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In the Continued Pursuit of Stadium Initiatives Following Past Failures: An Analysis of the Los Angeles Farmers Field Proposal

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**In the Continued Pursuit of Stadium
Initiatives Following Past Failures:
An Analysis of the Los Angeles
Farmers Field Proposal**

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Abstract

Superficially, it appears paradoxical that the city of Los Angeles does not have a National Football League (NFL) franchise, especially considering the city's status as the second-largest media market in the United States. Currently, the Anschutz Entertainment Group (AEG) is leading a proposal for a new, state-of-the-art, 68,000-seat outdoor football stadium in downtown Los Angeles, along with a significant renovation of the neighboring convention center, in order to return the NFL to the city. According to official documents, the \$1.2-billion project would be financed completely through private investment (Pamer & Healy, 2012). In addition to the familiar criticisms aimed at nearly every major sports facility proposal, pro-stadium officials must disassociate the present plan from past Los Angeles football endeavors. In this study, we analyzed AEG's organizational perception management strategies through a content analysis of the proposed stadium's official website and authorized social media outlets. Four primary themes emerged from an analysis of website social media communications. These themes represent AEG's primary communicative objectives and include: legitimating the project; educating citizens about the project; connecting to Angelenos; and calling potential advocates of the plan into action. Implications of this study and directions for future research are provided.

Keywords: stadium campaigns, Los Angeles, city image, sport finance, social media, organizational perception management

In the Continued Pursuit of Stadium Initiatives Following Past Failures: An Analysis of the Los Angeles Farmers Field Proposal

Introduction

One challenge for professional sport organizations seeking a new or renovated stadium is to convince influential stakeholders within their communities (e.g., voters, local government, private investors) to support their projects, financially and otherwise. To meet this challenge, these teams must demonstrate the positive contributions they make to their local municipalities. Sport teams competing in aging facilities justify their requests for new facilities by citing multiple anticipated benefits to fans and to the team, including wider concourses, improved sightlines, overall aesthetics, more accommodating access points, and increased revenues (Rosentraub, 2010). How (and whether) such benefits to the team and fans translate into financial and nonpecuniary benefits to the city and its wider community is often disputed (Zimmerman, 2008). Still, teams seeking public financing for new or renovated facilities often benefit from using the threat of moving to another city as leverage (deMause & Cagan, 2008), demonstrating the existence of a widely-held assumption that teams are of value to their cities.

There is a litany of case studies examining communities in which public stadium financing has been debated (e.g., Brown & Paul, 2002; Mondello & Anderson, 2004; Mondello, Schwester, & Humphreys, 2009), but less attention has been directed to cities where privately funded stadiums have been proposed. Certainly, the prospect of allo-

cating tax revenues, issuing tax-exempt bonds, or providing infrastructure is likely to garner more attention from local citizens, but the privately funded stadium proposal is not immune to public reproach, as discussed further in the case highlighted by this paper.

City officials seeking to lure an existing or expansion professional sport team with a new, state-of-the-art facility have often been met with public resistance, particularly when such cities have a history of failed professional sport endeavors. For example, in 2007, the 18,500-seat Sprint Center opened in downtown Kansas City, with the primary purpose to catalyze economic growth through the acquisition of a professional hockey or basketball team (Chapman, 2006; Molinari, 2005). At the same time, the National Hockey League's (NHL) Pittsburgh Penguins were in the process of negotiating for a new publicly funded arena. After Penguins officials declared an impasse with the city of Pittsburgh, the Penguins made a heavily publicized visit to Kansas City to explore the possibility of relocating ("KC Puts," 2007). Ultimately, the Penguins came to an agreement with Pittsburgh, thereby leaving Kansas City without a primary tenant for its new indoor arena. Had Kansas City successfully lured the Penguins, it would not have been the city's first foray with an NHL franchise. Kansas City was awarded an NHL expansion team in the mid-1970s, but the team was sold after two seasons and relocated to Denver ("Penguins Explore," 2007).

Interestingly, cities with histories of a previously failed sport franchise frequently show interest in a new or relocated team. As illustrated in Table 1, 13 professional teams (i.e., Major League Baseball [MLB], National Basketball Association [NBA], NFL, NHL) have relocated to new cities since 1990. Of the teams' new cities, seven had a prior history of professional teams in the same sport. Furthermore, of the teams' old cities, five have attracted new franchises (either through expansion or relocation) since losing their teams.

Presently, the city of Los Angeles is actively pursuing a new or existing NFL team. Los Angeles is the second-largest media market in the United States but has been without an NFL team since 1995, when the Raiders and Rams relocated to Oakland and St. Louis, respectively (Farmer, 2011). The centerpiece of the current proposal is Farmers

For example, some aspects of the deal require municipal cooperation, such as the city allowing its downtown land to be leased for \$1. Additionally, approximately \$275 million in tax-exempt bonds would be used to construct a new wing for the convention center, and AEG would lease the building site (owned by the city of Los Angeles) for 55 years. The proposal included a \$700 million naming-rights deal with Farmers Insurance. Furthermore, the stadium would feature a wide range of technological innovations and amenities. Under the original plan, construction would begin in 2013 and open in summer 2016, though that timeframe is no longer feasible due to the lack of an agreement. Despite the city's history of failed professional football franchises, the significant investment required from both private and public entities in Los Angeles represents the belief that professional sport—and an innovative facility—are valued commodities.

Table 1

Major North American Professional Sport Franchise Relocations, 1990-2011

Year	Relocation ^a	League	History in New City ^b	Status of Old City ^c
1993	Minnesota North Stars to Dallas Stars	NHL	—	Wild (2000-)
1995	Los Angeles Raiders to Oakland Raiders	NFL	Raiders (1960-1982)	—
1995	Los Angeles Rams to St. Louis Rams	NFL	Cardinals (1960-1987)	—
1995	Quebec Nordiques to Colorado Avalanche	NHL	Rockies (1976-1982)	—
1996	Cleveland Browns to Baltimore Ravens	NFL	Colts (1953-1983)	Browns (1999-)
1996	Winnipeg Jets to Phoenix Coyotes	NHL	—	Jets (2011-)
1997	Hartford Whalers to Carolina Hurricanes	NHL	—	—
1997	Houston Oilers to Tennessee Titans	NFL	—	Texans (2002-)
2001	Vancouver Grizzlies to Memphis Grizzlies	NBA	—	—
2002	Charlotte Hornets to New Orleans Hornets	NBA	Jazz (1974-1979)	Bobcats (2004-)
2005	Montreal Expos to Washington Nationals	MLB	Senators (1906-1960; 1961-1971)	—
2006	Seattle SuperSonics to Oklahoma City Thunder	NBA	—	—
2011	Atlanta Thrashers to Winnipeg Jets	NHL	Jets (1979-1996)	—

^aCity being relocated from (i.e., old city) to city being relocated to (i.e., new city). ^bIncludes new city's past teams that competed in same league. ^cIncludes old city's teams presently competing in same league.

Field, a \$1.2-billion, 68,000-seat stadium located in downtown Los Angeles (AEG, 2011). In July 2011, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) called for the new stadium to be built on the site of the West Hall of the Los Angeles Convention Center and adjacent to the STAPLES Center, the home of the Lakers (NBA) and Kings (NHL). AEG either owns or has an ownership stake in the STAPLES Center, the Lakers, and the Kings. The MOU stated no public funds would be used to construct the stadium and the proposal would proceed only after an NFL team had been secured.

Although the stadium is being funded through private investment, the plan nevertheless requires substantial support from lawmakers and the surrounding communities.

As will be explained in further detail, the perceived utility of a professional football team and stadium to Los Angeles presents a paradox when past experiences are considered. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the possible motives for lobbyists' pursuit of a professional sport team and stadium in a city that has historically lacked the support to sustain such ventures. Such a case provides perhaps the strongest illustration of the anticipated benefits of professional sports and facilities to a community. That is, despite the fact that past Los Angeles professional football teams have failed to remain viable, current efforts to bring football back to the city indicate the perceived benefits outweigh the foreseen risks. Below, we provide a history of professional football in Los Angeles and outline the city's most recent attempt to attract

an NFL franchise. Next, we identify themes in the arguments of pro-team lobbyists through a content analysis of the group's official website and its social media platforms. These forms of media are centrally important to the organization's perception-management strategies, which are employed in order to legitimate the stadium proposal. Legitimation is rendered all the more necessary by the past failures in Los Angeles. Finally, we address the research and practical implications of our findings and frame an agenda for future research.

Past Failures in Los Angeles

Because Los Angeles and its surrounding areas are presently represented by multiple MLB, NBA, and NHL teams, market unsustainability does not seem to adequately explain the city's past failures with NFL franchises. The rejection of the poor-market hypothesis—that a professional sports franchise is unsustainable under the city's market conditions—is further supported by the fact a new team is currently being sought by a private, profit-driven organization (AEG, 2013). A better explanation is that both the Raiders and Rams were unsatisfied with the condition of Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, which ultimately led to their relocations to Oakland and Anaheim, respectively, as discussed further below. As a result of these previous failures, the present Los Angeles stadium proposal is wholly premised on the presumed benefits and features of a new urban stadium.

In 1946, the Cleveland Rams moved operations to Los Angeles; the relocated Rams were the NFL's first team west of the Mississippi River (Strong, 1996). The Rams played in Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, the enormous stadium built in the 1920s and the central site of the 1932 and 1984 Olympic Games. With the capability of seating in excess of 100,000 spectators, the Coliseum presented attendance challenges for the Rams. Amid concerns that the team would move to a city with a smaller stadium, the Coliseum was renovated and its seating capacity reduced in the 1960s and 1970s (Munsey & Suppes, 2013). Despite these changes, the Rams moved their offices and training facility to nearby Anaheim, a city experiencing significant economic growth during the Rams' transition. The Rams competed in Anaheim Stadium (as the Los Angeles Rams) from 1980 until 1994, when they relocated to St. Louis. This move resulted from failed negotiations with Anaheim for stadium upgrades (St. Louis Rams, 2011).

In the early 1980s, Oakland Raiders owner Al Davis was seeking similar changes to the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum, a stadium built in the mid-1960s and shared with MLB's Athletics. Despite his concerns that Memorial

Coliseum was too large and lacked sufficient luxury suites, Davis signed a memorandum of agreement with the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum Commission, thereby declaring his intent to move the team to the Los Angeles venue. When the NFL and its members unanimously rejected the Raiders' relocation to Los Angeles, Davis filed an antitrust lawsuit against the league and successfully argued his case that the NFL wrongfully obstructed the team's relocation efforts (Lazaroff, 1984; Reich, 1989; Ross, 2003). While in Los Angeles, Davis lobbied for significant renovations to Memorial Coliseum, many of which were put on hold after a 1994 earthquake required the stadium commission to invest \$93 million for critical repairs (University of Southern California, 2011). Seeking a more favorable stadium for the Raiders, Davis entertained a number of offers from neighboring cities, including Irwindale, which made a \$10-million nonrefundable payment to Davis as a symbol of commitment to the Raiders; ultimately, Davis kept the money and moved the Raiders back to Oakland and the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum (now known as O.co Coliseum) ("Irwindale Loses Big," 1990).

Throughout the negotiation processes of both the Rams and Raiders, team owners were vocal about their concerns playing in the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, which had become outdated by the 1980s. Both teams struggled to sell out the stadium, leading often to telecast blackouts. Additionally, the configuration of the stadium seating was not optimal for viewing a football game and lacked many modern amenities, including luxury seating, which was increasingly becoming a relied-upon revenue source for NFL teams (Connell & Glick, 1986). Finally, team officials were concerned about the Coliseum's location in south-central Los Angeles because of the perception of criminal activity as well as the lack of parking (Euchner, 1993).

Farmers Field Project

Stakeholders advocating for sport facility upgrades may put forth a number of arguments to demonstrate their need. To the organization, an outdated facility represents lost potential revenue from corporate sales, increased attendance, personal seat licenses, concessions, parking, and sponsorship (Brown, Nagel, McEvoy, & Rascher, 2004; Crompton, Howard, & Var, 2003; Zygmunt & Leadley, 2005). In addition to the benefits to the team, pro-facility supporters may also identify community benefits, including increased jobs and economic stimulation (Coates, 2007; Schwesler, 2007), higher property values (Dehring, Depken, & Ward, 2007), elevated civic pride (Broudehoux, 2007), improved fan enjoyment (Swindell & Rosentraub, 1998), enhanced city status (Owen, 2003), increased visibility to outside corporations (Phelps, 2004), and positive media exposure (Crompton, 2004).

Many of the aforementioned arguments were used by advocates of the present-day Los Angeles proposal. As discussed in the section below, the proposed stadium differs from its predecessor in a number of ways and includes amenities sorely missed by the Rams and Raiders in Memorial Coliseum. Still, with the city's history of failed professional football ventures, its repeated interest in attracting an NFL team is compelling and warrants further investigation to ascertain if and why Angelenos believe this project would result in a different outcome than experienced by the city's previous professional football teams.

After the Rams and Raiders left the Los Angeles area in 1995, the city—with the cooperation of the NFL — almost immediately began plans to attract an existing or expansion team. In 1999, the NFL all but guaranteed Los Angeles an expansion team as long as the city could present a stadium construction and financing plan by the league's deadline. As noted by Kolker (1999), however, the city lacked enthusiasm when faced with the prospect of regaining an NFL franchise: "Los Angeles...has proved blasé about pro football, slow to form stadium or parking plans, sluggish before informal NFL deadlines, adamant against public funding for teams" (p. 1). After Los Angeles failed to meet the NFL's stadium-plan deadline, the league awarded its expansion franchise to Houston (Williams, McClain, Hanson, Schwartz, & Bernstein, 1999). For the past decade, the NFL has sought to reenter the region's lucrative media market, and a number of reasons might explain why the league has been unsuccessful thus far. As Alexander (2007) contended, the NFL's most likely obstacle has been overcoming local citizens' steadfast opposition to public stadium financing.

Recently, several competing plans have emerged that limit the public's investment in a new stadium. One such plan spearheaded by Majestic Realty Co. has called for a 75,000-seat stadium to be built in nearby City of Industry (Farmer, 2009). However, that plan has been criticized for its lack of a cohesive financing plan and limited opportunity for revenue generation (Markazi, 2011b). Consequently, much of the public's attention has turned to the AEG-led Farmers Field plan (Farmer, 2013).

The Farmers Field project (FFP) received endorsements from a wide range of individuals and groups, including elected officials (e.g., former mayor James Hahn; current mayor Antonio Villaraigosa), business leaders and local chambers of commerce (e.g., Greater Los Angeles African American Chamber of Commerce; National Association of Women Business Owners), labor unions (e.g., Laborers' International Union of North America,

Local 300), and sports celebrities (e.g., former Laker Magic Johnson; commentator Al Michaels) (AEG, 2011). In September 2011, California governor Jerry Brown participated in a ceremony with AEG to sign Senate Bill (SB) 292. The bill helped expedite the FFP by accelerating the environmental-certification review process required of major construction projects in California (Siders, 2011). Despite these highly publicized project endorsements, the FFP also faced several criticisms, including concerns that nearby neighborhoods and the downtown homeless have been ignored during the planning process (Linthicum, 2011; Tobar, 2011); that AEG's lease with the city unfairly benefits AEG (Lopez, 2011); that additional traffic would hinder travel (Zahniser & Farmer, 2011); that the proposed stadium would incur greater economic benefits outside the downtown area (Kotkin, 2011); and the plan affronts California's pro-environmental legislation (Futch, 2011; Hiltzik, 2011; McGreevy, 2011).

The FFP today is at a critical stage of development. As per NFL regulations, AEG must show evidence of a viable plan to finance and construct a stadium before the league will consider potential teams or ownership groups. Such a plan requires the commitment of a number of constituents, including state and local officials. Similarly, AEG must address the concerns of numerous entities, including the citizens of Los Angeles, local business leaders, and the media. While public scrutiny is expected of any mega project, the FFP is particularly susceptible to criticism given Los Angeles's historical lack of support (as evidenced by poor attendance and an unwillingness to renovate existing or construct new stadiums) for its football teams. Therefore, FFP officials must find ways to temper concerns about the city's past professional football failures and to respond to new issues raised about the stadium project. Through an examination of the pro-stadium marketing communications, we identified the salient themes emerging from AEG's FFP campaign. These themes represent AEG's central arguments for securing an NFL franchise and building Farmers Field.

AEG's Perception Management Agenda

AEG is charged with demonstrating the financial sustainability of a professional football team and downtown stadium, a particular challenge considering the fates of Los Angeles's past NFL teams. Therefore, one of AEG's primary objectives is to distinguish the FFP from similar endeavors. As noted by Elsbach (2006), an entity seeking to cultivate, manage, or modify its reputation and image can engage in organizational perception management (OPM). OPM is a multidimensional process through which perceptions of the organization (held by internal

and external audiences) are influenced by a variety of actions by organizational spokespersons.

OPM is a useful framework through which the Los Angeles football initiative can be examined. As described above, the historical lack of support for professional football in Los Angeles necessitates that any new proposal consider ways to differentiate its plan from past failures. A primary means through which the reputation of AEG and the FFP can be controlled is the careful management of direct communications. These verbal accounts are the subject of this study, as described in further detail below.

Methodology

The method utilized in this work followed the approach employed by Mondello et al. (2009). Specifically, we examined AEG's primary foci: the features and perceived contributions of the FFP. Using content analysis, we analyzed AEG's official Farmers Field website (i.e., farmersfield.com) and its three primary social media sites (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube), whose links were embedded within the primary website. These AEG-controlled messages included a variety of news clips, endorsements, and strategies to highlight the need for a new stadium initiative. Collectively, this information provided the key data points for our content analysis. Specifically, the social media analyzed included 178 statements posted on Farmers Field's official Facebook page from April to November 2011, 912 Twitter messages posted on its official microblog account between November 2010 and November 2011, and 29 YouTube videos posted on its official YouTube channel from April to November 2011.

In recent years social-networking communities have developed as a promising resource for marketers due to the low cost and relative ease with which information can be disseminated. A recent study by the Center for Marketing Research at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth revealed 75% of the 500 fastest-growing private companies in the United States are "very familiar" with social networking media (Barnes, 2010). Furthermore, the study found 91% of the companies researched are using at least one form of social networking (including blogs, podcasts, online videos, message boards, wikis, and social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, and LinkedIn). Of the companies currently engaged in social networking, 87% reported their social networking activity was successful. A similar incidence of social-networking usage occurs in North America's four most prominent professional sport leagues. Of the 122 professional sports teams comprising North America's four most prominent professional sport leagues, 93% provide access to their of-

ficial Facebook groups from their website homepages, while 95% of the teams promote their Twitter feeds in the same manner.

Following the guidelines of Fico, Lacy, and Riffe (2008), we grouped "expressions" into categories through the development of a multi-stage coding protocol. In the first stage, primary expressions from the primary website's content area were categorized according to a number of recurring themes found in the literature. The primary website's relationship with each social media outlet is perhaps best described as the anchor; that is, from our analysis of each medium, we observed that nearly all social media posts were designed with the intent of redirecting the reader back to the anchor website, providing the key features of the FFP emphasized by AEG. Each theme and its operational definition are provided in the results section. Following the identification of the primary themes, each social media post was analyzed and assigned, when applicable, to the aforementioned themes. When necessary, posts were coded into multiple themes. Additionally, if a post could not be assigned to an already identified theme, we considered the appropriateness of developing a new theme.

Two coders were used. To ensure coding reliability, if there was inter-coder disagreement or intra-coder uncertainty as to the coding of a posting, it was removed from the analysis. Because of our interest in the manner in which AEG is positioning the FFP (through OPM), the investigation of the developer's official Internet outlets is appropriate. Unlike the independent news media, these authorized mediums represent one of the few channels that can be wholly controlled by AEG. Thus, the primary themes extracted for our analysis indicate AEG's major points of emphasis regarding the FFP. These points are necessary for a number of reasons, including lending legitimacy to the campaign to return professional football to Los Angeles.

Results

During the first stage of content analysis, three broad themes emerged from a review of the FFP anchor website. These themes represent AEG's central objectives in communicating to the public and include: educating the public about the project; connecting to hopeful NFL fans and, more broadly, to Angelenos; and legitimating the project as a viable and worthy contribution to the city. Furthermore, during the second stage of content analysis (in which social media communications were categorized), a fourth theme emerged. Especially while

the plan was in its infancy stage, AEG stressed the importance of advocacy by calling to action those who supported the initiative. These findings are reported in Table 2 below.

impression-management strategies. In sum, 1,456 categorizations were made. Perhaps most obviously, AEG has relied on its online resources to educate citizens about the FFP (N=374). The depth of information provided ranged from broad to specific. Four subcategories were developed

Table 2

Results of Content Analysis, AEG's FFP Communications

Stage 1: Theme Extraction	Stage 2: Social Media Analysis			
Emerging Themes	Facebook (n=178)	Twitter (n=912)	YouTube (n=29)	Total
Educating	66	304	4	374
<i>General information</i>	39	121	0	160
<i>Financing plan</i>	2	29	3	34
<i>Pro-environmentalism</i>	8	46	1	55
<i>Miscellaneous press links</i>	17	108	0	125
Connecting	45	269	39	354
To Angelenos				
<i>Economic benefits</i>	8	62	18	88
<i>Convention Center improvement</i>	9	36	9	54
<i>Attraction of new entertainment options</i>	4	31	3	38
<i>Infrastructural changes</i>	0	27	0	27
To football fans				
<i>NFL team mentions</i>	24	113	9	146
Legitimizing	66	346	32	444
<i>Special events</i>	21	240	3	264
<i>Endorsements</i>	45	106	29	180
Calling to Action	21	119	0	140
Unclassified	2	19	0	21

Note. NFL team mentions and calling to action themes emerged during social media content analysis. All others emerged from content analysis of farmersfield.com.

When the 29 YouTube videos were examined, multiple themes emerged and were often embedded within a single video clip. For example, individuals endorsing the project typically gave multiple reasons for their support. These factors included job growth, the civic pride associated with an NFL team and entertainment center, and the need for an updated convention center. At the end of each video, the FFP theme (“It’s about jobs. It’s about pride. It’s about time.”) was reiterated to viewers. This slogan was also displayed prominently on the Farmers Field website.

Across all three social media sites, 1,119 social media communications were analyzed during the second stage of review, and 1,099 total communications were categorized (while 21 were left unclassified due to the lack of specificity in their messages). A number of posts contained multiple categorizations, suggesting AEG’s broad

to more precisely illustrate AEG’s educational initiatives. General information (n=160) encompassed a variety of messages related both to the stadium itself (e.g., size, cost, location) and details surrounding the FFP’s development (e.g., “AEG, LA City & @ConventionLA has chosen architect @Populous to design the new Convention Center Hall #FarmersField”). Financing plan (n=34) included information related to the funding apparatuses planned to develop and construct the stadium (e.g., “#FarmersField will be paid for by the PRIVATE sector-AEG”). The stadium’s planned pro-environmental design (n=55) was similarly emphasized (e.g., “The new #FarmersField stadium will be one of the most environmentally friendly stadiums in the world”). Lastly, AEG provided miscellaneous press links (n=125) when well-known media outlets provided favorable news reports (e.g., “Check out the *Los Angeles Times* article on the Farmers Field project reaching the next level in bringing the NFL to L.A.”).

While online content can be a significant source of information, much of the appeal of social media is its interactive capabilities. For AEG, the Farmers Field anchor website and social media sites provided means for connecting to both football fans and Angelenos in general, as evidenced by AEG's online posts (N=354). AEG sought to incite football fans by making NFL team references (n=146) (e.g., "What an amazing NFL opener! Great game-next year, I want it in LA @FarmersField @NFLinLA"). Despite the relative ease with which the FFP could resonate with football fans, additional outreach would be necessary to demonstrate the value to parts of the population with no interest in a professional football team. To connect to these Angelenos, online posts often touted the economic benefits (n=88) Farmers Field could provide (e.g., "The approval of Farmers Field brings us one step closer to thousands of jobs for L.A. and a boost to the economy").

Additionally, AEG highlighted other aspects of the FFP benefitting the city's image, such as the Los Angeles Convention Center improvements (n=54) representing a significant portion of the plan (e.g., "The Farmers Field project allows L.A. to finally compete for many of the top 50 conventions the current Los Angeles Convention Center is too small to host"). To appeal to those who may enjoy alternative forms of entertainment, social media posts sometimes discussed the potential new entertainment options (n=38) that would be found in the stadium when the NFL team was not playing ("Are you watching tonight's fight? Mayweather vs. Ortiz! Who do you think will win? How great would it be to see Pacquiao fight Mayweather at Farmers Field!"). In response to the worry that a downtown stadium would contribute to traffic problems, the FFP social media posts highlighted the infrastructural changes (n=27) aimed at addressing these issues ("[Downtown Los Angeles] has the traffic infrastructure to support #FarmersField").

In light of Los Angeles's history of past professional football failures, AEG has been challenged to demonstrate the ways in which this endeavor is different. To allay trepidation based on the city's history, AEG placed significant emphasis on the events legitimizing their plan (N=444). One useful function of social media outlets such as Twitter is the ability to "liveblog" a special event (n=264), or provide running commentary during the event (e.g., "At @FarmersField press conference with @JerryBrownGov."). Additionally, AEG illustrated the perceived legitimacy of the plan by referencing the numerous individuals and groups providing endorsements (n=180) for the FFP (e.g., "Former Laker Legend Earvin 'Magic' Johnson supports Farmers Field!").

Finally, AEG benefited from the interactivity of social media by calling to action their supporters (N=140). In addition to signing online petitions or registering for more information, AEG requested that pro-FFP supporters actively advocate for the plan (e.g., "Help move the #FarmersField project forward by contacting the L.A. City Council asking them to support @FarmersField!"). Below, we conclude with a discussion of AEG's perception-management strategies and suggest directions for future research.

Discussion

Each of the themes emerging from the content analysis provides a unique objective of AEG's OPM strategies. In addition to educating the public about general features of the stadium project, AEG also focused on publicizing two major aspects of the FFP. In anticipation of criticisms raised from perceptions that the stadium would be funded at least in part by public subsidies, social media communications focused on the fact the project would be paid wholly through private investiture. Distinguishing the FFP as a privately funded stadium is essential in light of the passionate debates occurring in cities where subsidized sports facilities have been proposed. These cases have been widely documented in both the scholarly literature (e.g., Brown & Paul, 2002; deMause & Cagan, 2008; Mondello & Anderson, 2004) and national media (e.g., Bakst, 2011; Belson, 2011a, 2011b; Bergen, 2011; Sachdev, 2010). Given the fact the majority of North American sports facilities are funded through local, state, or federal subsidies, AEG is utilizing its website and social media outlets to combat public assumptions that the FFP would require municipal funding.

The FFP's incorporation of environmentally sustainable design features is also a focal point of AEG's educational initiatives. When SB 292—the legislation designed to expedite the judicial process through which a proposed facility's environmental design is reviewed—was initially proposed, it was met with strong opposition from environmental groups, including the National Resources Defense Council (NRDC) (Pettit, 2011). According to its advocates, SB 292 accelerated the unnecessarily long and arduous environmental review required under the provisions of California's Environmental Quality Act. To opponents, however, SB 292 would "give AEG a break on lawsuits associated with its stadium and make it extremely difficult for communities to sue to force AEG to protect the livability and environment near the stadium" (Futch, 2011, para. 13). After revisions were made to the original bill, SB 292 passed with the support of the NRDC, the California League of Conservation Voters, and the *Los Angeles Times*. By focusing on messages acclaiming the FFP's

pro-environmental design (e.g., “Transportation plans for the stadium would give #FarmersField the lowest ‘cars per football game ticket holder’ ratio in the country”; “Under the bill, #FarmersField will become one of the only NFL stadiums in the United States to have a net zero carbon footprint”), AEG is continuing to demonstrate its commitment to pro-environmental initiatives. This strategy is essential to tempering criticisms that SB 292 allowed the stadium project to circumvent environmental reviews.

In addition to educating the public about the stadium initiative, AEG sought to form connections with both football and non-football fans. Frequent references to the 2011 NFL season were directed toward those with an interest in professional football. To attract nonfans, social media communications also focused on planned improvements to the convention center and named a variety of other events that could be hosted at Farmers Field, including boxing matches, concerts, major collegiate sports championships, and motocross racing. To professional sport organizations, a new arena or stadium represents a new way of attracting individuals traditionally uninterested in sport; for example, Kellison and Kim (in press) found that teams playing in pro-environmental arenas sought to market to environmentally conscientious consumers in order to stimulate new interest in the team.

In light of Los Angeles’s past failures with professional football franchises, critics have raised questions about whether the current stadium proposal would be successful. To address concerns about the FFP’s legitimacy and professional football’s long-term sustainability in Los Angeles, AEG included the endorsements of a number of prominent business leaders, celebrities, labor unions, and politicians in its social media communications. During the initial planning stages to build a stadium in Los Angeles (and prior to the development of the FFP), then-Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger was among the most vocal supporters, paying particular attention to a new stadium’s pro-environmental design: “This stadium is also a model of environmental efficiency. ... This stadium is so innovative that it is, literally, and I’m very proud to say, the first LEED-certified stadium in the [NFL]” (Schwarzenegger, 2010). Although officials have made assurances the stadium would be financed wholly through non-public means, their need to establish legitimacy in the community is nevertheless essential in order to “manage perceptions of long-term and enduring identities and reputations” (Elsbach, 2006, pp. 34–35).

Finally, during various planning stages of the FFP, AEG’s social media messages encouraged supporters to

show signs of support for the stadium initiative. Advocates were asked to sign petitions, contact local political leaders, and attend rallies. Additionally, to further legitimate the proposal, live-blogs of public hearings and meetings often emphasized the large numbers of supporters in attendance. Thus, by calling to action the thousands of stadium supporters, the FFP could be legitimated to critical decision makers, including apprehensive politicians, prospective team owners, and NFL administrators. Each of these groups plays an important role in the success of the FFP; a final city approval was initially targeted for June 2012 and a lease with a relocated team would be signed in early 2013 but those dates have now been pushed back (Markazi, 2011a).

These negotiations are noteworthy for several reasons. Because of Los Angeles’s past football failures, subsequent plans designed to attract a professional football team have been met with criticism. As a result of concerns that the FFP may be similarly unsuccessful (cf. Romero, 2011), AEG must legitimate its plan for a new stadium. As elaborated above, AEG’s social media messages have focused on educating Angelenos about the stadium itself (i.e., features, financing plan), connecting to both football fans and nonfans, legitimating the long-term sustainability of the project, and calling advocates to act on the FFP’s behalf.

Conclusions

Future research should consider whether Angelenos value the purported benefits of the stadium project. While there indeed may be evidence that professional football and Farmers Field could provide non-economic benefits to Los Angeles, similar attempts to quantify these in other cities have been absent from the scholarly literature until recently. Over the last decade, sports economists have utilized the contingent valuation method (CVM) to quantify the externalities produced by sport teams. Originating in environmental economics, CVM assesses user willingness to pay for goods or services that are not publicly traded on the open market. Specifically, this methodology presents respondents with hypothetical scenarios and then calculates both individual and group willingness to pay estimates (cf., Walker & Mondello, 2007).

Over the last 20 years, a proliferation of empirical sport management studies has examined the economic impact of stadiums and sporting events on local economies. Though the overwhelming majority of these analyses have consistently reported minimal and in some cases negative economic impact, various stakeholders (including city officials, professional sports teams’ owners and policy mak-

ers, and international sport representatives) have continued to claim these sports events and stadiums represent sound financial policy. However, within the last decade, as additional work continued to support the notion that sports and stadiums may not be economically beneficial to municipalities, stakeholders began promoting the non-pecuniary benefits of sports. These positive public goods and externalities include civic pride and having a city considered “major league.”

Our analysis of the Los Angeles FFP’s social media communications indicates stadium planners are disseminating a wide range of messages to enable support for the plan. This review of perception-management strategies provides a review of organizationally managed and authored messages designed to enhance the project’s reputation. Despite the city’s historical lack of support, the FFP represents a significant investment in the long-term sustainability of professional football in Los Angeles. As this case continues to evolve, other cities with similar circumstances (e.g., cities that have lost professional sport franchises) should be cognizant of the FFP’s successes and failures. Should the FFP proceed as planned, similar promotional strategies may produce a similar fate, one in which a professional sport franchise emerges only through enduring leadership, the support of highly visible leaders and ordinary citizens alike, and a plan to differentiate itself from past failures.

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