size was considered adequate due to saturation being achieved. While conducting the analysis, no new information or themes emerged from the data. This signified that the researcher conducted enough data to grasp a full understanding of the topic.

The articles were collected by searching the following phrases in the advanced search bar in Nexis Uni and Access World News: NFL Inspire Change Campaign, NFL social justice initiatives, Inspire Change, Inspire Change Launch, and NFL CSR Initiatives. Once these terms

were searched, 198 media reports were found in Nexis Uni. When the reports were specified to newspapers within the set period, the sample was reduced to 57 newspapers. With Access World News, the search sample totaled 520 media reports. A total amount of 208 articles were exact duplicates of an article selected to be part of the sample. In total, 28 articles mentioned the term inspire change not in relation to the NFL's campaign and were eliminated. In 39 articles, the Inspire Change campaign was mentioned as a footnote in the articles and 27 were duplicates of those types of articles. Lastly, 144 articles just mentioned the NFL. After the reports were consolidated within the time period and exclusively to newspapers, the sample was reduced to 32. There were duplicates of the same articles; they had different headlines, but the content was the same. The article that belonged to the more prominent publication with the earlier date stamp was chosen from the duplicates. Articles that mentioned the Inspire Change campaign as a footnote instead of the main topic were also eliminated from the data set. Additionally, articles written in Spanish were excluded. Finally, cross-references between the articles from the databases were conducted, and duplicates from those were eliminated making the total 24 articles. A Google search was conducted to gather the articles from a sports perspective. By typing in NFL and Inspire Change into the search bar, four articles from ESPN and three from Sports Illustrated fit the criteria making a total of 31 newspaper articles.

Coding & Analysis

An inductive research approach was used for both coding processes. Scholars suggested a strong presence of inductive thinking, which can help stimulate the development of category forming in qualitative research (Taylor & Lindolf, 2011). In a similarly structured thematic analysis study, an inductive approach was used to investigate how tobacco companies are using third-party awards to frame themselves and their core activities via company-controlled

communication channels (Marshman et al., 2023). Inductive coding enabled the organic emergence of themes from the data as opposed to the application of an existing coding framework, thereby facilitating novel insights (Marshman et al., 2023). Further, inductive analysis refers to approaches that primarily use detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by an evaluator or researcher (Thomas, 2006, p. 238). The coding for this research for both parts, the NFL's frames of Inspire Change and the media's, was completed in three phases: open, axial, and selective. The coding notes for each phase were recorded in a notebook, and there is a final codebook provided with the code names, definitions, and an example of the code from the NFL's preferred frames and the new frames that emerged from the media.

The first step conducted was open coding. Open coding helps the researcher identify distinct concepts and themes among the text (Williams & Moser, 2019). By sifting through the material, patterns and categories can begin to emerge organically. In this phase, once an article was deemed within the research criteria, the title and date of the article were recorded, if it had one. As each individual article was found, it was re-read multiple times. Notes of specific phrases, words, and quotes that stood out were written down. After a thorough reading of the article, a summary was written underneath the initial phrases that were recorded. As each article was collected, these steps were repeated for each one. When the data from the open coding phase was organized, a final reading of the notes took place to fully understand what was collected before moving on to the axial phase.

In the second phase, the researcher moved to axial coding. According to Strauss (1998), axial coding identifies relationships between open codes to develop core codes. Major (core) codes emerge as aggregates of the most closely interrelated (or overlapping) open codes for

which supporting evidence is strong. In this phase, patterns and existing codes from the open coding were examined. Each article was reviewed in the notebook again, and common patterns listed to create smaller categories. Williams and Moser (2009) recommended that the researcher spend time engaging in continuous analysis, cross referencing, and refining theme categorization to be prepared for selective coding.

In the last phase, selective coding, codes from the categories previously made during the axial phase, were created and became the frames that answer the research questions. Flick (2009) stated, “selective coding continues the axial coding at a higher level of abstraction [through] actions that lead to an elaboration or formulation of the story of the case” (p. 310). The purpose of selective coding is to make meaning out of the findings that emerged.

It is important to note that the coding process for the emerged frames from the media were pre-constructed ideas that stemmed from the found frames of the NFL during the first process. Open, axial, and selective coding was still applied, but the researcher came up with ideas of some frames that could possibly emerge. This was analyzed by looking for specific texts, ideas, and information within the media reporting that evolved from the NFL’s CSR frames.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

NFL's Preferred Frames

The first research question sought to determine how the NFL strategically positioned its social justice initiative, Inspire Change, through a CSR lens. For this research, a “CSR lens” refers to the perspective in which a company views their CSR efforts. Studies indicated that for a CSR campaign to be successful, it must have a strong message (Robinson & Eilert, 2018). Furthermore, by choosing to adapt a specific message strategy to support the CSR initiative, the message will be more effective. The NFL chose to frame its social justice message by creating a strong central message around the priority points of the Inspire Change campaign, its on-going commitment to advancing social justice, and how they utilize external partnerships to enhance the message. Literature explicitly stated how organizations strategically choose to communicate messages to their consumers throughout different avenues (Robinson & Eilert, 2018). The NFL utilized press releases, videos, the creation of websites, and articles to communicate its Inspire Change campaign.

In this study, textual analysis was performed on a total of five press releases, the Inspire Change website, and the Inspire Change campaign launch video, which premiered during the Super Bowl in 2019. More specifically, as a text, the video gave insight to what the NFL felt the Inspire Change initiative stood for and why it was needed. The video opens with a frame of minority children and a voiceover of someone saying, “the most important thing is our kids and our community.” It then goes on to indirectly highlight the Inspire Change focus areas and how players wanted to make a change. To communicate CSR messaging, companies should convey

the key high-level points of its message (Robinson & Eilert, 2018). Not only did the league execute this strategy but they utilized the voice of the players, showing commitment and a united front from the NFL.

During the coding process, the texts revealed consistent messages that led to the presence of major frames. Throughout the data, the NFL made sure to explain how all its actions were a part of hitting the campaigns priority areas. All five press releases, the video, and the website touched on the focus of the Inspire Change campaign. Three of the press releases and the website spoke on how this social justice initiative was an on-going commitment to help the advancement of the cause, and the texts highlighted the external partnerships that helped amplify the initiative.

Through analysis of the key threads in the data, three different frames emerged. The emerging frames included: four strategic priority areas positioned to shape the focus of Inspire Change, external partnerships, and stretching the importance of an on-going commitment to advance social justice. CSR is an organization's way of showing how they can work in a sociable and responsible manner. Research implied that they often do this, keeping in mind how they can impact communities, environments, consumers, and stakeholders (Murphy et al., 2013). These frames are motivated by CSR processes due to the NFL's ability to strategically implement them. Studying how the NFL framed this campaign first was imperative to the study to ascertain whether those frames were present in the media.

Frame One: Inspire Change Priority Areas

For this corporate social responsibility (CSR) campaign, the NFL intentionally highlighted and focused on its commitment to four priority areas concerning social justice. Social justice can have different meanings for multiple parties, but the NFL aimed to define it as creating positive change to ensure equal opportunity (NFL Operations, n.d.a). By doing this, the

league zeroed in on four key pillars to address social justice issues: education, economic advancement, community-police relations, and criminal justice reform.

To enhance education opportunities, the NFL's goal is to mentor and foster children for better outcomes in education (NFL, n.d.b). With economic advancement, they hope to advance access to financial literacy and career pipelines (NFL, n.d.b). To help reduce the barriers to criminal justice reform, the NFL provides transition support for the formerly incarcerated and advocates for critical reforms to the criminal legal system, including pre-trial detention (NFL, n.d.b). Lastly, to improve community-police relations, the league will create changes in policing through law enforcement-community collaboration and expanded 911 response options (NFL, n.d.b).

In this frame, the NFL mentioned its four priority areas in every press release within this data set. The league made it a point to forcefully explain its position and definition of social justice and continue to connect everything they did in the Inspire Change campaign back to these key focus points. Gligor-Cimpoieru and Munteanu (2014) stated that communicating CSR initiative results is a strategic process, which is what the NFL did when they connected their actions to accomplishing their goals.

Research also suggested that proper communication throughout CSR campaigns is a viable way to encourage a positive association with consumers (Groza et al., 2011). The NFL effectively and consistently relayed its definition of social justice to its consumers. These four priority areas were constantly shared directly through press releases and the Inspire Change website, as well as indirectly during the launch video. Because of that, the NFL could target partnerships, financial contributions, and support from other organizations that wanted to support the cause. The NFL later strategically capitalized on the benefit of external partnerships and

financial contributions by making it a monumental piece of how they frame the Inspire Change campaign.

Frame Two: External Partnerships

Three of the press releases regarding the Inspire Change campaign focused on the NFL engaging in partnerships. In August 2019, the league's official live music entertainment strategists entered a long-term partnership with the Roc Nation music label founded and owned by Jay-Z in 2008. The goal of this partnership was to further support the social justice initiative while nurturing and strengthening the community. Roc Nation's contribution to the partnership was to help amplify the campaign's platform through music by creating musical content across streaming services for various social justice initiatives. According to Jay Z in a press release, "With its global reach, the National Football League has the platform and opportunity to inspire change across the country" (NFL Communications & Roc Nation, 2019, para.4). NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell stated, "Roc Nation is one of the most globally influential and impactful organizations in entertainment. The NFL and Roc Nation share a vision of inspiring meaningful social change across our country" (NFL Communications & Roc Nations, 2019, para.6). In addition, Roc Nation and the NFL also partnered with other artists such as Meghan Trainor, Meek Mill, and Rhapsody to launch an Inspire Change apparel line and Songs of the Season. These individuals would serve as Inspire Change advocates and create songs to be streamed on NFL platforms throughout the season. The proceeds from both were allocated to help fund Inspire Change programs throughout the country, working to help accomplish the goals of the social justice initiative. The NFL framed these goals as an opportunity for this partnership by creating different avenues to support the NFL in advancing social justice through its campaign.

Equally important, the league partnered with rapper Big Boi to make a \$100,000 financial contribution to the Martin Luther King Center. According to a press release, “As part of the NFL’s #InspireChange social justice initiative, the NFL and Big Boi’s commitment will further the education and training principles, philosophy and methods of Dr. King’s nonviolence movement” (NFL Communications, 2019, p.1).

The league strategically partnered with these well-known public figures because in the realm of corporate social responsibility, these partnerships can help amplify the impact of a campaign (Muniz & Guzman, 2021). Research found that celebrity endorsers have been used for brand communication purposes for years and have demonstrated their ability to influence brand perceptions and capture attention (Muniz & Guzman, 2021). This creates an opportunity for other organizations and consumers to see the work that the NFL is doing and potentially get on board to help. Organizational partnerships are also important because they can help both parties achieve common goals more effectively, especially if the goal is to impact complex change.

Frame Three: On-going Commitment to Advance Social Justice

The NFL purposefully underscored the narrative, emphasizing that their actions were an ongoing commitment to advance social justice throughout the texts. Before Inspire Change was launched, the NFL made a commitment to the social justice cause. In 2017, the NFL formed a player-owner committee specifically intended for the advancement of social justice (NFL Operations, n.d.a). These individuals laid the foundation by organizing financial grant contributions to the cause and encouraging the other clubs to participate. In 2018, the league also launched the “Let’s Listen Together” campaign (NFL Operations, 2018). The campaign included digital content and brand spots, highlighting the player-led work on social and racial equality,

along with individual letters from players and owners sharing their stories and personal reasons for making social justice a priority (NFL Operations, 2018).

It was continuously brought up that the NFL's actions were a part of an ongoing commitment. Researchers found that the nature of a CSR campaign can affect how consumers respond and interact with it (Growza et al., 2011). The league's message with this initiative highlighted that it was a part of something bigger and would remain constant. This also makes it more likely for consumers to pay attention to the initiative and possibly engage with more urgency. Researchers explained that consumers attitudes toward firms and their social initiatives are likely to be influenced by corporate motivation (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006).

Studies have also shown that companies can enhance brand equity by increasing their commitment to CSR (Andreu et al., 2015). Throughout the texts, the NFL made sure to strategically highlight this ongoing commitment in every new step of the campaign to grasp the concept of how this initiative is prominent and will be a part of the NFL as they work to advance social justice. In addition, an increase in brand equity can help attract other organizations to partner with the league in its mission. Because of how well the NFL marketed its initiative, they attracted external partners and more support.

Part One: How the Media Framed Inspire Change

The second research question aimed to determine if the media frames reflect the NFL's underlying strategic initiatives in the Inspire Change campaign. Before examining the media frames, it is important to note there were a priori frames that guided this section of the study. This provided a structured approach to interpreting the frames that emerged in the media. The NFL's approach included emphasizing the campaign's priority points, its ongoing commitment to advance social justice, and its external partnerships. This section examined how the media

portrayed the NFL's strategic initiative, specifically focusing on the two frames identified in research question one: the Inspire Change priority points and Jay-Z's involvement. Notably absent in media coverage was the NFL's ongoing commitment to promoting social justice. We will delve further into each of these frames below.

Frame One: Inspire Change Priority Points

The first frame to emerge from the findings that reflected the NFL's strategic initiatives was the Inspire Change priority points. Just like the NFL, the media homed in on the focus points of the campaign throughout its messages. From a CSR approach, it is important that this frame was translated throughout the media because these points serve as the backbone for the Inspire Change initiative. The current literature on CSR communication suggested that organizations must identify their CSR goals, which in this case includes the priority points (Lim & Greenwood, 2017). In 15 of the articles, the media highlighted the focus of the campaign. A few of them were published in the first week the campaign launched, two of them during the off season, six right before the beginning of the NFL season, and seven at the beginning of the season. More specifically, as a framing technique, in two of them the media centered the narrative alone around the creation of the campaign, its purpose, and examples of what the initiative looks like in action. These articles came from the *Associated Press* and *The Times and Timescript*. In a closer read of these stories, although the narrative was the same, each outlet historicized it differently. *The Times and Timescript* emphasized how Inspire Change was designed to serve as a platform to showcase the efforts the NFL was making for social justice. In the *Associated Press*, their narrative of how and why the initiative was created mirrored the NFL's. The article focused on framing Inspire Change as a fresh start to advancing social justice, thus presenting the priority focus areas instead of a continuation of efforts that were already happening. Additionally, in the

Times and Timescript, the players' voices were heavy throughout the narrative due to the framing of Inspire Change, which served to emphasize what the league and players were actively doing. Recognizing the interchanging narrative throughout the media reports allowed readers to critically evaluate the information being received.

Although this frame in the media was reflective of one of the NFL's preferred frames, it is essential to contextualize how it was implemented by the media. Overall, the articles analyzed current priority points in varying levels of attention. In some instances, the priority points were framed heavily to share the purpose, impact, and goals. For example, an article published by the *Durango Herald* focused only on the NFL launching its new social justice initiative. Wilner (2019) wrote, "The NFL is launching a social justice platform, with an emphasis on education, economic development and community and police relations" (p. 1). This frame shaped the narrative to focus on the initiative's unique purpose. This also gave the audience a direct vision of what the initiative should or should not look like. After clearly stating the priority points of the initiative, it named the campaign and what it would involve as the latest step towards social justice for the NFL. According to Wilner (2019), "The platform is called Inspire Change and includes the funding of grass-roots organizations such as Big Brothers Big Sisters of America and Operation HOPE. This launch involves new grants, new African American history education programs in schools, grants with organizations we have not worked with before and who are doing the work on the ground" (p.1). Including and emphasizing the how of what the NFL is doing with Inspire Change helped influence audience perception and lay the foundation of what narrative the media wants to portray as well, just as the NFL did through its messages.

In this frame, the media also drew attention to and recognized the components of the initiative and how it would impact the community. This helped shape and strengthen the

narrative around an individual priority point, community. An article by *Times and Timescript* mentioned the NFL's financial commitment towards the league, which would go directly towards the NFL's priority areas: "It was estimated that the league and teams would contribute about \$89 to \$90 million between the onset of the arrangement and 2023 to community-activism programs deemed important by the players, focused on African American communities" (Maske, 2019, para. 1). Including this in the media reports adds context to the narrative from the league's perspective for what they are specifically doing as a commitment to the initiative's priority areas. In these instances, the media framed the league in a positive light, making strides towards achieving the goals of its newly found social justice initiative.

Surprisingly, only two emphasized these priority points at the time of the launch in January. The leading cause may be due to the NFL only releasing one press release on the launch itself. Throughout their media sources, instead of posting about the launch from different points of view, the NFL decided to copy and paste the release and post it on its sites. Six articles applicable to this frame were published in August, when the NFL announced its partnership with Jay-Z. However, it is important to note that although the specific frame was present, it reflected in the media a bit differently. Throughout the articles published at the time of the launch, the article was specifically focused on what this initiative was as mentioned above. In August, most of the articles that included these points were heavily focused on how the partnership can impact these areas instead of letting the points shine. As a result of trying to emphasize the partnership, it led to a narrative shift. As an illustration, an article said,

On Aug. 30, the NFL and Shawn "Jay Z" Carter's entertainment company, Roc Nation, announced the creation of a new socially conscious platform called "Inspire Change," an initiative with the primary objective to address criminal justice reform, police and community relations, and economic empowerment. (Defender News Service, 2019, p.1)

In this instance, the media focused on the partnership more than how the partnership is supposed to help amplify the priority points. Because of the way the media chose to present the partnership along with the priority points in the narrative the NFL originally created surrounding the priority points, the media began to shift its focus elsewhere. In this media report, the quote frames the Inspire Change platform as if it was created by Roc Nation and the NFL together. Because of this, the frame in this instance is not being represented accurately by the media. The NFL also highlighted Jay-Z's involvement, but it is important to note that when framing the priority points specifically, they did not include his involvement. Additionally, this article was presented in the media as if Inspire Change was just now announced, when it had been in effect for seven months at the time. Likewise, an article from the *Portland Press* addressed the priority points, but in relation to how Jay Z's root within the African American community would help the campaign succeed. "For Inspire Change to succeed, it must have strong roots within the communities that are most affected by the issues the players want addressed: criminal justice reform; relationships with police; economic growth opportunities; and educational progress" (Wilner, 2019, p.1).

This report referred to Jay-Z's involvement with the initiative, which provides strong roots within the minority communities through his music. Thus, those roots are needed for Inspire Change to succeed. In this instance, the media chose to place the priority points on a back burner, by shedding light on how the league's choice of partnership was deemed beneficial. However, this may hinder the league's message since the focus would not be emphasized consistently. Lastly, as another framing technique of the media, it not only presented the priority points holistically, but individually. Articles spoke on different ways the NFL was advancing education and strengthening the community. An article titled, "NFL Launches Social Justice

Initiative, Stressing Education” not only mentioned the Inspire Change priority points, but emphasized the impact it was going to have on the educational aspect. It was important that the media broke down the priority points individually. It benefits the consumers by giving them the opportunity to examine each point more closely to see what change is happening. In terms of strengthening the community, a couple of articles included how this action would be done through Inspire Change.

Jay-Z's group will also help boost community efforts through American football and music under the NFL's Inspire Change program launched earlier this year to bolster communities around the United States in areas for education and economic advancement, police and community relations and criminal justice reform. (Raskin, 2019, p.1)

Additionally, the media shed light on what the league was doing in communities as a part of the initiative's focus. They took a post on Twitter from Cook County State's Attorney Kim Foxx who applauded the NFL on its execution of the contributions of the campaign. It stated,

In the days leading up to the season opener the NFL hosted neighborhood community engagement events with BBF Family Services, local Boys and Girls Clubs, among others. Having the @nfl and @rocnation come to North Lawndale to invest in the bright young people who are here lets them know that their hopes and dreams matter just as much as anyone else in the city. It was my honor to be a mentor today and help #InspireChange. (Edwards, 2016, video)

Like the NFL, the media endeavored to frame specifically how these priority points were being applied to the campaign. Pushing the narrative of “Inspire Change is about making real change,” is what helped it gain favor among consumers along with more supporters. The media framing the NFL as an organization that not only laid down the foundation of a good cause but had people who followed through with it and placed the social justice initiative in a positive light. This type of exposure not only helped boost the league's social responsibility but also its reputation among the skepticism. Likewise, framing these points individually in the media was a smart technique because it provided more in-depth reporting on the goals of the initiative. This also created an opportunity for more clarity and focus throughout the news articles.

Frame Two: Emphasis on Jay Z's Involvement

The second frame that was reflected from the NFL into the media was an emphasis on Jay-Z's involvement with the Inspire Change campaign. The frame that emerged from the NFL and was throughout its messages was its external partnership with Jay-Z. Likewise, the media framed a consistent and strong narrative around the partnership between Jay-Z and the NFL, along with him being attached to the initiative in general. An analysis of the media reports revealed that in this frame the narrative of Jay-Z's involvement was interchangeable. Within the external partnership, Jay-Z's involvement first started as a positive reflection of the NFL making changes to involve a music mogul who has partnered with other artists in support of social justice. However, as the beginning of the season got closer, the narrative begins to shift from focusing on what the partnership was doing to who it involved.

Also, actions such as the utilization of specific language and verbiage to frame the partnership in multiple viewpoints were analyzed within the articles. Roc Nation, Jay Z's music label, agreed to a partnership with the NFL where he would serve as a live entertainment strategist. According to the NFL, a core component of this partnership amplified the Inspire Change platform priority areas (NFL Communication & Roc Nation, 2019). Some of the positive verbiage used to describe this partnership and what it could do in the media included: meaningful and positive, positive change, and amplify Inspire Change. This type of language reflected the same message the NFL framed for Jay-Z's involvement in the partnership.

Similar to the framing of the NFL's priority points, this reflected frame was evident in the media, but occasionally from a different point of view than the NFL. A total of 59% of the articles were about Jay-Z's partnership with the NFL. However, all of them were not focused on the benefits of this partnership and the good it could do, as the NFL framed the partnership.

Some of the media surrounding this partnership focused on critiquing Jay Z's role, figuring out whether he would perform, and people feeling like he sold out Colin Kaepernick with the partnership. The language and phrases the media utilized throughout these stories contributed to framing the issue in a negative light. Phrases such as "burying Colin's career," "selling out Colin Kaepernick," and "silencing the movement" were used. This impacted the NFL positively and negatively due to the mixed reviews that removed the essential goals set by the league and Jay-Z when the partnership was announced. The goal was to utilize his platform to help amplify the social justice initiative and not to focus on Jay-Z. The media choosing to focus on Jay Z's involvement with the NFL instead of what he brought to the table shows how they were framing different perspectives of Jay-Z's actions. Additionally, it is essential to consider that the media reporting highlighted different viewpoints of Jay-Z that were unrelated to the Inspire Change campaign. This is significant to acknowledge because in doing this, it adds to the narrative the NFL already made for its social justice initiative. Consequently, adding to the narrative opens the door, shaping public reception and an understanding of the NFL's goals and objectives. More importantly, it creates the opportunity to foster dialogue, which can lead to engagement with the topic. Before the Inspire Change partnership, Jay-Z openly supported Kaepernick (Raskin, 2019). Once he partnered with the NFL, the media interpreted his action as Jay-Z taking the side of the NFL instead of Kaepernick. The media reported on the critiquing of the partnership; however, they also captured the vision Jay-Z had in mind for the partnership and what he set out to do. Nevertheless, the amount of skepticism was somewhat high among the press releases, but it was critical for the media to capture his vision in an attempt to show readers that this partnership was not a publicity stunt but had real plans behind it.

Although the media heavily framed the negative components of the partnership, it also captured the positive elements of the campaign like the NFL did. It was emphasized that this partnership was needed to strengthen the communities because of the representation that Jay-Z brought (Wilner, 2019). This is important because these articles pushed the narrative that Jay-Z's involvement was helping the cause. One article wrote, "For Inspire Change to succeed, it must have strong roots within the communities that are most affected by the issues the players want addressed: criminal justice reform; relationships with police; economic growth opportunities; and educational progress" (Wilner, 2019, p.1). The phrase "strong roots within the communities that are most affected by the issues" said a lot about the real root cause of Inspire Change and the reason for Jay-Z's involvement. This point also emphasized in its framing the issues reflected in minoritized groups. This phrase is intended to resonate with the minorities the Inspire Change initiative aimed to support. This article helped communicate the message more effectively by connecting with the audience.

Lastly, throughout this frame, the media strategically implemented quotes from NFL commissioner Roger Goodell in its articles. Incorporating quotes from leadership helps support the narrative along with its credibility. He focused on Jay-Z's involvement making an impact. The NFL commissioner said, "Every conversation I've had with Jay has been inspiring, not just on his perspective on the process of how we do the entertainment, but what we should try to achieve" (Raskin, 2019). This quote captured the partnership between the NFL and Jay-Z and how they both truly believed it was a step in the right direction to improve social change. It also addressed the criticism that his involvement in the campaign attracted. This is important to frame because it shows that the NFL had confidence and believed in what they were doing.

An article from *ESPN* proclaimed, "I don't think either one of us expected that this relationship wouldn't have its critics," Goodell said. "But you don't let the critics or the negativity overwhelm the chance to do something really positive" (Reid, 2019, p.1.). He continued, "We talked about a variety of issues. When we first met, we talked about entertainment and how we do that. But the No. 1 thing we went to was impact, that we can have an impact together, and that we can do some positive things in our communities" (Reid, 2019, p.1).

It is critical to note that the media coverage did not reflect the NFL's frame about its on-going commitment to advancing social justice. NFL's on-going commitment included financial contributions to social justice, the creation of partnerships, and actions done to help advance social justice. This perspective is important because it is the NFL's way of showing the credibility of the Inspire Change campaign. Emphasizing the specific steps the league has taken towards advancing social justice gives proof of action and suggests an effort to make change. Without a track record, this opens the door for skepticism, criticism, loss of credibility, reputation damage, and most importantly, loss of opportunity.

Part Two: How the Media Framed Inspire Change

Research question three asked which new frames emerge within media reporting of the Inspire Change campaign that were not part of the league's strategic communication frames. These are the frames that emerged from the media that did not align with the NFL's message. The identified frames included: negative criticism, player advocacy and involvement, and the incorporation of Colin Kaepernick into the Inspire Change narrative.

Frame One: Negative Criticism

The first media frame that emerged was negative criticism toward the NFL's intentions behind the campaign and the people attached to it. In eight articles, the NFL was framed as not

being sincere with the creation of the campaign. Some of the language and terms used in the media in relation to not being sincere were: controversial, skeptical, “PR Ruse,” disingenuous, and hollow. Evaluating the language and tone throughout the media articles provided insight into how they were presented and possibly interpreted. The narrative surrounding the insincerity of the campaign was broadly directed towards the NFL’s actions.

Several media reports in this frame emphasized a negative narrative towards Inspire Change. Some of them attempted to drive the narrative by including it in the headlines. A couple of examples of the headlines in the media were: “The NFL's social justice work is a slick PR ruse; stop falling for it” and “The Introduction of the NFL & Roc Nation's "Inspire Change" Campaign Draws Mixed Reviews.” The articles with these headlines employed rhetoric and language around criticism and sarcasm towards the initiative. Terms such as, “arrogance of the league,” “unqualified white people,” “false equivalence between charity and activism,” “supposed commitment towards social justice,” and disingenuous were used in the terminology to frame the NFL’s actions towards the Inspire Change initiative. This should be noted due to the impact tone, language, and narrative structure can have on the reader. Language such as this is often used to evoke a particular response from an audience or persuade points of view. The negative connotation can affect the message the NFL tried to share about the campaign.

The second headline did not use the same language as the first one but weighed both sides of the arguments about Inspire Change. Although it was not 100% negative, it still highlighted the unfavorable aspects of the campaign. In the media report, the NFL was scrutinized for the partnership with Jay-Z because people felt it was hollow and just a ploy to make the NFL look better. Before Inspire Change, Jay-Z was among those who sided with Colin Kaepernick and felt the NFL needed to make a change (Raskin, 2019).

Not only was criticism directed towards the NFL found while analyzing the media coverage, but a good amount of criticism of insincerity was directed towards Jay-Z, who was an external partner. This narrative revolved around his involvement with the NFL and their selection of how to help advance social change. "Kaepernick's ex-teammate and fellow protester Eric Reid SLAMS Jay-Z's partnership with the NFL because the rapper is making 'millions by assisting the league in burying Colin's career" is an example of a headline in the news articles that criticized the partnership between the two entities. An article with a negative cadence towards the partnership wrote, "The announcement of a concert series and a merchandise line further frustrated critics, who complain that Jay-Z is selling out and that he and the NFL are throwing shallow solutions at systemic problems" (Jane, 2019, p.1). The media noting that the Inspire Change initiative was supposed to be a solution to systemic problems is interesting mainly because it hints that there are underlying issues that are systemic problems in addition to the ones the NFL was dedicated to fixing in its priority points. This demonstration of the media critiquing the NFL's existing system creates a perspective that there is a need for a more strategic and in-depth solution to this social justice issue. In another illustration, an article written about Jay-Z rehabbing the NFL's image accused him of being a part of the problem. It stated, "It also bulletproofs the NFL against criticism that it is out of touch with the hip-hop generation and an on-field workforce that's 70 percent black" (Campbell, 2019, p.1).

The language within these articles frames him as being the NFL's enabler for not addressing the true root of the issues. Additionally, the media opted to illuminate how some people were not in favor of this partnership regardless of the good that it was supposed to do. It is important to note that the article incorporated criticism from social media posts into their reporting. This allowed the opportunity to highlight the voices and opinions from people in real

time, adding authenticity to the reporting. Social activist Shaun King wrote, “Let's be clear, he's (Jay-Z) a capitalist, and if a good deal comes along, even if it means working with the NFL at the expense of Colin Kaepernick, he'll make the deal,” King wrote on Twitter. “That's what he just did” (Raskin, 2019, p.1). Including a negative opinion from an expert on the cause Jay-Z was supporting shows the media attempted to strategically frame Jay-Z in a negative light.

Highlighting a perspective from an expert increases the credibility of those who are speaking out against him.

The analysis of these media reports also showed how headlines played an integral role in the framing process of the initiative. For instance, the article with the headline about Eric Reid slamming Jay-Z and the partnership accused the NFL of trying to silence the movement and change direction (Raskin, 2019). The NFL's priority points help the underprivileged communities that players, including Colin Kaepernick, were fighting for. However, by taking the focus from the underlying factor, racism, it led others to believe that the NFL created their own narrative to specifically define what social justice means to them. By creating their own definition of social justice, it allowed the opportunity of more control. Not only that, but the league can also justify its actions by saying we defined social justice as this. Therefore, the leagues efforts toward its version of social justice are “advancing social justice.” However, regardless of the attempt, these headlines in the media show that people are catching on to what they are doing, and it is not supported.

Frame Two: Player Advocacy & Involvement

The second frame that originated from the media was how players were involved or advocated for the initiative. “Advocacy” is described as a wide range of individual and collective expression or action on a cause, idea, or policy (Reid, 2000, p.1). Involvement is defined as the

act or instance of someone, or something being involved (Merriam-Webster, n.d., p.1).

Throughout the articles in this frame, the media's narrative emphasized players' involvement and impact on the campaign. To do this, they incorporated framing techniques such as selection, inclusion, and exclusion when discussing the player's efforts towards Inspire Change. Fourteen out of 27 articles included the players' efforts toward Inspire Change by either quoting them or explicitly stating what they were doing. Among the articles, the media selected to highlight the Player's Coalition role in making Inspire Change, *The Portland Press Herald* wrote, "Inspire Change was created by the league after an agreement with a coalition of players who demonstrated during the national anthem to protest social and racial injustice in this country" (Wilner, 2019, p.1). This article framed the player's advocacy for the initiative by showing that the initiative was developed because of conversations between them and the NFL. Throughout the other texts, an emphasis on the collaborative efforts between the players and the league was framed to highlight the innovation between the two entities. This perspective the NFL framed gave credibility to the social justice initiative by showcasing the two working together to form a common goal.

The Player's Coalition was founded in 2017 by co-founders Anquan Boldin, NFL 2015 Walter Payton Man of the Year, and Malcolm Jenkins, 2017 NFLPA Byron "Whizzer" White winner, and is governed by a Task Force Board of 11 voting members (Player's Coalition, n.d. p.1). This organization's sole purpose is to impact social justice and racial equality at the federal, state, and local levels through advocacy, awareness, education, and resource allocation (Players Coalition, n.d.). Throughout many articles in this frame, the media consistently acknowledged the Player's Coalition involvement with the making of the social justice initiative. The media report's structure and the use of active players actions was implemented strategically to establish

this frame. The articles that attributed to this frame were constructed around this narrative where the lead paragraphs acknowledged the player's involvement and efforts with Inspire Change. Doing this implicitly highlighted the central focus of the narrative they wanted to share. The media aimed to stress the integral role the players contributed to the social justice initiative.

An analysis of the reporting presented continuity throughout the message of what ignited this call for change. In seven of the reports, while mentioning the agreement between the Coalition and the NFL, it recognized that these players were the ones who demonstrated in the national anthem, and they supported social justice by protesting racial injustice. Also, one article went even further stating that those demonstrations were sparked by Colin Kaepernick's protest of kneeling during the national anthem (Palatka Daily News, 2019). It is essential to note that the media features the players' demonstrations to emphasize how important they were in addition to the impact they had. These reports gave insight into how involved the players were with the Inspire Change initiative.

It is also important to note the Coalition involvement since the NFL did not mention the involvement of the Players Coalition very often, and they did not credit them for the creation of the campaign. It was critical that the media talk about the origination of the Player's Coalition due to them being credited for helping start this initiative. Because the league barely credits their contribution, people do not know the in-depth story of where Inspire Change came from. The media also allowed consumers the opportunity to dive deeper into a narrative that the NFL opted to not make a priority of its campaign. However, the league did credit the Player's Coalition for collaborating with NFL teams to continue to support the programs and initiatives that reduce barriers to opportunity with a focus in the campaign's priority areas (NFL Communications, 2019).

Furthermore, regarding this frame being established due to an emphasis on the player's actions, the media reports focused on how these players impacted the NFL's social efforts. These efforts were framed as the players having a voice in what causes the support of social justice initiative, the freedom to suggest how to center the Inspire Change priority points within their own specific football clubs, and emphasizing how to use their own voices to make social change. Additionally, these media stories pointed to the players contributing to the creation of Inspire Change. The narrative around their involvement, besides the Player's Coalition, focused on how players protested social and racial injustice during the national anthem (Wilner, 2019). The stories underscored the players protest as contributing to Inspire Change by their actions being referred to as "demonstrations" that helped spark attention to the need for social justice change. Correspondingly, when speaking about the players' protesting, Colin Kaepernick was mentioned although the NFL does not include him in its own narrative. An article wrote, "Kaepernick started the #TakeAKnee movement in 2016, which saw him, and several other players refuse to stand during the national anthem at games in protest against police brutality and racial injustice" (The Gleaner, 2019, p.1). The choice to include the players protesting about police brutality and racial injustice while framing their involvement is interesting since the NFL shied away from mentioning police brutality in terms of Inspire Change. The media aimed to indirectly connect the players' actions of protesting as a contribution to Inspire Change. This is interesting due to the NFL not connecting Colin Kaepernick's protest along with its social justice narrative. More importantly, the NFL did not support the kneeling protest. Including the player's involvement that did not align with the NFL's beliefs shows that the media felt the protest still needed to be highlighted.

In advocacy, the media framing included how past and present players supported the initiative. *Sports Illustrated* wrote an article on how Inspire Change's commitment to education hit home for Stephen Weatherly, defensive end of the Cleveland Browns, because he resonated with the good the social initiative was doing. Weatherly advocated for continuing the initiative and spoke highly of it. The article used a story-telling technique by telling a personal story about how he had to learn about his African American roots from his mother because it was not taught in school. It then explained how Inspire Change will help fix this problem. "One piece of that pot will be committed to helping schools implement more comprehensive African American history education programs than what Weatherly and many of his contemporaries had growing up, at no charge to the schools or students" (Vrentas, 2019, p.1). The article closed by stating,

Now that the NFL has brought a lot of awareness to the problem, even if it was by accident, they are saying, here's what we are going to do to be a part of the solution, and no longer be a bystander. I hope with that extra oomph from the NFL and NFL teams, we can start to see real changes in communities. (Vrentas, 2019, p.1)

The media took his reason for advocating for Inspire Change and framed it in a sentimental light. This type of rhetoric can be used to evoke emotion from consumers and influence the audience's perception of the issues. Additionally, this partnership has faced skepticism and controversy. Focusing on the good it is doing, along with examples of where direct impact happened, humanizes the social justice initiative. Chicago Bear Linebacker, Sam Acho also advocated for the social justice initiative, refuting the critics in the media. Amid people questioning the purpose and intentions of the initiative, and the NFL, he spoke out about the league utilizing players to use their voices to make a difference. The media highlighted him saying,

If you look at history and you just look at life, there are certain things and certain times where something peaks and it's a hot topic," Chicago Bears linebacker Sam Acho said. "People catch on. Politicians catch on. And then it goes away. But our thing as a team is, it's always been a thing for us to try to give a voice to those people who don't really have one. . . . We got together and said, 'How can we make a change for our city?' That was regardless of the controversy and the protests. (Maske, 2019, p.1).

It is imperative that the media emphasize the players advocating for this cause, especially if it is being framed as forming from player's ideas. Additionally, it also adds a sense of credibility toward the campaign. If the NFL's own employees were not contributing or supporting the cause that raised so much attention two years prior, more people would be skeptical of the initiative.

Surprisingly, the media also included advocacy against Inspire Change from a player's perspective. Eric Reid was one Colin Kaepernick's teammates and one of the first players to join him in his protest against racism and social injustice (Ziegler, 2019). In this report, he is positioned as a voice of authority opposed to the NFL's initiatives. Reid stated,

You & some others seem to misunderstand that we had no beef with the NFL until they started perpetuating the systemic oppression that we are fighting by blackballing Colin and then me,' Reid wrote on Twitter after being accused. 'Nah I won't quit playing but I will be a royal pain in the NFL's a** for acting like they care. (Raskin, 2019, p.1)

Incorporating this gives consumers a different perspective and shapes a new narrative. It is interesting to watch the media use a known figure who openly opposes the campaign in an article about it. To frame his stance, the media heavily included Eric's social media posts opposing Inspire Change and its partnership with Jay-Z. The language, tone, and rhetoric in his posts consisted of negative connotations towards the initiative. The media incorporated both sides of the advocacy in its frames, which shows that they wanted to capture it from an unbiased point of view and provide additional context to how players advocate.

Frame Three: Colin Kaepernick's Impact

Lastly, the third frame to emerge from the media was Colin Kaepernick's impact on Inspire Change. This frame is interesting because it was the furthest away from the messages the NFL framed around Inspire Change. The NFL strategically and intentionally did not mention Colin Kaepernick on their website, in the press releases, or in the launch video of this social

justice initiative. Not a single document mentioned his involvement with the launch of Inspire Change. The league did this because they did not want people to think that Colin Kaepernick was associated with its initiative because of consumers knowing what he stood for.

In this frame, Colin Kaepernick is positioned into the narrative of Inspire Change as a reason to point towards why the NFL started Inspire Change. Throughout the articles, he was recognized for his social justice efforts, and his involvement in the campaign was contextualized by providing background information of what he stood for. Colin Kaepernick's spaces in this frame evolved around the media historicizing the narrative of Inspire Change.

In 11 out of 27 articles, Colin Kaepernick is acknowledged for "sparking" the Inspire Change campaign with his kneeling movement and protests that took place in 2017. If the articles did not specifically acknowledge his actions as sparking the initiative, then it mentioned his efforts for social justice. Some phrases in the articles were: "had a major role in starting the process," "Kaepernick ignited a movement," "demonstrations sparked by Colin Kaepernick," "raised awareness for social injustice," and "famously protested against police brutality and social injustice." The language from these phrases provided context for the significance of his impact. Including his efforts as a frame can shed light on a new narrative that the NFL chose to exclude. The media also guided consumers toward understanding that this campaign started from a deeper foundation than what the NFL presented.

In this frame, a lot of the reporting went against what the NFL wanted, which was including Colin in the narrative of its social justice initiative. The media contextualized his involvement in the campaign by providing background on what he stood for. In framing, hinting at a point to say what something is, but not providing details hinders what is trying to be relayed. Acknowledging Colin's impact would not have been enough due to the media not being able to

assume that all consumers were familiar with his background. Therefore, throughout the articles, the media chose to emphasize the history of Colin Kaepernick and what he's known for, tying him to Inspire Change. An article from *ESPN* said:

Former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick had a major role in starting the process. By first sitting and then kneeling during the national anthem more than two years ago to shine a light on police brutality and systemic oppression, Kaepernick ignited a movement and thrust the NFL into a nationwide debate about the meaning of equality. (Reid, 2019, p. 1)

The text emphasized how the beginning of Colin's efforts later evolved into the launch of the Inspire Change initiative. The *Portland Press* highlighted that the Inspire Change was created by the league after a coalition of players protested social and racial injustice. It then said, "Those demonstrations were sparked by former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick kneeling during the national anthem in 2016" (Wilner, 2019, p.1). Contextualizing the history behind Colin's efforts provided the opportunity for a broader and deeper understanding of his purpose. It is also important because it can possibly influence an audience's perception and change their entire point of view of a situation. In this case, the NFL's CSR frames can now be seen in a different light because more background has been revealed. As a result, this new information may lead people to reevaluate their perception of the NFL's CSR frames and call the NFL to task to do more, as well as recognizing all the aspects of social justice that contributed to the campaign.

In addition to highlighting what Colin stood for, the media also briefly recognized the disconnect between his stance and the NFL's position. In the texts there is a trend of emphasizing the NFL missing the point of Colin's stance. To stress the disconnect, the media reports offered the viewpoints of Colin Kaepernick and Jay-Z on what they both believed to be the best way to pursue social justice. Phrases such as "shortsighted, out of touch, and erase the movement" were used to frame the narrative around how the NFL was missing Colin's points.

On the other hand, phrases such as “the next phase, this is a success, and there's two parts of protesting” were a part of Jay-Z’s terminology to explain why the NFL must move forward from focusing on Colin’s protest. These phrases replicate how the media was able to shed light on the differences in these two approaches.

Lastly, an analysis of the articles revealed Colin Kaepernick’s narrative tying him to Inspire Change was often circulated by other people. Throughout these media reports, the journalists and Eric Reid are the ones who tied him to Inspire Change. While Colin stayed silent in the reports, the media still wrote about his impact and efforts that, they felt, helped spark this initiative. Aside from journalists, he was also included in the narrative from other players advocating for him. Eric Reid, a teammate of Colin Kaepernick who knelt with him, often advocated for him on social media. The media reports included him defending Colin Kaepernick and the role he played in the social justice initiative. For example, on Twitter, when people wondered if Colin was a part of the deal the NFL made with the Player’s Coalition, Reid went on social media and made it clear that he was not involved. Additionally, Reid’s voice was also amplified to support Colin when the NFL launched its partnership with Jay-Z for Inspire Change. On Twitter he responded to a tweet by Jay-Z speaking of people wanting to focus on Colin not having a job in the NFL. He said, “These aren't mutually exclusive. They can both happen at the same time! It looks like your goal was to make millions and millions of dollars by assisting the NFL in burying Colin's career” (Raskin, 2019, p.1). This is significant from the journalistic point of view since it states what the media wanted to focus on even if it did not align with the NFL’s narrative. Also, implementing a player's voice who is still actively in the NFL emphasizes that not everyone in the league supports the NFL’s actions. Additionally, showing the support that

Colin Kaepernick had can influence readers to look more into his stance and how it differs from what the NFL was doing.

It is imperative to recognize that the media's portrayal of Colin Kaepernick's involvement with the NFL's Inspire Change campaign provided a platform for him to express his perspective to the same audience he attempted to reach during his protests. The media strategically employed language, rhetoric, phrases, and quotes to underscore Kaepernick's influence on the campaign, even when he was excluded from the NFL's official narrative. This approach has a profound impact on shaping the public's perception of the campaign's underlying message as it encourages consumers to scrutinize a narrative that runs counter to the NFL's stance. Moreover, the media's persistent attribution of credit to Kaepernick throughout its communications has broadened the campaign's scope to include him by adding to the narrative that the NFL strategically implemented in its own messages. The media produced a link between Kaepernick and Inspire Change, which opened the door for a more in-depth engagement with the framed objectives of the campaign. It also gave the media a chance to shift the conversation around the issues Colin Kaepernick tried to address such as racism, police brutality, and inequality.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The findings from this study include how the NFL framed the Inspire Change campaign and how the media framed it. To enhance clarity for the discussion, and emphasize the key points of this research, Table 5.1 outlines each found frame.

Table 1. The Frames From the NFL & Media on the Inspire Change Initiative

	Frame One:	Frame Two:	Frame Three:
NFL's Preferred Frames	Inspire Change Priority Points: The NFL highlighted and focused on its commitment to four priority areas concerning social justice.	External Partnerships: The NFL emphasized its partnership with Jay-Z and "Inspire Change Advocates" which were meant to amplify the campaign's platform.	On-going commitment to advancing social justice: The NFL underscored the narrative, emphasizing that their actions were an ongoing commitment to advance social justice.
Media Frames: Reflected from the NFL	Inspire Change Priority Points: The NFL highlighted and focused on its commitment to four priority areas concerning social justice.	Emphasis on Jay Z's Involvement: The media framed a consistent and strong narrative around the partnership between Jay-Z and the NFL, along with him being attached to the initiative in general.	
Media Frames: New Emerged Frames	Negative Criticism: The media highlighted negative criticism toward the NFL's intentions behind the campaign and the people attached to it.	Player Advocacy & Involvement: The media focused on how players were involved or advocated for the initiative.	Colin Kaepernick's Impact: The media emphasized Colin Kaepernick's impact on Inspire Change.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributed to the field of framing and strategic communication with three theoretical implications. These findings emphasize what the research has shown about framing, media and strategic communication.

The first implication revealed through this research is that strategic communication tactics can be used to produce frames and media frames. The NFL's framing mechanisms aligned directly with how communication professionals utilize CSR communication tactics within an organization to bring about success. These tactics include awareness, partnerships, and commitments. To frame the initiative, the NFL employed a CSR strategy of awareness when initiating Inspire Change. The literature stated that CSR can only be effective among stakeholders if they are aware of the organization's CSR activities (Ajayi & Mmutle, 2021). The NFL's most dominant frame, the campaign's four priority points, were implemented by creating a strong specific message strategy to ensure the effectiveness of the message surrounding the campaign. The NFL consistently highlighted and focused on its dedication to carrying out the four priority areas of the social justice initiative to ensure that its consumers knew the goals and objectives of Inspire Change. The second CSR tactic used by the NFL was their emphasis on partnerships for Inspire Change. Research indicated that developing partnerships with societal actors is essential for the success of CSR (Nijhof et al., 2008). It also stated that including an endorsement from a third party increases source credibility while communicating CSR (Kim & Ferguson, 2015). The NFL's most highlighted aspect, external partnerships, was established as the league emphasized its partnership with Jay-Z to amplify the Inspire Change initiative. Lastly the NFL highlighted its commitment to this social justice initiative as a part of the CSR strategies. Studies have revealed that to gain success within an organization's CSR initiative, the commitment to CSR needs to be enhanced (Andreu et al., 2015). The NFL's final frame of Inspire Change produced the narrative of how the league has had an on-going commitment to advance social change. These findings also suggest that the NFL should continue to use strategic tactics through a CSR lens as an effective tool to communicate its future initiatives and

campaigns. By successfully and strategically implementing these frames, there is a better opportunity for them to be translated into the media in the way the organization intended it to.

The second implication suggests CSR communication strategies can be utilized successfully to translate media frames. In the key findings, two of three of the NFL's preferred frames were translated into media reports. These were the "Inspire Change priority points" and "external partnerships," while three new frames were introduced. The priority points and external partnerships were more than likely translated into the media because of the use of CSR strategies to implement them. For external partnerships, the literature revealed that implementing a third-party endorsement is strongly related to public acceptance of a CSR message (Kim & Ferguson, 2018). Not only does this relate to the consumers, but the media's acceptance of its own narratives applies here as well. In relation to the Inspire Change priority points, the literature states, "informativeness is an essential aspect of successful CSR communication" (Kim & Ferguson, 2018, p.553). In other literature, scholars also echo this point by revealing that an organization focuses on its commitment to a cause, the impact it has on the cause, why it engages in a particular social initiative, which is how to employ effective CSR communication (Du et al., 2010). Additionally, the Inspire Change priority points and external partnerships were in the top three most present frames throughout the media reports. This finding may also be attributed to several other factors: (1) music mogul Jay-Z was at the forefront of the partnership for Inspire with the NFL, (2) these priority points were the goals of the Inspire Change campaign, and (3) something new was being presented that had the potential to impact people.

The final implication revealed framing impacts the way messages are translated into the media. The two frames that emerged from the media that aligned with the NFL's preferred frames, Inspire Change priority points and external partnerships, were not always a direct

reflection of the league's narrative in the articles. This finding speaks to the earlier discussion of how media framing heavily involves salience and selection throughout its process (Entman, 1993). In this process, the media selects some aspects of a perceived reality and makes them more salient in a communicating text to promote a particular problem definition and/or treatment recommendation (Entman, 1993). The media's frames used salience and selection to create its own frames surrounding Inspire Change, which is why the narrative on the same topic is not a direct reflection. Additionally, it is important to note "Colin Kaepernick's involvement" was a frame that conveyed a contrasting narrative from the NFL's preferred frames. This frame was interesting because there was controversy between Colin Kaepernick and the NFL on the topic of social justice in 2016 and a pinnacle moment for athlete activism. However, the media framing Colin Kaepernick in the Inspire Change narrative aligns with the research. Scholars have found that media sources can take pieces of information to promote a problem and causes of their choosing (Hefferman & Maxwell, 2019). Instead of framing the social justice initiative directly, the media used it as an opportunity to frame its own narrative around social justice.

Strategic Communication Practical Impact

The results from this study not only yield theoretical implications, but several practical implications that can be applied in the field as well. Two of these implications are aimed towards takeaways for strategic communication professionals and the others for the NFL.

The first implication is how these results provided an opportunity to advance the researchers' theoretical understanding of the use of CSR strategies. The NFL's Inspire Change served as a social justice initiative. The results from this study give clear direction on what strategies to include to ensure the success of initiatives translated into the media. By clarifying the connection between implementing CSR strategies and CSR initiatives, it provides an

understanding of how these practices can help improve the translation of initiatives into media reporting put in place by communication practitioners of an organization.

The second implication is how this research helps practitioners and strategic communication professionals in organizations proactively understand the role media framing can play in its translation of CSR initiatives. The second part of this study demonstrated how the NFL's preferred frames on Inspire Change were translated into the media and in addition, what new frames emerged. The proposed framework, media framing, allowed the researcher to trace how the media interpreted the NFL's social justice initiative. This is essential to public relations practitioners in order to evaluate their organizational communication practices to its consumers and stakeholders. It is imperative that professional communicators understand the theoretical concept of framing to consider how it may take place within its messages. Relating back to the literature, media frames have the power to influence public opinion and behavior change (D'Angelo, 2017). All of these things can be detrimental to an organization translating its CSR initiative to consumers in the way it preferred. This research is crucial to helping organizations consider the effects of media frames. Understanding media framing allows organizations to be proactive in framing, potentially playing a role on the translation of the messaging.

The third implication recommends that the NFL create a high volume of content used to frame its CSR initiative to ensure the message has the best opportunity to translate in media reporting. Only five press releases were available from the NFL on Inspire Change mainly due to providing duplicate press releases. It is understandable to want to have a consistent message across organizational platforms, but providing different points of view can be helpful for consumers. Also, providing more content for the media gives the message a better chance to be interpreted in the same way it was meant to be by the organization. The factors that contributed

to the NFL not releasing more content could possibly attribute to (1) the NFL focusing more on Super Bowl content, since this initiative was launched prior to that weekend and (2) trying to avoid an overcommitment at the beginning of the launch, specifically regarding what they aimed to do for Inspire Change. This finding offers insight into what strategies produce successful results when presenting a CSR campaign to its consumers.

The last implication from this research recommends that when incorporating an external partnership within a CSR initiative, the NFL should ensure the partnership's purpose is displayed more than the actual deal. When the media framed the partnership between Jay-Z and the NFL for Inspire Change, the narrative was more focused on Jay-Z's involvement instead of the partnership due to how the NFL framed it. When the NFL framed its external partnership with Jay-Z, it was at the beginning of their conjoined efforts. Because of this, the league had minimal results to highlight about the partnership. This led to the media only being able to focus on the components of the partnership and not what came from it. It is understandable that the NFL needed to use Jay-Z to amplify Inspire Change's platform, but the amplification became hollow due to not being able to emphasize how the partnership specifically helped support the initiatives cause. This discovery provides significant implications for strategic communication practice by emphasizing the importance of what areas to highlight when a third party is involved in a CSR initiative. This is also important to ensure that external partnerships for CSR initiatives are amplified in ways that benefit the organization's CSR goals.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

The creation of Inspire Change gave the NFL an opportunity to establish more social responsibility within the communities where its clubs reside. Since then, the league has worked efficiently and strategically to share the initiative with its consumers by utilizing CSR strategies for implementation. This study represents a preliminary exploration of how the NFL frames their Inspire Change campaign and which ones were present within the media. Understanding how to productively execute this task is helpful for the longevity of this campaign and for other CSR initiatives formed by the NFL.

The purpose of this research was to employ a textual analysis to understand how the NFL framed their social justice initiative and how it was manifested by the media. Comprehending how the media utilized CSR strategies to execute its initiative provides a future recommendation for how to present future initiatives to consumers. Key findings indicated that implementing a campaign through a CSR lens makes for success. For the second part of this research, an analysis of how the media framed the campaign provided a closer examination of framing practices throughout the news reports and how the NFL's preferred frames were translated in the media. These findings revealed that two of the NFL's frames were reflected in the media but did not convey a direct reflection of what they framed. These findings suggest the NFL needs to launch its next CSR initiative with more content of what they would like to frame. This would give the media more content to pull from and an opportunity for the translation of the NFL's frame to be more compelling in the media.

This research was important because it provides practitioners with the opportunity to evaluate whether the impact they are trying to make is being accomplished within their work. Often, great ideas get lost in translation because of execution. More specifically to the NFL, public relation practitioners and communicators in the NFL need to know how to communicate these kinds of topics to consumers because of the impact of the platform. Not only can this be applied to the NFL, but to other sports organizations and people who have a considerable platform. Regarding the campaign itself, advocating for social justice is a tall order. People sometimes look at the messenger who relays the message instead of the message itself. The NFL must understand the urgency of being an organization reputable enough to handle these serious conversations. The takeaways from this study can be applied to the longevity of this social justice initiative and to other CSR initiatives.

Limitations & Recommendations for Future Research

This study provided an overview of how the NFL framed the Inspire Change campaign when it launched. It was limited because it only covered the first nine months of when the social justice initiative started. Around this time, the league was focused on establishing what Inspire Change was and how it looked as it was executed. Because of this, we can only know how it was framed at the beginning, and it does not apply to where the initiative is now. Another limitation was the amount and type of material the NFL launched. The NFL could have released more press releases and articles. Instead, the articles that the NFL did publish were a direct replica of the press releases, making the sample size minimal. Another limitation that became apparent was the data sample. In Nexis Uni, over 10,000 media reports are available when the term “NFL Inspire Change Campaign” is searched. In Access World News, around 5,000 news sources are available. Limiting the data set excluded a surmountable number of media that could have

revealed more frames. Newspapers are a great source of information; moreover, the scope of media has expanded and should be considered throughout further research.

Furthermore, there are several directions for future research related to this study. First, future studies can examine how the NFL is framing the campaign now in comparison to when it was first launched. This will show if they have changed direction with the social justice initiative or added more call to action. Likewise, adding how it is currently being presented in the media would extend our knowledge if these strategic practices were employed. It would also give insight into whether the media sees this initiative in a different light from before to five years of watching the league's actions. Another avenue of research could involve studying how the individual teams are carrying out the Inspire Change initiative underneath the league's priority points. Each NFL club and its players have free range to support the social justice initiative they want within their own communities. It would be interesting to see the difference of action, implementation, and sense of urgency the different teams have. This could differentiate based on location of the team, the team's prior history of interacting with league-led CSR initiatives, and the types of players apart of the team.

The NFL has a history of partaking in CSR initiatives. Inspire Change was different because, for the first time, the league participated in a CSR initiative that supports a controversial topic. Topics such as social injustice and the fight for equality in underserved communities should be more than just a box to check off on a social responsibility checklist. The NFL may have utilized strategic messaging for its communication, but they should be encouraged to continue to share that message and inspire real change throughout the communities it impacts.

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