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Recommended Citation

Huberty, Lana; Kellison, Timothy; and Mondello, Michael, "Fan Mobilization and the Minnesota Sport Stadium Campaign" (2016). *Kinesiology Faculty Publications*. 49.

doi: <https://doi.org/10.1123/ijsc.2015-0118>

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Fan Mobilization and the Minnesota Sport Stadium Campaign

Abstract

As state and local government subsidies to professional sport organizations have increased over the past three decades, economic arguments have been crafted to justify these subsidies such as Crompton's (2004) claims of increased community visibility, enhanced community image, stimulation of other development, and psychic income. The purpose of this study was to examine the public relations strategy of a professional sport organization campaigning to secure public funding for a new stadium. Specifically, authors focused on the use of press releases by the Minnesota Vikings, a National Football League team, over the three seasons preceding the completion of their successful sport stadium campaign. The authors identified the arguments made by the team to garner support for the stadium plan during the Vikings' campaign. Using a qualitative research method, 71 press releases were collected, examined, and coded by investigators. Findings were discussed to provide insight into these four alternative justification arguments.

Keywords: alternative justifications for public subsidies, public relations, stadium finance, political participation, sport fandom

Fan Mobilization and the Minnesota Sport Stadium Campaign

In the 1800s, professional sports became prominent in American public life. Historically, the business of sport was primarily a private undertaking, financed with private money and played in private stadiums and arenas (Baade, 1994). Today, private sport organizations seek state-of-the-art facilities in which to host events often subsidized through public monies. Public money invested in sport facilities by taxpayers is only one dimension of the complex financial relationship between cities and major and minor league franchises. Other dimensions include the extent of in-kind contributions for which cities may take responsibility, and the terms of leases encompassing a wide array of issues including the distribution of revenue streams; maintenance and renovation of the facilities; and scheduling of the facilities for events unrelated to the team franchises (Crompton, 2004; Crompton & Howard, 2013). This commitment of public funds to private businesses has generated organizational interest on leveraging the media to facilitate a successful fundraising campaign.

As state and local government subsidies to professional sport organizations have increased over the past three decades, economic arguments have been crafted to justify these subsidies. Crompton (2004) identified several popular claims used to justify public spending including increased community visibility, enhanced community image, stimulation of other development, and psychic income. While the content of these messages is fairly consistent, the sources delivering the argument and targets receiving them can vary widely. For example, when a stadium-subsidy decision is subject to a public referendum, members of the local growth coalition (e.g., business leaders, elected officials) may campaign in order to obtain a favorable outcome at the ballot box (e.g., Sapotichne, 2012). In the absence of a public vote (i.e., when policymakers make a decision on the behalf of citizens), the team may attempt to appeal to city

councilmembers and county commissioners charged with voting on a stadium issue (Kellison & Mondello, 2013). The latter example is the subject of this article.

The purpose of this study was to examine the public relations strategy of a professional sport organization campaigning to secure public funding for a new stadium. In particular, authors focused on the use of press releases by the Minnesota Vikings, a National Football League team, over three seasons preceding the completion of their successful sport stadium campaign. The Vikings had engaged in lobbying for a new stadium over the course of two decades, which culminated in the successful plan for U.S. Bank Stadium, a \$1.04-billion (\$498 million public) stadium slated to open in 2016 (Publictrack, 2015). Given the fact the public-financing plan was decided by elected officials rather than voters, investigators aimed to identify: (1) the arguments made by the team to garner support for the stadium plan, and (2) the intended audience of the Vikings' campaign. In the following section, the authors provide specific details of the Vikings' quest to secure a new stadium.

Minnesota Vikings History, 1990s to Present

The Vikings played their first game at the Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome in a preseason matchup against the Seattle Seahawks on August 21, 1982. For the next two decades, the Vikings organization was housed in the Metrodome, located in downtown Minneapolis and owned and operated by the Metropolitan Sports Facilities Commission (renamed the Minnesota Sports Facilities Authority in 2012). Although the commission proposed a \$160-million renovation to better serve the Vikings organization within the existing stadium, a Vikings spokesperson claimed the Vikings could not succeed in the Metrodome, arguing it was too small and did not have the revenue-generating amenities that newer stadiums offered (Weiner, 2000).

In the late 1990s, the Vikings organization began a campaign to solicit public support for a new NFL stadium to be constructed in the state of Minnesota (Weiner, 2000).

What transpired over the next nearly 15 years was a strategic public relations campaign involving the Vikings organization releasing information to the local press. Media releases have been a common communication tool for sport organization managers in a variety of contexts (Trumpbour, 2006; Walters & Walters, 1992) with the Vikings organization being no exception as they utilized media releases in their promotional campaign for a new stadium. The Vikings organization owner and management team were straightforward in their ideas (Weiner, 2000). Then-owner Red McComb stated that for communities seeking to have a professional sport franchise, it was the responsibility of the public to pay for and build the facility. McComb's belief was supported by the idea that he, as the team owner, would in return fund the team.

During the three-year period of 2010 to 2012, the Vikings organization made use of the local press to educate their fans, garner support for their program, and solicit sponsors. Releases that were made public from the Vikings organization targeted current Vikings fans, ordinary Minneapolitans, and local policymakers. Each of these press releases highlighted key issues in an effort to educate and influence positive public stadium support. Funding was approved in 2012 for a \$1-billion facility to replace Minneapolis's aging Metrodome (Helgeson & Brooks, 2012). Minnesota Governor Dayton signed the law in May 2013 supporting the new Vikings stadium deal.

In the weeks and months leading up to the approval of the financing plan, legislators held a series of public hearings. In addition to the substance of the hearings themselves, much of the media's attention on the meetings focused on the large turnout of Vikings fans, who "[crashed] the capitol party en masse in purple face paint, horned helmets, leather scabbards, and important

Norwegian medallions” (Marsh, 2012, para. 31). In retrospect, Vikings fans were credited for their role in getting the stadium plan passed, as *StarTribune* sports columnist Sid Hartman reported:

But when it came to the Vikings stadium this year, you saw the biggest turnout of fans for a stadium legislative hearing in history. Vikings fans took over and put the pressure on members of the Legislature—one said his calls were 10-to-1 for the stadium. The appearance of so many Vikings fans at the Capitol had a big influence. (Hartman, 2012, para. 13)

The convergence of Vikings fans at the state capitol in St. Paul during the legislative hearings was undoubtedly influential in the final decision by lawmakers to finance a new stadium. More generally, the mobilization of citizens to participate in public issues is a common political strategy, as discussed further below.

Mobilizing Citizens as Political Actors

Citizens play important roles in democratic societies, though their involvement in governing can fluctuate greatly. Researchers have long been interested in understanding the factors contributing to citizens’ political engagement, ranging from voting to “writing to political representatives, working for political parties or candidates, attending public debates or meetings over policy or issues, or involvement in social movements or protests” (Wicks, Wicks, Morimoto, Maxwell, & Schulte, 2012, pp. 623–624). These myriad activities demonstrate the impact citizens can have on policymaking, thereby illustrating why public officials and businesses have vested interests in attracting citizens to their causes (Bernhagen & Bräuninger, 2005).

To political candidates or organizations seeking support of a stadium subsidy plan (e.g., political action committees, local growth coalitions; Delaney & Eckstein, 2007; Molotch, 1976), local fans are an obvious source of support. Weber (2013) examined the influence of emotions (i.e., anger, sadness, fear, enthusiasm) on political participation and found that anger was particularly influential in an individual's political activeness. Indeed, emotional appeals are especially applicable to a stadium-finance issue, where the threat of a favorite team's relocation to another city can evoke strong feelings among citizens. Past research utilizing the contingent valuation method (CVM) provides tangential support for this hypothesis. In CVM analyses using cities with existing professional sport teams, individuals with an interest in the team expressed a higher willingness-to-pay in order to avoid the team's relocation to another city (compared to those without an interest in the team (Johnson, Mondello, & Whitehead, 2007). This finding suggests fans of the team may be more tolerable of an unpopular policy, so long as it keeps the team from relocating.

Despite fans' potential to be allies during a stadium-subsidy debate, previous research illustrates that citizens (both fans and nonfans) can sometimes resist attempts by organizations to recruit them. For instance, in his study of the Minnesota Twins' tumultuous subsidy campaigns during the 1990s, Quirk (1997) blamed the five unsuccessful subsidy attempts on the fact that each campaign was led explicitly by the team's ownership. In cases where citizens are not suspicious of a team's motives, they may nevertheless prefer to abstain from the political process. For instance, in Norman, Ventresca, Szto, and Darnell's (2015) examination of blogging entries related to the New York Islanders' unsuccessful efforts to secure a new hockey arena, they noted that fans adopted an apolitical stance on the issue, choosing instead to focus their comments on the team itself. Ultimately, the researchers noted, "the bloggers' reluctance to

promote a particular political perspective and the subsequent framing of stadium issues to a fan orientation ultimately worked in the interest of team ownership and left dominant neoliberal logic largely unchallenged” (p. 33). Therefore, these examples of political stadium campaign focused solely on fan persuasion failed leading stadium promoters to look elsewhere for support.

In the case of the Vikings, a campaign directed at both fans and policymakers could provide the best opportunity for a stadium deal. While it was important for the team to clearly communicate the benefits of a new stadium to local and state officials (who ultimately held decision-making power), the team could also mobilize fans that favored the public financing plan to contact their local legislators, attend public meetings, and write supportive letters to the local press. In the following section, the authors examine the Vikings’ strategy to mobilize fans and promote the stadium-subsidy plan to policymakers.

Media’s Role in Stadium-Subsidy Debates

In an effort to better understand public support for stadium subsidies, research has examined the role media plays in the stadium funding debate process. Previous studies have found political campaigns and the media to be common partners in influencing public opinion (Delaney & Eckstein, 2008; Paul & Brown, 2006; Sage, 1993; Sherer & Sam, 2008; Trumbour, 2006). Although the media representation of stadium financial issues should seemingly be communicated impartially, this was not commonly what occurred. Instead, when looking specifically at the media’s role in stadium-subsidy debates, stadium information communication had often been manipulated by the media to create positive voter support (Scherer & Sam, 2008).

Sage (1993) investigated the various forms of power used to convince taxpayers to financially support a stadium for the use by a privately owned corporation. This support was found to often stem from professional sport officials who were backed by local politicians and

businesses. For example, to gain public support for building and operating a new MLB stadium in Denver, a state legislator sponsored a bill in the Colorado House of Representatives establishing a Denver Metropolitan MLB Stadium District. The media helped stir up local interest and create a demand for the facilities and the Denver community was faced with pressures from such powerful and well-organized individuals and groups. Denver politicians, business interests, and the local media all sought to rationalize public expenditures for the new stadium in terms of economic benefits, arguing that Denver would profit by increases in revenue, economic activity, and taxes. The media promoted various benefits such as neighborhood redevelopment and enhanced civic pride. These arguments were the foundation on which promotional efforts in support of the stadium tax were built and ultimately, this media manipulation favorably impacted the successful outcome of approving public support for a new MLB stadium in Denver (Sage, 1993).

As researchers continued to study the influence of the media on garnering public support for private stadiums, Paul and Brown (2006) reported political campaigns and the media to be the most common source of voter manipulation in such scenarios. Additionally, Delaney and Eckstein (2008) investigated media coverage of 23 publicly financed stadium projects in 16 American cities. This study determined that custom media coverage usually supported the finance initiatives without criticism. Occasionally the media was found to offer a more critical “hybrid” approach of neither completely being critical nor uncritical of the stadium projects. Furthermore, a 2010 study by Vaczi and Berkes looked into the media’s role and funding connection behind Hungary’s sport industry. In this case, the media successfully promoted a new gambling-related, government-controlled sport-marketing program to provide extra funds for

Olympic sports federations and the sport industry in general. The Hungarian sport industry example demonstrated how creative financing can be secured through media promotions.

Overall analyses of the media's role during stadium finance debates have shown media coverage historically favors pro-subsidy campaign (Buist & Mason, 2010; Delaney & Eckstein, 2008; Paul & Brown, 2006; Sage, 1993; Trumpbour, 2006; Vaczi & Berkes, 2010). The authors of these studies contend that media approaches were highly influential in helping or hindering a stadium initiative. That is, studies demonstrated how the media's impartiality or endorsement of a pro-subsidy campaign increased the likelihood of a referendum passing. On the contrary, if the media was critical of a pro-subsidy campaign, the referendum was more often defeated (Trumpbour, 2006).

Methodology

The purpose of this research was to better understand what messages were communicated through the various press releases by the Minnesota Vikings sport organization for the three years prior to a successful public funding campaign. Subsequent write-ups in the local press based on these press releases likely carried some degree of influence, given previous research on the role of the media in framing stadium debates and mega events (Kim, Choi, & Kaplandiou, 2015; Misener, 2013; Mondello & Kellison, in press). To develop insight into this topic, the researchers analyzed the Vikings' press releases to identify key messages communicated. These press releases were the initial releases distributed by the Vikings organization public relations department and did not include any media responses. These messages were categorized within the alternative justifications for public subsidy as discussed within sport management research (Crompton, 2004; Crompton & Howard, 2013).

An important distinction in this case is that the decision to subsidize the new stadium was made by elected officials (i.e., through legislation) rather than voters (i.e., through a public referendum or initiative) (Kellison & Mondello, 2014). Although ordinary Minnesotans remained an important target of the Vikings' stadium campaign, it was also necessary for the Vikings to engage with policymakers. As a result of these distinct stakeholders, the Vikings engaged in a perception-management strategy coupling traditional promotional approaches (directed at ordinary citizens) with acts of politicking (directed at policymakers). This study illustrates the use of fan mobilization as a means of political strategy by examining the Vikings' official public communications during the public-stadium debate.

To investigate the topics key in the Vikings organization promotions during the three-year period prior to passing the stadium bill, a constructivist approach with a qualitative method was chosen that employed document review to examine text data (Creswell, 2009). The researchers (three university professors working in the sport management field) served as the key investigators, collecting and reviewing the documents. The documents in review were 71 press releases disseminated by the Minnesota Vikings Public Relations staff from 2010, 2011, and 2012. These three years were identified as a crucial communication period for the Vikings organization; prior to the bill passing in 2012 and being signed into law in 2013.

The primary target of the press releases was Minnesota Momentum, a “grass-roots’ pro-stadium organization created and backed by the Vikings” (Reusse, 2013, p. 1C). Though it is unclear exactly how many messages were circulated and to how many members, estimates included “thousands” of emails sent to more than 400 members, who mobilized and endeavored to garner support for a new Vikings stadium in the state of Minnesota (Reusse, 2013; Seifert, 2006). Although news references to Minnesota Momentum date back to 2006, the group appears

to have reorganized and expanded in 2010 (Kaszuba, 2010), which coincides with the first set of press releases analyzed in this study. The Public Relations Director for the Minnesota Vikings organization shared these press releases with our research team.

The investigation process included employing a taxonomy of the four alternative funding arguments first suggested by Crompton (2004) including increased community visibility, enhanced community image, stimulation of other development, and psychic income. Increased community visibility encompasses the significant amount of media coverage for the city in which the sport stadium is located. A city having a major league franchise receives exposure each day across the nation when fans read their sport pages (Crompton, 2004). This attention is magnified when a team makes the play-offs and/or a championship final. The connection between community visibility and economic growth implies an aid in recruitment of relocating businesses and in enhancement of the city's economic vitality.

The alternative funding argument of enhanced community image embraces a conceptualization of image as perceived reputation or character (White, 2001). Many communities strive to sell the image of a place so as to make it more attractive to businesses, tourists, and inhabitants (Kotler, Haidler, & Rein, 1993). The popularity of sport in the media has been influential in garnering public support for a sport franchise in a community. Major sport events and teams capture the imagination and help establish a city's image in people's minds to such an extent that many people believe that to be known as a "major city" it must have a major sports team (Crompton, 2004; Crompton & Howard, 2013). Research has found that the loss of a sport franchise is often seen as a reflection of incompetent city leadership (Crompton, 2004).

Stimulation of other development is a third alternative funding argument (Crompton, 2004). This particular argument encompasses the idea of a new sport facility attracting additional

development to the community, thus increasing the tax base. The building of new sport facility will stimulate development or redevelopment around the site. This concept is founded on previous economic development projects that have experienced a number of entertainment attractions being built around each other, supporting each other's operations. To successfully implement such a project, an integrated, coherent, master plan for redevelopment was generated and implemented. This argument was further investigated in 2013 by Crompton and Howard generating more attention to the notion of economic impact and the return on investments. To explore this justification, investigators looked for phrases and/or text segments that referenced the two key principles of this particular argument: 1) Ensuring the facility was part of an integrated master plan including proximity to transportation, infrastructure, and entertainment attractions 2) Promotion of general development by capturing the celebrity status of major events, teams, and players in an attempt to open doors and gain access to key figures in relocation decisions of other businesses.

The final alternative argument relates to increased psychic income (Crompton, 2004). This argument focuses internally on the benefits received by existing residents in the community, or the internal audience. Psychic income is the emotional and psychological benefits community resident believe they will receive, regardless if they are not in attendance or directly involved in planning or implementation of the sport events. Local residents may be avid fans, engaging in team spirited activities, but never attend a game. Research has determined when a new sport team comes to a city, a broad segment of the community becomes excited and identifies with it (Crompton, 2004). Through team identification, public members experience community consciousness and social bonding.

Qualitative methods were used to analyze the media releases of the Vikings organization with specific attention given to the major issues discussed in each release. Using the arguments for alternative public funding support for stadiums, the press releases from the Minnesota Vikings were analyzed to identify key words and phrases communicated within each individual press release. These identifiers were categorized into one of the four aforementioned categories. Additionally, potential supplemental arguments to Crompton's original four were explored to determine if the main topics within the Vikings organization press releases did or did not fit into any of the four pre-defined categories. This content analysis process was utilized to prepare, organize, and report the phenomenon of the written messages found within the press releases.

To ensure credibility and validity in this qualitative analysis process, the three researchers triangulated the individual interpretations and findings. Inter-coder reliability was assessed by creating a standard grid of Crompton's (2004) arguments that was completed separately and systematically by each investigator. The key words and phrases detailed and categorized by individual investigators were then aggregated (the results of which are provided in the Appendix). In cases where words or phrases fell into more than one category, multiple justifications were noted. By agreeing to analyze the categories according to the four areas of alternative justification for public stadium subsidies by Crompton (2004), the categorization process was systematic across the investigators and enabled results to be easily synthesized.

Results

The investigation process employed the four alternative funding arguments of Crompton (2004): increased community visibility, enhanced community image, stimulation of other development, and psychic income. The process involved comparing the text segments identified by each of three researchers to see if there were trends or patterns that identified the focus within

the Vikings releases between 2010 and 2012. The public relations campaign employed by the Minnesota Vikings organization during this period of time involved press releases that were specifically written and distributed to grassroots supporters of the new Vikings stadium. Key to the success of the public campaign, a total of 14 articles were released in 2010, 23 in 2011, and 34 in 2012. A summary of the results are provided in Table 1, and the qualitative analysis findings of these releases and highlighted text segments will be discussed next as they relate to the appropriate alternative justification for public subsidy.

Table 1: Number of Releases Based on Category and Year

	2010	2011	2012	Total Occurrences
Increased Community Visibility	1	1	0	2
Enhanced Community Image	7	18	18	43
Stimulation of Other Development	5	20	9	34
Psychic Income	1	10	18	29
Total Number of Press Releases	14	23	34	

Increased Community Visibility

A total of 14 releases were analyzed from 2010. Although the first of these was dated April, the new stadium creating awareness was not mentioned until later in the year with the December 3, 2010 press release. The alternative justification argument of increased community visibility was not mentioned earlier possibly because the community already had an NFL team in Minneapolis playing at the Metrodome. This team was receiving media coverage via TV, radio, print, and Web. This coverage was keeping the city in front of people and relevant therefore the concept of a new stadium was not the intended focus of these 2010 Vikings releases.

In the investigation process of the 2011 Vikings releases, the alternative justification for public subsidy of community visibility was again not found to be a major focal point in the 23 reviewed. One exception was a release that stressed the importance of keeping the Vikings in the

state of Minnesota until 2045. Considering the state already had an NFL team meant media attention for the team and community already existed. A possible explanation for the re-employment of this argument may simply be the long-term visibility a major stadium and sport team brings a community.

This pattern of non-use of the argument of increased community visibility as an alternative justification for public support for a new Vikings stadium continued from 2010 and 2011 into 2012. Of the 34 press releases this year, none of them noted enhanced community visibility. However, five of these releases did feature information on the architecture firms and their remarkable reputations involved in the design process. The investigators did not believe the information specific to potential architects was the same as if the sport organization had chosen to promote community visibility for a justification for the new stadium.

Upon conclusion of the review for all releases written within the grassroots public relations campaign, increased community visibility was not to be a justification the public relations committee chose to highlight as an alternative justification for public subsidy of the new Vikings stadium. Although Crompton (2004) noted community visibility to be one of the top four justifications, this was not the case throughout all three of the years reviewed.

Enhanced Community Image

The focus of the 2010 Vikings' releases was found to include the alternative justification for public subsidy of enhanced community image. The alternative funding argument of enhanced community image embraces a conceptualization of image as perceived reputation or character (White, 2001). With this concept, the Vikings organization sought to establish the image of a new stadium in the mind of the local community. Seven of the 14 releases, or 50%, noted the importance of keeping the Vikings in Minnesota through the use of phrases such as the Vikings

being “an asset to the state.” In an effort to justify public subsidy of the new stadium project, press releases noted the need for a new stadium to secure the long-term future of the Vikings staying in the state. Furthermore, place marketing by new stadium advocates noted the value of a new stadium as an attraction to businesses, tourists, and inhabitants. Although the Vikings had a stadium, the Metrodome, this current facility was believed to be in need of renovation in order to be sustainable.

The 2011 grass roots new stadium campaign involved the 36 press releases to Vikings fans. Of the 36, 18 (50%) contained text segments addressing how a new stadium would enhance the community image. The year 2011 references were made of the roof collapse of the current Vikings stadium, “The Dome,” and how a new stadium would build community pride (May 16, 2011; March 11, 2011; Sept. 26, 2011). The new stadium was predicted to attract more than one million fans to the stadium for football games alone. Attracting national and international events was highlighted to enhance the facility image in consumers’ minds. Terms such as “first class,” “multi-purpose,” and “state of the art” were added to help create a mental reconstruction of the ideal stadium in supports’ minds and place the facility in consumer minds. This is consistent with Crompton’s alternative justification for public support: Enhanced community image (2004). Further prompting of support, the organization detailed how important it was securing the Vikings to stay in the state instead of seeking a new home elsewhere. This fact alluded to how this loss would negatively reflect on the community.

In 2012, about half of the 36 releases within the Vikings marketing strategy again included text segments representing the use of enhanced community image as an alternative justification for public support for the new Vikings stadium. Statements such as “attracting over 1 million attendees to the city each year” were included to assist the local community members

to envision just how amazing the stadium would be (March 21, 2012). The April 17, 2012 release noted how keeping an NFL team in our market would help the city retain the status of a major league city. Other terms reflective of the enhanced community image argument included the project being the largest public works project in Minnesota's history (August 10, 2012), making the stadium unique to the state (August 13, 2012) and a world-class stadium (May 22, 2012; Sept. 28, 2012)

Upon conclusion of the review of Vikings press releases pertaining to the new stadium over the three-year period, enhanced community image did emerge as a common theme throughout the verbiage. In fact, 50% of the total releases employing this alternative justification for public support for the stadium, terms such as "first class," "multi-purpose," and "state of the art" were shared across this period of marketing for the Vikings organization.

Stimulation of Other Development

The two key principles of the justification for public subsidies for a sport stadium stimulation of "stimulation of other development" include: Having a threshold level of cumulative attraction and ensuring facility is part of an integrated master plan. This complimentary development often notes the importance of facility proximity to transportation, infrastructure, and other nearby attractions such as restaurants, bars, hotels, and other entertainment. Investigators looked for phrases and/or text segments that referenced the two key principles of this particular argument: 1) Ensuring the facility was part of an integrated master plan including proximity to transportation, infrastructure, and entertainment attractions 2) Promotion of general development by capturing the celebrity status of major events, teams, and players in an attempt to open doors and gain access to key figures in relocation decisions of other businesses. The review of 2010 releases determined the stimulation of other development was a

common focus of the Vikings organization with 5 of the 14 highlighting job creation. The September 29, 2010 and December 3, 2010 releases promoted general development by capturing the celebrity status of potentially hosting major events such as the Super Bowl and NCAA Final Four as well as smaller, more community focused events such as high school and amateur sporting events.

The 36 releases by the Vikings organization from 2011 were reviewed in an effort to identify text segments that used stimulation of other development as an alternative justification when persuading the community to support a new NFL stadium. Of the 36 releases, 20 contained references to the stimulation of other development and contributing positively to the local economy. Common themes included statements such as adding thousands of jobs with 13,000 full-time and part-time jobs being created over the three-year construction period. These predictions alluded to an improvement in the overall economy of the Twin Cities area, not only for the project employees, but local businesses as well. At this point in time, the Vikings organization was considering an alternative site, the Twin Cities Army Ammunition Plant (TCAAP), to the downtown location in a first-ring suburb, Shoreview. This site was known as the TCAAP site because it formerly served the military, but had been sitting vacant and contaminated for several years. Various members of the local community supported the 430 acre TCAAP re-development because it offered the opportunity to clean up and develop the site (Feb. 15, 2012). Additionally, the neighboring Arden Hills Army Training Site (AHATS) added nearly 2,000 acres to the potential redevelopment project. Vikings leadership considered the opportunity to generate much more development in this area as compared to the more confined Metrodome area in Minneapolis (Nelson, 2011). Ultimately, the TCAAP site concept was dismissed as plans to maintain the original location in Minneapolis were solidified.

In 2012, 9 of the 34 articles released to garner support for a new stadium highlighted stimulation of other development as an alternative justification for public subsidy of the project. Job creation and putting Minnesotans back to work was a common theme (April 9, 2012) along with specific facts such as the 4.3 million hours of construction work required and nearly \$300 million paid out in wages for construction workers for the project. In 2012, the economy was still in a recession and these statements of economic stimulation were made to garner support for the new stadium project (Nov. 1, 2012). Other notes included the tax benefits to the state (March 21, 2012; Sept. 28, 2012) and the predicted \$25 million that would be generated annually through facility/event/team operations (March 2, 2012).

After reviewing the 71 releases from the 3 year period, it was evident the Vikings press releases employed the alternative justification argument of stimulating other development in their tactics for a new publicly subsidized sport facility. Key text segments such as “job creation,” “tax revenue,” and “economic benefits” were common themes through many of the press releases reviewed. This finding supports Crompton’s belief of the use of this particular argument for organizations when seeking public support (2004).

Psychic Income

Of the 14 releases from 2010, it was not until the final press release of the year that the organization mentioned psychic income as a motivating factor to support public subsidy of the stadium project. The December 3 releases noted the new stadium would be a world-class facility for the community that would benefit Minnesota families and friends for many decades. Within these releases, the idea of a publicly owned facility was highlighted three times. Additionally, facts detailed the Minnesota Vikings organization remained one of the lowest revenue generating NFL teams due to their challenges of their current stadium.

Ten of the 36 Vikings press releases in 2011 contained phrases/words pertaining to stimulation of psychic income. These releases employed phrases such as the new year-round, publicly owned, multipurpose facility would be a source of pride for the community (Feb. 15, 2011; March 11, 2011). The organization touted that Minnesotans loved their Vikings with one out of every two people in Minnesota following the team (March 11, 2011). The March 31, 2011 press release referenced a belief of this new stadium project being about more than just economics, but a quality life and image. On May 16, 2011, the Vikings organization stated the Vikings play an important role in the quality of life for the nearly 2.5 million Minnesotans following the team. Sentiments such as the Vikings being an important piece of the State's fabric and that they belong in Minnesota (November 8, 2011) continued throughout 2011 with a continued plea to keep the Vikings in Minnesota for the next generation of fans (November 1, 2011).

In 2012, the Vikings organization released 36 articles in which about half contained text segments relative to the alternative justification of psychic income. This was significantly more than the two previous years had shown when it came to highlighting this particular alternative justification argument. These segments highlighted the emotional and psychological benefit residents perceive they receive of having a sport team or event in an effort to build community consciousness and promote the quality of life. Key phrases included touting the new stadium being multi-purpose and publicly owned. These phrases were emphasized so fans would understand the Vikings organization was looking to provide a facility that would be available for community use throughout the year for event such as high school and amateur events (March 21, 2012; Sept. 28, 2012). The April 17, 2012 releases stated that Minnesotans were in charge of their destiny to help maintain the great quality of life currently enjoyed. A few weeks later, May

22, 2012 and again on August 10, 2012, the organization urged the fans to make the new stadium a reality and keep the Vikings in the state for future generations. The use of psychic income continued to be a common trend throughout 2012 as the Vikings press releases noted the substantial use of design and cutting edge technology to create the ultimate game-day experience for fans within the new stadium (Sept. 28, 2012).

After reviewing the 71 releases over a three-year period, it was evident the Vikings press releases employed the alternative justification argument of psychic income in their ploy for a new publicly subsidized sport facility. Although this theme was not as common in 2010, its use grew in 2011, with extensive use occurring in 2012. A common theme in the 2012 press releases showed the Vikings' argument that members of the local community would be able to use and benefit significantly from this new project. These findings support Crompton's (2004) belief of the use of the psychic income argument for organizations when seeking public funding support for a facility.

Discussion

The results of this qualitative study highlighted the alternative public funding arguments employed by the Vikings organizations in their press releases targeting fans that resulted in a successfully stadium campaign. These press releases were the initial releases distributed by the Vikings organization public relations department and did not include any media responses. These analysis results offered a deeper understanding into these four categories as well as the practical application as demonstrated by the Vikings organization.

Upon conclusion of the review of press releases pertaining to the new stadium, enhanced community image emerged as the most common theme. In fact, 50% of the total releases employed this alternative justification for public support for the stadium, with terms such as

“first class,” “multi-purpose,” and “state of the art” were shared across this period of marketing for the Vikings organization. Additionally, it was evident the Vikings press releases employed the alternative justification argument of stimulating other development. Key text segments such as “job creation,” “tax revenue,” and “economic benefits” were common throughout the press releases reviewed. Similarly, the Vikings employed the alternative justification argument of psychic income, highlighting the supposed benefits all members of the community would receive from the project. Perhaps the strategy to talk about psychic income was also a residual effect of the fact there was a growing body of empirical research questioning the validity of economic impact claims related to the stadium and team on the local economy. For example, an international study by Ahlstedt and Maennig (2010) showed that, although stadiums were responsible for an increase in surrounding property values of between eight and 15%, this effect dropped quickly as you moved away from the stadium. In fact, these property value increases disappeared altogether at a distance of three miles from the stadium. Compared to psychic income, increased community visibility was not found to be a justification used by the Vikings. Further implications of these findings are provided in the next section.

In the qualitative analysis process of alternative arguments for public support for a sport stadium, a new development emerged. The messages soliciting public support for a Viking stadium, and the spokespersons through which the messages were delivered, were central strategies in the Vikings’ campaign to illustrate the value of a publicly financed stadium and to “produce perceptions of organizational legitimacy and trustworthiness among community members” (Kellison & Mondello, 2012, p. 504). In this case, community members include—among others—ordinary citizens and elected officials. Although ordinary citizens did not have a direct vote on the matter, they were nonetheless important because of their ability to pressure

policymakers. In many ways, the Vikings' stadium communications resembled a traditional promotional campaign, as the team had to promote the idea that citizens would derive benefit from a new stadium. But given the highly political nature of the decision-making process, the team also had to consider strategies that would best engage policymakers. A common approach emerging from the content analysis was the Vikings' urging of supporters to contact their public officials and to join the grassroots campaign.

Conclusion

The results of this qualitative study highlighted the alternative public funding arguments employed by the Vikings organizations in their press releases resulting in a successful stadium campaign for the team. These results offer a deeper understanding into these four categories as well as the practical application as demonstrated by the Vikings organization. Furthermore, because the process of mobilizing fans for political strategy contains elements of marketing, political science, and public policy, future research in this area represents a promising venue for interdisciplinary collaboration.

Limitations of this study, consistent with other qualitative research, include the risk of suggesting transferability and generalizability (Creswell, 2009). The promotional messages effectiveness shared by this sport organization may or may not be replicated with success in another stadium campaign. Due to the fact that only press releases derived from the public relations department of the Minnesota Vikings organization were included in the study, outside communication may have influenced voter support as well. Additionally, although the Vikings organization shared all 71 of their press releases sent to fans during this grass roots campaign, information stating the demographics of the target market of these messages was not available. If

this data was shared, it may have offered more depth to this study. Therefore, additional studies of these alternative justification for public stadium support criteria are recommended.

Recommendations for future research were generated from the current study on alternative funding arguments for public sport facilities. Future research agendas included replicating this study with other professional teams, focusing on other cities, and possibly even looking into other leagues/levels of play. These future research studies would be beneficial in offering deeper insight into stadium funding communication strategies for sport administrators.

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Appendix: Keywords and Terms By Category and Frequency

Increased Community Visibility

- “Vikings Stadium Chat Makes National News!”
- “keep Vikings in the state until 2045”

Enhanced Community Image

- “...we also believe this is an...image issue” (11)
- “keeping the Vikings in Minnesota” / “securing the future” (9)
- “moving forward on one of the most exciting projects in MN history” (4)
- “Vikings an asset to the state” (4)
- “important project for the City of Minneapolis and the state” (3)
- “the largest public project in state history” (3)
- “a world class stadium to Minnesota” (2)
- “create a first-class, publicly-owned facility for the State” (2)
- “make this stadium unique to Minnesota” (2)
- “retain our status as a major league city” (2)
- “Images of the Metrodome roof collapse have raised the stadium discussion on both a local and national level. The dramatic YouTube video showing snow and ice dumping through the gaping hole in the roof is one of the most-watched videos online.”
- “Vikings games [are] a strong tradition. This is our 50th season and we hope to have another 50 in Minnesota.”

Stimulation of Other Development

- “new jobs created” (21)
- “an opportunity to develop the unused land, bring significant economic activity into the area” (6)
- “generate nearly \$26 million annually in taxes” (2)
- “... We certainly believe there are economic benefits that come with having professional sports in a community...” (2)
- “opportunity to put thousands of unemployed construction workers back on the job”
- “put Minnesotans to work”
- “...improvements will serve a much broader purpose”

Psychic Income

- “source of pride” (13)
- “...facility built for the community” (5)
- “quality of life” (4)
- “a tangible sense of excitement”
- “cultural asset for future generations”
- “Watching Vikings games is a strong tradition” (3)
- “Minnesotans love their Vikings! One out of two in MN follow the Vikings every Sunday.”
- “This team...is an important piece of the State’s fabric”

Note. Coding was informed by keywords and phrases as well as the contexts in which they were applied.