

Black Lives Matter to the NBA: The Impact of Sport Fanship and Political Affiliation on the Perception of the NBA's Racial Justice Initiatives During the 2020 Playoff Bubble

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The NBA's (National Basketball Association's) racial justice initiatives during the 2020 Playoff Bubble are considered an act of corporate social advocacy and provide an exemplary scenario to explore this intersection of sport and politics. Based on this observation, the purpose of this study was to explore how one's level of identification with the NBA and his/her identification with a political party can impact one's perception of the NBA's racial justice initiatives. Specifically, the researchers wanted to determine if outrage toward the NBA and one's perception of the NBA's reputation is influenced more by one's political identity or one's fanship for the league. A survey was conducted using a national convenience sample of 518 participants recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk. Results showed that while both fanship and political identity had effects on one's outrage toward the NBA and one's perceived reputation of the NBA, the stronger factor differed between Democrats and Republicans.

Keywords: social identity theory, fanship, political affiliation, National Basketball Association, survey

During the 2020 Playoff Bubble that the National Basketball Association (NBA) established in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that temporarily derailed the sport industry, an opportunity was presented for the league to make a collective stance toward racial justice. In response to the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor at the hands of law enforcement, as well as the killing of Ahmaud Arbery by civilian White men while Arbery was on a jog, the NBA decided to support the racial justice movement through a league-wide initiative during the NBA's resumed season (McCarriston, 2020). The league decided to paint the slogan on all three arenas inside the NBA and WNBA bubble and allowed players to wear social justice messages on their jerseys.

While some praised the NBA for players, coaches, and other personnel collectively using their platform during the unique situation to push the message that change needs to happen (Moore, 2020; Spears, 2020), some saw the approach as merely performative activism. Meaning that the actions were seen as more self-serving to the league rather than the causes it was attempting to support compared with the league's counterparts in the WNBA and their more authentic methods of activism (Thimsen, 2022). Players like Kyrie Irving felt that forcing play to resume, despite the messaging, took away from the necessary work players could do in their communities to combat racial injustice (Dator, 2020). Kimble (2020) stressed the larger issue with corporate activism: that, while on the surface, it provides a feel good moment that makes the organization look good, it does not provide the necessary setting for impactful change to occur because of the reality that the gestures are for generating profit. This was further illustrated by the fact that while owners publicly "supported" the movement, their financial contributions to mainly Republican politicians suggest otherwise (Lee, 2020).

During the NBA Finals, the ratings dropped to a historic low, declining 37% from the previous year Katje (2020). This could be attributed to the impact of the pandemic on sports consumption, with NBA Finals increasing more than 30% both in 2021 and 2022 (NBA.com, 2021, 2022) and comparable drops in ratings affecting Major League Baseball (40%) and the National Hockey League (38%) during their 2020 championship runs (Paulsen, 2020). Nevertheless, President Donald Trump and right-wing politicians and pundits quickly blamed the NBA's embrace of the racial justice movement as the reason for the league's poor ratings without any evidence to support this notion (Euronews, 2020). Although a Marist poll does show that 70% of Republicans are less likely to watch live sports because of athletes' calls for racial justice, 61% of Democrats and almost half of independents say that the protests have no impact on their viewing habits (Beer, 2020). Within this line of thought, recently, there have been many parallels drawn between sports fandom and the "sport" of politics (e.g., Devlin & Devlin, 2020). Just as fans express their affinity, loyalty, and allegiance to their favorite sports team, "fans" of particular political parties have increasingly made their allegiances more public with displays of loyalty and affinity to that party, specifically during the Trump administration. Because of these similarities, it is interesting to examine how these worlds intersect when someone faces a politically charged scenario in the sports world. It begs the simple question: "When encountering a situation involving both sports and politics, which of your 'fandoms' will influence your opinion of that situation more?"

The NBA's embrace of the racial justice movement is considered an act of corporate social advocacy (CSA) and provides an exemplary scenario to explore this intersection of sports and politics. Based on the previous inquiry, this study aims to explore how one's level of identification with the NBA and one's identification with a political party can impact one's perception of the NBA's racial justice initiative during the 2020 NBA Playoff Bubble. Specifically, the researchers want to determine if outrage

toward the NBA and one's perception of the NBA's reputation because of its racial justice initiative is influenced more by one's political identity or one's fanship for the league.

Literature Review

On March 11, 2020, before the start of a game between the Utah Jazz and the Oklahoma City Thunder, Jazz center Rudy Gobert tested positive for COVID-19. Because of this, the game was postponed, and soon after, NBA commissioner Adam Silver suspended the season indefinitely (Aschburner, 2020). This was considered by many to be the beginning of the informal shutdown of the sports world in the United States in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Soon after, almost every major collegiate and professional sports league in the United States postponed or canceled their seasons within a matter of weeks, with the NCAA canceling its 2020 men's and women's basketball tournaments, the National Hockey League postponing its season, and Major League Baseball delaying Opening Day (Boone, 2020; Kepner, 2020; Young, 2020). Surprisingly, some sports, like professional wrestling (Davidson et al., 2020) and mixed martial arts (Butryn et al., 2020) continued, albeit with a more stripped-down version void of fans.

During this period of sport shutdowns, tensions were rising in the nation due to a number of racially motivated conflicts involving African Americans. While still responding to the murder of Ahmaud Arbery, a 25-year-old Black man shot by residents of a South Georgia neighborhood while jogging, police officers shot Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old Black woman. Taylor was in her Louisville, Kentucky, apartment when plainclothes officers forced entry into her apartment during a drug-dealing investigation (Browne et al., 2020; Fausset, 2020). The anger climaxed when Minneapolis police killed George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, while in custody (Hill et al., 2020).

As the NBA prepared to restart the 2019–2020 season on July 30 in Orlando, understanding the need to support its African American players' fight against racial injustice, the league decided on a number of initiatives to display its commitment. The most prominent initiatives were the agreement to allow players to wear social justice messages on the backs of their jerseys (Turner & Woike, 2020) and the decision to paint the courts inside the bubble with a "Black Lives Matter" logo (Zagoria, 2020). In addition, the league allowed players to kneel during the national anthem (Feldman, 2020).

While the NBA Orlando bubble was seen as a success in terms of protecting the health of the players, team staff, and production staff, ratings indicated a down year, with the NBA Finals ratings dropping 37% lower than ratings from the previous year (Paulsen, 2020). Noting the decline in ratings, many conservative politicians and news pundits claimed that this decline was based on the league's social justice initiatives during the restart. However, these claims were grounded in faulty reasoning, particularly since leagues that did not embrace social justice initiatives also saw considerable declines (Paulsen, 2020). Commissioner Silver stated that no data suggested the ratings decline was due to the league's racial justice initiatives and provided several other reasons for the fall, including cord-cutting and increased sports viewing options due to the alteration of the sports calendar during the pandemic (Feldman, 2020).

The criticism of the NBA's support of the racial justice movements during the Orlando bubble raises important questions about the embrace of identity. Specifically, this issue brings into

focus two aspects of social identity: fanship and political identity. The effects of both aspects of a person's identity could influence how one perceives the embrace of social justice movements in sports, but to what degree? Understanding this balance of identities, and more importantly, which aspect of one's identity has a stronger impact on his/her opinion, could give insight into how to approach social justice initiatives in the future in order to support passionate fans while mitigating the effects of alienating others that may not support the initiatives. The question addresses the notion of competing social identity cues, which warrants a look into social identity theory and how it relates to our two characteristics in question: fanship and political identity.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory (SIT) proposes that group identity and, by extension, intergroup relations originate not from functional motivations regarding in-group utility, but rather from processes of cognitive self-categorization (Brewer, 1979; Hogg, 2006; Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The theory suggests that self-categorization into a social group leads to identification with the group, which, in turn, promotes group normative behavior (Brewer & Brown, 1998; Tajfel, 1970, 1982). Self-categorization depends on the salience and relevance of the social group (Brewer, 1979; Hogg, 2006; see also Turner et al., 1994, for an overview of SIT's corollary theory, self-categorization theory, which seeks to explain variability in self-categorization based on these and other factors), while identification with the in-group results from objective group membership and positive evaluations of the group (Tajfel, 1982).

The presence of an out-group amplifies these processes through social comparison and attribution biases (Brewer, 1979; Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), which can lead to a variety of outcomes, including individual mobility (i.e., de-identification with a group that is evaluated negatively), social creativity (i.e., redefinition of comparison criteria to change the balance of evaluation), and social competition (i.e., maximization of in-group resources or minimization of out-group resources, both of which can lead to intergroup discrimination). It was the last outcome—intergroup discrimination—that was of foremost concern to the European social psychologists who developed the theory, which posits that discrimination is most likely when group members engage in the process of depersonalization (Hogg, 2006; Tajfel, 1982), in which they start to see themselves and others not in terms of their unique individual qualities, but rather in terms of group stereotypes. Importantly, these processes occur even when group affiliation is minimal (Tajfel, 1970, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), which means that the bar is relatively low for group identification and intergroup discrimination to occur. If true, this low bar implies that "real conflict" is not necessary to prompt intergroup discrimination, but rather it can result from the very act of group identification, even if groups are arbitrarily constructed.

Sport Fanship as Social Identity

Considering SIT Tajfel (1970), as outlined above, it has also long served as a useful framework for understanding sports fans' motives and behaviors (e.g., Cialdini et al., 1976; Schramm & Knoll, 2017). Being a sports fan binds and builds one's social network, and the fundamental nature of competitive sports allows for the creation of distinct in-groups and out-groups. Fans' self-identity and self-esteem are intimately tied to the status of their chosen in-groups. They can be highly invested in the performance and reputation of their favorite leagues and teams. In a series of

three studies, Cialdini et al. (1976) identified two specific behaviors that demonstrate this investment: basking in reflected glory when a favored team is victorious and cutting off reflected failure when a favored team is defeated. Respondents used possessive pronouns after games (e.g., “we won, they lost”) and wore more sports apparel after wins than losses. Later work in this area also found individuals to rate their personal and social abilities at a higher rate after victories than defeats (Hirt et al., 1992; Madrigal, 1995). Beyond these in-group behaviors, fans may also derogate out-group members (e.g., rival leagues, teams, and athletes) to enhance their own status. Indeed, Wann (1995) identified self-esteem enhancement as a key motivation of sports fans, as did Raney (2006).

It is also important to note that group identification can operate at multiple levels, including sport, league, and team. Although most research in this domain has centered on team identification (e.g., Lock & Heere, 2017), Heere and James (2007) emphasize the importance of seeing sports fans as community members, where teams (and their followers) are embedded in the larger organizations and social structures of their environment. Hence, identification with sporting leagues should matter, as we see them as part of their larger organizational systems. Market researchers, in particular, are highly interested in the demographic makeup, personality characteristics, and viewer ratings (e.g., Nielsen) of professional league fan bases (Chiger, 2017). For example, Wakefield (2021) reported that NBA fans try to convert others to follow the league at a higher percentage than other fans (i.e., MLS, NHL, NFL, MLB), and Yağiz (2020) found league identification to be an essential component of commitment to the Turkish Super Football League. In sum, league identification is an important avenue of research (if less often studied than team identification) that is likely to contribute to our theoretical understanding of SIT.

When placing sports fandom (via SIT) in the larger context of other social institutions such as religion and politics, there are some clear similarities among the activities. Being a sports fan holds great meaning for many individuals. All three institutions have sacred symbols, shared rituals, and revered leaders. All three of these practices have been examined through the lens of SIT (e.g., Hogg et al., 2010; Huddy & Bankert, 2017; Keaton & Gearhart, 2014). One’s self-concept can benefit from identifying with sports teams, religions, and political parties. Identification with competing religious and political perspectives has been demonstrated to have a strong moral component (e.g., Tetlock et al., 2000), and there is increasing evidence that identification with sports does as well (e.g., Cottingham, 2012; Lewis & Hirt, 2018). Thus, beyond being interested and invested in sports leagues and teams, fans employ moral norms to defend, protect, and support their favored parties.

Political Party Identification as Social Identity

Recent scholarship in political communication has challenged the traditional approach to citizenship and civic life as a primarily information-driven phenomenon and has forwarded an alternative approach centered on “political identity” (Kreiss et al., 2020). For example, Achen and Bartels (2016) argue that progressive-era assumptions about the “informed public” do not accurately represent the realities of modern political life, and offer a “group-based theory of democracy” instead, which conceptualizes political identity, particularly as it is expressed through party affiliation, as the central organizing feature of Americans’ political preferences and behavior. This approach reflects a growing tendency toward “social sorting” in American society (Mason, 2018), in

which ideology and party affiliation are increasingly correlated (i.e., we have seen the disappearance of conservative-leaning Democrats [the so-called Blue Dogs or Reagan Democrats] as well as liberal-leaning Republicans [that is, fiscal conservatives who lean left on social issues]). This sorting process has left Republicans and Democrats with little common ground (Mason, 2018), fostering a growing sense of dislike (i.e., affective polarization) between the two groups (Iyengar et al., 2012).

This turn toward identity in political communication is part of a broader effort to incorporate social identity into explanations for political attitudes, preferences, and behaviors. Recognizing that SIT addresses important political processes such as intergroup conflict, social conformity, and collective action, research on political behavior and political communication, has developed the notion that political party affiliation is a form of social identity (e.g., Greene, 2004; Huddy, 2001; Iyengar & Krupenkin, 2018). Even while many political affiliations, particularly party affiliation, are relatively stable over time (Woessner & Kelly-Woessner, 2020)—unlike the “minimal” conditions examined in much of the experimental work on SIT, people voluntarily choose their party affiliations and evaluate them over long periods of time (Huddy, 2001)—some evidence suggests that group identity does play a role in forming and updating political evaluations and preferences. For example, Conover (1984, 1988) found that group identification produces group normative evaluations and perspectives about political issues, even while controlling for objective group membership (see also Walsh, 2012). Similarly, Walsh et al. (2004) found that class identity affects political interest, efficacy, and participation over and above the influence of objective group membership. Thus, identification with a political group or party may shape the ways in which people interpret political issues and form perspectives and preferences about them.

Political party affiliation also helps shape both information exposure and the perception of that information. For example, Dvir-Gvirsman (2019) found that political affiliation affects selective exposure to like-minded media, while Reid (2012) found that self-categorization processes explain perceptions of political media bias, which means that party affiliation can also influence how people perceive and interpret political information they encounter in the media and elsewhere. Finally, political party affiliation shapes feelings toward both in-party and out-party adherents. For example, Iyengar et al. (2012) find that while the extent of issue polarization in the American public is minimal, affective polarization (i.e., dislike of the “other side”) has dramatically increased in the past several decades and is primarily a function of party identity. Based on these prior studies, it can be concluded that identification with one’s political affiliation, even if it is relatively stable, is an important factor that shapes how people perceive, interpret, and orient themselves toward the political landscape.

Evaluating Competing Social Identity Cues

Importantly, SIT posits that people oscillate between personal and social identities depending on the communicative and informational context, which allows for the likelihood that people also hold multiple, sometimes overlapping, identities that have more or less influence on psychology and behavior depending on their relative salience (Haslam et al., 1999). The assumption of identity salience is that because a person has multiple identities, these identities are hierarchical, and when activated, some identities could affect one’s perception and behavior more so than others (Burke, 1980). Recent research supports these ideas. For example, Shuv-Ami and Toder

Alon (2020) find that personal and social identification are only moderately correlated. Meanwhile, Ho and Yeung (2019) find that questionnaire wording can affect whether people adopt a subgroup or superordinate identity. Finally, Xu (2020) finds that different social issues have varying effects on identity salience. Based on these results, different social identities may be more or less relevant, depending on the context presented. What is less clear is whether what happens when more than one identity is made salient in the audience by the informational environment.

Because of the activation of multiple identities, intersectionality theory could be suggested as a lens to examine this phenomenon. However, intersectionality theory typically looks at how multiple aspects of one's identity (e.g., being a Black male) work together to shape one's view of the world through lived experiences, suggesting that these identifiers are most likely interdependent (Cole, 2009). While this can be true, this study, through the lens of social identity theory, suggests that identifiers do not always have to be interdependent to shape one's perception. Rather, they could potentially compete to determine which aspect of one's identity becomes more salient due to the informational environment. This is particularly true when multiple identities contradict stereotypes or expectations related to each, such as Shih et al.'s (1999) examination of how Asian American women perform on quantitative examinations. While intersectionality works well for the examination and understanding of one's long-term social relations, the current study, through the lens of SIT, is more concerned with the short-term activation of multiple identities and its effect on the processing and evaluation of information.

The NBA's social justice initiatives present an opportunity to advance theory about the interaction of competing identity cues. In particular, the racial justice movement has become a flashpoint for identification with political groups as prominent members of two major political parties in the United States adopted diverging stances toward it, with Democrats largely supporting the movement and Republicans largely opposing it (Drakulich et al., 2020). Likewise, partisan media has adopted divergent frames, with left-wing media largely framing the movement around the advancement of social justice and right-wing media generally adopting a "law and order" frame (Kilgo & Mourão, 2019). Therefore, media coverage of the contemporary NBA is likely to increase not only the salience of fan identity, but also of political identity.

News stories that refer to both fanship groups and political parties are of particular interest to this study because while prior research has clearly documented the effects of a single identity cue or a single category of identity cues, it has not studied contexts in which these cues may co-occur. Theoretically, cues that are favorable to an individual's fanship in-group, as well as their political in-party, should not conflict. Applied to the context of the NBA, this prediction means that we might expect strong fans of the NBA who also identify with the Democratic Party to respond favorably to the NBA's racial justice initiative. However, where cues do not align, they may be pitted against one another in a competition for social identification. Therefore, we might expect that strong fans of the NBA who also identify with the Republican Party to respond less favorably to the NBA's racial justice initiatives. While these predictions regarding the comparisons among strong NBA fans are relatively straightforward based on social identity theory, it is unclear what to expect regarding comparisons within political in-parties. For example, Republican-leaning NBA fans could have a stronger negative response to the NBA's

response than Republican-leaning nonfans. Conversely, their NBA fanship could temper their negative political evaluation. Similar questions emerge for Democrat leaners.

Outrage and its Consequences

Considering that people's attachment to their favorite teams or leagues, or their chosen political parties, can be strong, they are particularly likely to react when their favored sports leagues, teams, and athletes are derogated against. The sacred values protection model (Tetlock et al., 2000) proposes that individuals engage in certain actions to protect sacred values when they are attacked. Sacred values are defined as clear rules and norms within larger social groups that should not be violated. Examples of sacred values can be found in a variety of social groups. For fundamental Christians, a violation would involve the denial of Jesus Christ as the divine savior of humanity. For staunch conservatives, supporting prochoice initiatives might serve as a violation. In sports, both respondents and fans can violate sacred values. Respondents who cheat are often perceived as violators (e.g., Lance Armstrong); fans who disrespect sacred objects or symbols can also be perceived as violators. Cottingham's (2012) moral framing of Pittsburgh Steelers fans identified the Terrible Towel as a sacred object. Expected behaviors of Steelers' fans regarding the towel were to not use the towel for any other reason (e.g., cleaning) than demonstrating one's allegiance to the team (e.g., displayed during games, at home, at work). Opposing fans can violate this sacred value by defacing or damaging it.

These violations elicit strong negative emotional responses from members of the in-group and are identified as moral outrage (Tetlock et al., 2000). Moral outrage involves elements of anger, disgust, and a perception that the violator is ignorant or foolish. When in-group members experience moral outrage, they denigrate and punish the violator and reinforce the importance of the group's sacred value. This response clarifies the acceptable and unacceptable behaviors within the social group (Tetlock, 2003).

Regarding the NBA's corporate advocacy for racial justice during the 2020 NBA Playoff Bubble, we ask how one's fan identity and political identity could influence one's outrage toward the partnership after the 2020 season. Specifically, it would be valuable to determine which aspect of one's identity would influence that outrage (or lack thereof) more. As such, the following research question (RQ) is proposed:

RQ1: Would one's (a) fanship toward the NBA or (b) identification with a political party be a stronger predictor toward one's outrage toward the NBA for its racial justice advocacy during the 2020 NBA Playoff Bubble?

CSA and Reputation

As corporations increasingly use their platforms to voice opinions on controversial issues, research within the communication paradigm on these actions' implications is also increasing. Involvement with movements, such as the NBA's social justice initiatives during the 2020 Playoff Bubble, is considered to be CSA, which occurs when an organization takes a public stance on social or political issues unrelated to their business considerations (Dodd & Supa, 2014; Parcha & Kingsley Westerman, 2020; Waymer & Logan, 2021). CSA actions can be beneficial to sports organizations because an organization's response to social issues, if viewed positively, can result in a more positive reputation (Asada et al., 2021).

Organizations can approach societal issues with “complicity by supporting oppressive status quos in society or they can challenge and destabilize them” (Waymer & Logan, 2021, p. 2). As noted by Rugg’s (2020), CSA efforts can be complicated as organizations try to strategically align actions to capitalize on activism and appear to be an authoritative institution working for social good, while minimizing negative responses from stakeholders. In an analysis of the National Football League’s “Inspire Change” campaign, Rugg’s highlighted the actions taken by the NFL aimed at unifying fans after mixed reactions to players kneeling in protest during the national anthem. The campaign relieved fans who were not interested in the social justice movement by emphasizing efforts that the NFL players could accomplish themselves for social justice causes. While the campaign demonstrated “protest to progress” efforts, it also provided athletes an outlet to participate in activism that the NFL could control through its own campaign (Rugg, 2020). This strategy aligns with a concern voiced by Cloud (2007), in that institutions can use ethical positions, such as those taken through CSA campaigns, to “quell labor unrest, co-opt various stakeholding groups . . . and maintain a favorable public image” (p. 220).

Whether driven by self-serving purposes or for the betterment of society, engaging in controversial topics force institutions to balance the possibility of positive or negative impacts to organizational assets, including attitudinal and behavioral outcomes (Dodd & Supa, 2014; De Bakker et al., 2013). A direct link between an organization’s actions focusing on societal demands or expectations and perceived reputation has been found through the literature examining the umbrella concept of corporate social responsibility (e.g., Du et al., 2010; Yoon et al., 2006). However, further understanding of how a corporation’s actions revolving around societal or political advocacy influence its reputation is needed. Thus, the current study examines the effects of CSA on perceived corporate reputation as the final outcome variable.

Harnessing a positive reputation can reduce stakeholder uncertainty about organizational performance, motivate consumers to buy products, attract high-quality employees, and encourage outside investors and partnerships (Maden et al., 2012). The definition of corporate reputation is “a collective representation of a firm’s past actions and results that describes the firm’s ability to deliver valued outcomes to multiple stakeholders” (Fombrun & van Riel, 1997, p. 10). A systematic review of the corporate reputation literature found that reputation may have different dimensions and is issue specific (Walker, 2010). Depending on the measurement tool being used, corporate reputation can be characterized by the organization’s products and services, relationship with consumers, feelings created from interactions, leadership and innovation, internal environment, ethical enterprise, and discretionary social responsibility practices (Feldman et al., 2014). It has also been argued that reputation dimensions on a corporate level can reflect individual characteristic roles such as moral character (Chun, 2005; Davies et al., 2001; Moore, 2005).

In general, it has been stated that a positive reputation is one of the most valuable assets a corporation can have (Vidaver-Cohen, 2007). However, once a reputation is tarnished, it is not guaranteed that trust with stakeholders can be rebuilt. This damage can be translated into adverse outcomes such as financial loss and threaten the organization’s survival (Coombs, 1995). If a favorable reputation is maintained, previous studies have found a positive correlation between reputation and successful corporate outcomes (Flanagan & O’Shaughnessy, 2005; Milgrom & Roberts, 1982;

Roberts & Dowling, 2002). For example, Coombs (2007) suggested that an organization’s reputation can directly impact individuals’ behavioral intentions toward organizations. Brown et al. (2020) found support for this suggestion when looking at the inverse influence reputation can have on crisis outcomes in the sports team context. The researchers found that as individuals’ perceived reputation of a sports team decreased, they would be more likely to speak negatively about the team. Findings also suggested that individuals would also be less likely to support a sports team with a negative reputation.

While corporate reputation has been readily applied to fields within the private sector, fewer studies have applied it to the sports marketing industry. Studies within the sports arena have primarily examined the effects of athlete transgressions (e.g., Brown et al., 2018, 2020; Sato et al., 2015; Williams & Olaniran, 2002). Scholars have argued that reputation holds similar weight in the sports arena as it does with corporations, such as creating positive and sustainable team identity, team image, and team reputation (e.g., Gladden & Funk 2001; Hill & Vincent 2006; Ross, 2006; Ross et al., 2006). Scholars have called for more research endeavors to empirically test team and league reputations to contextualize dimensions and provide a more rigorous understanding of how spectators identify with these organizations (Jang et al., 2015; Yousaf et al., 2020).

Therefore, the current research endeavor builds upon previous sports marketing reputation and CSA literature by examining how the backdrop of a sports league’s embrace of a social movement could influence perceptions of reputation, while also examining how one’s fan identity and political identity can influence these perceptions. Similar to the question posed related to moral outrage, the following RQ is proposed:

RQ2: Would one’s (a) fanship toward the NBA or (b) identification with a political party be a stronger predictor toward one’s perceived reputation of the NBA after its racial justice advocacy during the 2020 NBA Playoff Bubble?

Method

A survey was fielded between September 15 and September 19, 2020, to examine how these two differing forms of social identification would influence perception of the NBA’s racial justice initiatives. A national convenience sample of 518 respondents was recruited using Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). MTurk provides registered users (called “workers”) a chance to complete a variety of tasks (called “Human Intelligence Tasks” or “HITs”) for a monetary payment (called a “reward”; Paolacci et al., 2010). The quality of MTurk samples is comparable to samples collected using other professional panel companies (Kees et al., 2017) and is typically more diverse demographically compared with college student samples (Mason & Suri, 2012). Parameters were set to ensure the sample’s quality: the location of the sample was set to the United States, the worker HIT approval rate was set to 90%, and the minimum number of HITs the worker completed was set to 50. Respondents were paid \$2 for their participation in the survey; the average time for survey completion was less than 15 min (14:26), meaning that the wage equated to about \$8/hr, above the federal minimum wage, and reasonable compared with the typical wages for respondents (Matsakis, 2016). Following Shamon and Berning’s (2020) recommendations to aid in assuring quality data collection, attention check questions were included throughout the questionnaire to help ensure participants paid attention to

measurement items and to identify straightlining. Respondents that failed those attention checks were removed from the sample ($n = 64$, 10.9%).

The final sample consisted of 311 men (60%) and 200 women (38.6%), with seven respondents identifying as another gender or preferring not to answer (1.4%). The average age of the respondents was 39.7 years ($SD = 11.24$ years). The majority of respondents were White (non-Hispanic; 402 respondents, 77.6%), with the largest minority groups being African/African American/Black (40 respondents, 7.7%), Asian or Asian American (30 respondents, 5.8%), and Hispanic/Latino/Latino American (24 respondents, 4.6%). Fourteen respondents (2.7%) identified as multiracial. In addition, 329 respondents (63.5%) completed a bachelor's degree or higher, and 516 respondents (99.6%) completed high school. The majority of respondents earn less than \$60,000 annually (360 respondents, 69.5%). Finally, a one-item, 7-point Likert scale was used to determine respondents' degree of national political interest ("I regularly keep up with news and information about the state of politics in this country"). The higher the mean score, the more the participant agreed with the statement ($M = 4.94$, $SD = 1.43$).

Independent Variables

NBA Fanship

Respondents' fanship toward the NBA was measured using a 16-item, 7-point Likert scale adapted from the Roccas et al. (2008) modes of identification scale ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 1.55$, $\alpha = .97$). All Likert scales for this questionnaire used the same extremes and midpoint (1 = *strongly disagree*, 4 = *neither agree nor disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). A mean score was calculated using all 16 scale items, and the higher the mean, the more the participant identified as an NBA fan. The scale measured four dimensions of identification: degree of commitment to the NBA as a fan ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 1.69$, $\alpha = .93$), degree of sense of superiority as an NBA fan ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 1.51$, $\alpha = .91$), degree of importance of NBA fanship to the participant's identity ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 1.89$, $\alpha = .95$), and degree of deference to the NBA and its fans' decisions and perceptions ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.51$, $\alpha = .84$).

Political Affiliation and Identity

Respondents' identification with a political party was first measured using a single, multiple-choice item asking if respondents self-identified as a Democrat ($N = 239$, 46.1%), a Republican ($N = 161$, 31.1%), or an Independent or other affiliation ($N = 118$, 22.8%). The 118 respondents that did not identify with either party were then asked if they leaned closer to the Democratic Party ($N = 79$, 66.9%) or the Republican Party ($N = 39$, 33.1%). For political affiliation, respondents that stated that they leaned closer to the Democratic Party were grouped with the Democrats, and respondents that stated they leaned closer to the Republican Party were grouped with the Republicans.

After respondents identified their political affiliation, depending on whether they chose (or leaned) Democrat or Republican, they were directed to a similar modification of the Roccas et al. (2008) modes of identification scale to measure their identity with that political party. A mean score was calculated using all 16 scale items, and the higher the mean, the more the participant identified with their chosen political affiliation. The scale measured four dimensions of identification: degree of commitment to their political party ($M = 4.91$, $SD = 1.51$, $\alpha = .91$), degree of sense of superiority because of their political party ($M = 5.02$, $SD = 1.40$, $\alpha = .94$),

degree of importance of their political party to the participants' identity ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 1.80$, $\alpha = .90$), and degree of deference to their political party's decisions and perceptions ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.49$, $\alpha = .88$).

Dependent Variables

Moral Outrage

Moral outrage was measured using a six-item, 7-point Likert scale adapted from Lewis and Hirt (2018). It included items such as "I'm angry that the NBA supported Black Lives Matter" and "I would like to criticize or challenge NBA leaders about supporting Black Lives Matter." A mean score was calculated, and the higher the mean, the more outraged the participant was about the NBA's racial justice initiatives ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 1.81$, $\alpha = .93$).

Corporate Reputation

Corporate reputation was measured using an adaptation of Fombrun et al.'s (2000) Reputation Quotient. The 20-item scale measures various dimensions related to a company's reputation: its emotional appeal, the quality of its products and services, the perception of its vision and leadership, the quality of its workplace environment, its corporate social responsibility efforts, and its financial performance. The scale was adapted as a 7-point Likert scale, and a mean score was calculated using all 20 items, where the higher the mean score, the higher the participant perceived the NBA's reputation ($M = 5.15$, $SD = 1.23$, $\alpha = .98$). Appendix A provides the scale items for all independent and dependent variables.

Procedure

After receiving institutional review board approval, the questionnaire was posted on MTurk to begin recruitment. The survey was voluntary, and respondents could withdraw at any time. Once respondents were recruited for the study, they were prompted to visit a distinct web address containing the questionnaire. Once the participant read the informed consent statement and agreed to participate, they answered items related to NBA fanship. Next, the participant read an article discussing the NBA's racial justice initiative (Appendix B). The journalist and media outlet's names were redacted to prevent bias or priming issues. Afterward, the participant completed items related to their moral outrage toward the NBA and their perception of the NBA. Finally, respondents read a statement thanking them for participating in the study and answered demographic items, including political identity and political interest.

Results

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used to examine the impact of NBA fanship and political affiliation on both one's outrage toward the NBA and one's perception of the NBA after its racial justice initiatives during the 2020 NBA Playoff Bubble. Models were controlled for four demographic variables in Block 1: race (using two separate dummy codes: one designating "1" for "White, non-Hispanic," and one designating "1" for "Black/African American"), gender (using a dummy code designating "1" for "male"), age, and political interest. NBA fanship and political identity were included in Block 2. To compare regression coefficients to determine differences in effect sizes, a modified z test suggested by Paternoster et al. (1998) was used.

Effects of Demographic Variables

Prior to answering the RQs, effects of the demographic variables on both moral outrage and reputation were examined using an analysis of variance for race and gender, while using correlation analysis for age and political interest. Regarding moral outrage, there was a significant difference in one's outrage toward the NBA based on race, $F(7, 510) = 2.32, p = .03$. Post hoc analysis revealed that respondents that identified as White were statistically more outraged than their racial counterparts. There was also a significant difference based on gender, $F(3, 514) = 2.72, p = .04$. Post hoc analysis revealed that respondents that identified as male were statistically more outraged than their counterparts. Correlation analysis revealed that there were no significant relationships between political interest and moral outrage, $r(518) = -.03, p = .54$, or between age and moral outrage, $r(518) = .07, p = .11$.

Regarding reputation, there was a significant difference based on race, $F(7, 510) = 3.29, p < .01$. Post hoc analysis revealed that respondents that identified as Black or African American viewed the NBA more positively than their racial counterparts. However, there was not a significant difference in one's perception of the NBA's reputation based on gender, $F(3, 514) = 0.68, p = .56$. Correlation analysis revealed that there were no significant relationships between political interest and reputation, $r(518) = -.06, p = .15$, or between age and moral outrage, $r(518) = .02, p = .65$.

The main effects of political affiliation (Democrat vs. Republican) were also examined using analysis of variances. For moral outrage, there was a significant difference based on political affiliation, with Republicans (and people who lean Republican), $M = 4.33, SD = 1.55$, being more outraged than Democrats (and people who lean Democrat), $M = 2.16, SD = 1.41, F(1, 516) = 270.30, p < .01$. For reputation, there was also a significant difference based on political affiliation, with Republicans (and people who lean Republican), $M = 4.73, SD = 1.40$, perceiving the NBA more negatively than Democrats (and people who lean Democrat), $M = 5.41, SD = 1.04, F(1, 516) = 38.76, p < .01$.

Effects of Fanship and Political Identity Toward Moral Outrage

The first RQ asked would one's (a) fanship toward the NBA or (b) identification with a political party be a stronger predictor toward one's outrage toward the NBA for its racial justice advocacy during the 2020 NBA Playoff Bubble. Controlling for demographic variables, the overall model revealed that neither NBA fanship ($\beta = 0.04, t = .64, p = .52$) nor political identity ($\beta = 0.12, t = 1.89, p = .06$) predicted moral outrage toward the NBA, $R^2 = .05; F(7, 510) = 3.50; p < .01$.

Two separate models were also produced in addition to the overall model to compare based on political affiliation: one for Democrats (and people who lean Democrat) and one for Republicans (and people who lean Republican). When looking at those models based on political affiliation, for Democrats, the model, $R^2 = .12; F(7, 310) = 6.10; p < .01$, revealed that NBA fanship had a direct association with moral outrage, meaning that the more one was an NBA fan, the more outraged one was toward the NBA ($\beta = 0.35, t = 5.44, p < .01$). Political identity had an inverse association with moral outrage, meaning that the more one identified as a Democrat, the less outraged one was toward the NBA ($\beta = -0.28, t = -4.23, p < .01$). The regression weights for NBA fanship and political identity are statistically similar ($z = 0.88, p = .19$).

For Republicans, the model, $R^2 = .25; F(7, 192) = 9.22; p < .01$, revealed that NBA fanship had an inverse association with moral outrage, meaning that the more one was an NBA fan, the less outraged one was toward the NBA ($\beta = -0.47, t = -6.34, p < .01$). Political identity had a direct association with moral outrage, meaning that the more one identified as a Republican, the more outraged one was toward the NBA ($\beta = 0.52, t = 7.19, p < .01$). The regression weights for NBA fanship and political identity are statistically similar ($z = 0.62, p = .27$).

Effects of Fanship and Political Affiliation Toward Reputation

The second RQ asked would one's (a) fanship toward the NBA or (b) identification with a political party be a stronger predictor toward one's perceived reputation of the NBA after its racial justice advocacy during the 2020 NBA Playoff Bubble.

Controlling for race, the overall model, $R^2 = .39, F(7, 510) = 45.56, p < .01$, revealed that NBA fanship had a direct association with reputation, meaning that the more one was an NBA fan, the more positively one viewed the NBA's reputation ($\beta = 0.53, t = 12.76, p < .01$). Political identity had a direct association with reputation, meaning that the more one identified with their political party, the more positively one viewed the NBA's reputation ($\beta = 0.12, t = 2.89, p < .01$). For all respondents, NBA fanship was statistically a stronger predictor of reputation than political affiliation ($z = 8.20, p < .01$).

For Democrats, the model, $R^2 = 0.45, F(7, 310) = 35.47, p < .01$, revealed that NBA fanship had a direct association with reputation, meaning that the more one was an NBA fan, the more positively one viewed the NBA's reputation ($\beta = 0.30, t = 5.79, p < .01$). Political affiliation also had a direct association with reputation, meaning that the more one identified as a Democrat, the more positively one viewed the NBA's reputation ($\beta = 0.44, t = 8.58, p < .01$). For Democrats, political affiliation was statistically a stronger predictor of reputation than NBA fanship ($z = 2.14, p = .02$).

For Republicans, the model, $R^2 = .62, F(7, 192) = 43.81, p < .01$, revealed that NBA fanship had a direct association with reputation, meaning that the more one was an NBA fan, the more positively one viewed the NBA's reputation ($\beta = 0.85, t = 15.97, p < .01$). Political affiliation had an inverse association with reputation, meaning that the more one identified as a Republican, the more negatively one viewed the NBA's reputation ($\beta = -0.16, t = -2.99, p < .01$). For Republicans, NBA fanship was statistically a stronger predictor of reputation than political affiliation ($z = 9.86, p < .01$).

Discussion

The NBA 2020 Playoff Bubble presented a near-perfect scenario for the league to show solidarity to a cause that is supported by many of its players. Naturally, those on the outside looking in had strong opinions about the league's racial justice initiative during the playoffs. This study sought to examine how social identity, particularly related to fan identity and political identity, influenced the opinions about the NBA's embrace of the initiative.

When looking at the results, it seems that overall, neither NBA fanship nor political identity impacted their outrage toward the NBA; however, when examining this relationship based on a breakdown by political affiliation (Democrats/leaning Democrat

vs. Republicans/leaning Republican), both aspects of one's identity had a significant association with moral outrage. Results showed that for Democrats, there was a direct association between NBA fanship and moral outrage (as fanship strengthened, outrage strengthened). This contrasts with Republicans, who demonstrated an inverse association between NBA fanship (as fanship strengthened, outrage lessened). Results could suggest that Democrats that are more hardcore NBA fans perhaps agree with the "shut up and dribble" philosophy embraced by some right-wing pundits due to the amount of media dedicated to social justice protests recently, where those fans simply did not want social justice messaging as a part of the playoff bubble (Niven, 2021). While the associations between fanship and outrage provided somewhat counterintuitive results, the associations between political affiliation and outrage were in line with expectations based on previous research (e.g., Drakulich et al., 2020; Kilgo & Mourão, 2019), with Democrats having an inverse association (as political identity strengthened, outrage lessened) and Republicans having a direct association (as political identity strengthened, outrage strengthened). It is also important to note that despite the counterintuitive direct effect for Democrats, overall, Democrats were significantly less outraged about the NBA's initiatives than Republicans. The regression weights of both identity factors were statistically similar for both Democrats and Republicans, meaning that neither fanship nor political identity had a stronger impact over the other in terms of influencing one's outrage; however, the respondents that identified as independent could have impacted this result considering the number that lean either Democrat or Republican.

While both NBA fanship and political identity had a direct association with perceived reputation of the NBA (as fanship and political identity strengthened, the NBA's reputation was viewed more positively), results showed that fanship has a stronger effect on one's perception of the NBA's reputation than one's political identity. When looking at the breakdown by political affiliation, for Democrats, both fanship and political identity had a direct association with perceived reputation of the NBA; however, political affiliation was the stronger predictor of perceived reputation. For Republicans, fanship had a direct association with perceived reputation, while political identity had an inverse association with perceived reputation (as political identity strengthened, the NBA's reputation was viewed more negatively). Again, the results align with the expectations from Democrats versus Republicans on their views of the social justice movement based on previous research (e.g., Drakulich et al., 2020; Kilgo & Mourão, 2019). Finally, in contrast with Democrats, fanship was the stronger predictor of perceived reputation for Republicans.

The NBA fanship does not seem to have much of an impact on one's perception of the NBA's social justice initiatives if the person is a Democrat, suggesting that one's political in-group is more influential in forming these opinions among Democrats than one's fan identification. This is similar to previous findings of how political group identification can help shape opinions about political issues more so than other factors (e.g., Dvir-Gvirsmán, 2019; Reid, 2012). In contrast, fanship seems to be the stronger factor for Republicans than political identity. While Republicans did have more moral outrage toward the NBA and a more negative perception of the NBA due to its social justice initiatives overall, hardcore Republican fans of the NBA viewed the partnership more positively than Republican nonfans consistently. This is evident by the direct association between fanship and reputation, suggesting that their fanship of the NBA mitigated the amount of outrage Republican fans had toward the NBA.

When looking at the effects stemming from both partisanship (whether Democrat or Republican) and fanship measures, there is a clear competition stemming between these identities when faced with an immediate situation that challenges both, in contrast to how intersectionality implies that identities are working together to form opinions and beliefs over time (Cole, 2009). The contrast is similar to previous studies that examine how multiple identities can contradict each other and compete to help the audience process information (e.g., Shih et al., 1999); however, this investigation extends this outlook by providing context into the ways these identities can compete.

Based on the data, we can suggest a few outcomes that could happen when different aspects of one's identity are at conflict due to outside events. First, for strong Republicans who are also strong NBA fans, while they should be outraged or negative about the NBA's social justice initiatives due to their Republican identity, their strong fanship of the NBA allows them to support the NBA without feeling guilty about abandoning the political aspect of their identity. Their Republican identity is not abandoned completely, however, because they still scored lower than their Democratic counterparts for reputation and higher for moral outrage. This could suggest an outcome of *indemnity*, suggesting that one identity (in this case, NBA fanship) mitigates the losses and makes up for the harm or outrage suffered because of another identity (in this case, political affiliation) while not altogether abandoning that identity.

Second, for Democrats, regardless of their NBA fanship, the data suggests that their political affiliation had a stronger impact on their evaluations of the NBA's social justice initiatives. Democrats, regardless of their degree of partisanship, perceived the NBA's reputation higher and were less outraged compared with Republicans. This could suggest an outcome of *amplification*, suggesting that one identity (in this case, political affiliation) could intensify the effects of another identity (in this case, NBA fanship), again while not abandoning that identity completely. The question here is could there be a ceiling effect—is there a point where the amplifying identity stops having a significant effect on another identity?

Finally, while not demonstrated here, a third outcome could be *ascendency*, suggesting that one identity "wins out" over another because it is more important to evaluate the context at hand. An example of this was found by Golan et al. (2021), where respondents' degree of nationalism was more important than their partisanship when evaluating international news stories about the United States, overshadowing partisanship as a result. However, partisanship was more critical when evaluating domestic news stories about the United States, overshadowing nationalism. Future research should seek to explore these three proposed effects to see if they truly demonstrate what happens when competing identity cues impact one's evaluation of an event.

Practical Implications

The decision by the NBA to take a stand regarding racial injustices during Spring 2020 came at a time when more corporations were beginning to express their voices regarding sociopolitical issues. CSA initiatives in recent years include Starbucks' support of the legalization of gay marriages (Dodd & Supa, 2014), Starbucks' and Budweiser's stance on President Trump's immigration ban executive order Kim et al. (2020), Ben and Jerry's supporting LGBTQ and BLM (Lim & Young, 2021), and most recently, Delta Airlines, Major League Baseball and Coca-Cola's public condemnation of Georgia's voting laws, including MLB moving the All-Star Game from Atlanta (Chappell, 2021; McGregor & Denham, 2021).

Previous evidence suggests that corporations can capitalize on strong allegiances to advance prosocial outcomes through CSA (e.g., Parcha & Kingsley Westerman, 2020; Kim et al., 2020). While the current study cannot make causal inferences between CSA activities and behavioral intentions to support a prosocial justice movement, results from this study can aid in the discussion of how partaking in CSA can impact the public's attitudes toward corporations.

Previous research has shown that organizations taking part in prosocial activities such as philanthropic giving (e.g., Bae & Cameron, 2006) or environmental responsibility (e.g., Li et al., 2020) can harness positive attitudes from the public. In 2019, Nike launched a campaign supporting social justice and diversity featuring Colin Kaepernick. Within a week, the campaign garnered Nike approximately \$43 million worth of media exposure and \$6 billion in sales (Everett, 2018; Gibson, 2018). The current study advances knowledge regarding attitudes by offering key insight into the importance of considering social identities when deliberating the effects of CSA activities. Similarly, Li et al. (2020) indicated that corporations should engage with individuals who are considered active publics (motivated and involved) in a cause or organization when initiating CSA activities. Findings from the current study expand upon this in that with the NBA's social justice initiative, segmentations, including fanship levels and political affiliation, influenced perceived reputation. It is recommended that CSA-based campaign messages should be designed and deployed in a way that targets appropriate audiences. In addition, results show competing identity cues such as differing in-group and out-group statuses should be considered. This requires communication professionals to be able to identify and understand subgroups of their organization to determine the best ways to take a stand on sociopolitical topics to aid both self-interest and prosocial outcomes.

Limitations and Future Research

The study has several limitations that should be noted. The findings of this study should be reflected upon in light that the sample employed may not reflect the general population as a whole. For example, the sample for this study, on average, captured a higher level of responses from younger, White males. Also, racial and gender differences were found related to levels of moral outrage and perceived reputation. It is suggested that future efforts account for demographic attributes that may influence attitudes to see their impact as competing cues with other forms of identity. In addition, this study was conducted in the form of a survey, which is appropriate for understanding attitudes and behavioral intentions. However, an experimental design could further explore potential causal effects among variables. In addition, qualitative studies can provide context into the rationales for why certain aspects of a person's identity influence their perceptions more than others to help give a better picture of identity construction and competition. While this study provided insight into the outcome variables of moral outrage and corporate reputation, it would be of value to measure supportive behavior intentions and levels of moral support that individuals have not only toward the organization initiating CSA efforts, but also their intentions to engage with the advocacy topic. Additionally, examining how corporations, such as the NBA, communicate to their publics regarding CSA efforts could provide further guidance to sports public relations scholarship and practice. Finally, while league fanship was the focus for this study, understanding how team and player fandom would impact their

evaluations of teams and players embracing (or opposing) social justice movements.

Conclusion

The purpose of the current research endeavor was to build upon previous sports marketing reputation and CSA literature by conducting a survey examining how the NBA's embrace of a social movement could influence perceptions of reputation. It was also of interest to examine how one's fanship of that league and political affiliation can influence these perceptions. Guided by four RQs, results from this study can aid communication professionals and scholars with the discussion of how partaking in CSA efforts can impact the public's attitudes toward corporations. Specifically, a contextual model of social identity competition is proposed outlining the potential role indemnity, amplification, and supremacy play in mitigating reactions toward CSA efforts. These findings provide the opportunity for future research within CSA to further explore the influence of public segmentation characteristics (e.g., knowledge, level of involvement, problem recognition) within fan groups and specific political affiliations. Notably, there is a need to further test the social identity competition model and the effects these identity characteristics and cues have on attitudes and behavioral intentions toward institutions that choose to partake in social justice movements. Finally, the current manuscript presents the question of the role of competing identity cues. Initial findings suggest that one identity (e.g., NBA fanship) could mitigate adverse outcomes such as moral outrage because of another identity (e.g., political affiliation) while not altogether abandoning that identity. As more institutions become involved in social justice movements through CSA efforts, it will be of continued interest to understand the balance of gaining support from stakeholders while not alienating others.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire Items

Modes of identification (Roccas et al., 2008)

Commitment	I feel strongly affiliated with NBA fans. I am glad to be an NBA fan. I am strongly committed to being an NBA fan. I like to help fellow NBA fans.
Superiority	Other fans can learn a lot from NBA fans. Compared with other sports fans, NBA fans are particularly good. Relative to other sports fans, NBA fans are a very moral group. NBA fans are better than other sports fans in all respects.
Importance	Being an NBA fan is important to my identity. It is important to me that I view myself as an NBA fan. It is important to me that others see me as an NBA fan.
Deference	When I talk about other NBA fans, I usually say “we” rather than “they.” In times of trouble, I rely on other NBA fans to help me through. All NBA fans should respect the history and leadership of the league. It is disloyal to criticize other NBA fans. There is usually a good reason behind every decision NBA leadership makes.

Note. Reputation quotient (Fombrun et al., 2000)

Emotional appeal	I have a good feeling about the NBA. I admire and respect the NBA. I trust the NBA.
Products/services	I stand behind the NBA and its players. The NBA is innovative. The NBA offers a high-quality sports experience. The NBA offers a valuable sports experience.
Vision/leadership	The NBA has excellent leadership. The NBA has a clear vision for its future. The NBA recognizes and takes advantage of opportunities.
Workplace/environment	The NBA is a well-managed organization. The NBA is a good company to work for. The NBA seems like a company that would have good employees.
CSR	The NBA supports good causes. The NBA is a responsible company. The NBA maintains high standards in the way it treats people.
Financial performance	The NBA tends to outperform its competitors. The NBA looks like a low-risk investment. The NBA looks like it has potential for future growth. The NBA has a strong record for making a huge profit.

Note. This is the scale used to measure NBA fanship. Similar items were used to measure identity with one's political affiliation. CSR = corporate social responsibility; NBA = National Basketball Association.

Moral outrage (Lewis & Hirt, 2018)

I believe that the NBA should have supported Black Lives Matter. (RC)
I'm angry that the NBA supported Black Lives Matter.
I would like to criticize or challenge NBA leaders about supporting Black Lives Matter.

I am disgusted that the NBA supported Black Lives Matter.
The NBA is foolish for supporting Black Lives Matter.
The NBA should be admired for supporting Black Lives Matter. (RC)

Appendix B: Article Text (Outlet and Journalist Name Redacted)

Black Lives Matter, people.

Those are the words Miami Heat All-Star Bam Adebayo often said at the end of his media interviews throughout the NBA's restart. And at the conclusion of the 2019–2020 season, with the Los Angeles Lakers crowned NBA champs after defeating the Heat in Game 6 of the Finals on Sunday night, those are the words that the league hopes will continue to resonate.

"It's one of those things that I started doing so people can respect it," Adebayo told *The Undeclared*. "Black Lives Matter isn't just a movement. It's a lifestyle. A lot of people know that. A lot of people are scared of that . . . I embrace it because I'm a Black man. My mother is a Black woman. At the end of the day, it could have been either one of us that could have been killed, shot, sprayed with mace.

I say Black Lives Matter at the end because I feel that people forget.

No one will forget this NBA season in which the Lakers won their 17th NBA title, LeBron James earned his fourth Finals MVP (most valuable player) trophy, and the league created a safe bubble in which no one tested positive for COVID-19. But when the history of the season is written, perhaps it will be remembered most

for how the league and its players used their platform to fight for social justice.

Before the restart of the season in July, many players had participated in the nationwide protests against racism and police brutality sparked by the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor by police. Some players were concerned that their voices would not be heard if they played basketball in a bubble. Ultimately, the NBA and National Basketball Players Association (NBPA) agreed to resume the season with a commitment to use their platform to address social justice issues. NBPA executive director Michele Roberts said playing was the best option.

"Some of our players, obviously, because of the number of followers they have, will have an audience that's vast," Roberts told *The Undeclared*. "But I believed then, and I believe now that the fact that the games played enhanced the audience that was going to be available for our players to convey their messages.

Having our games highlight the continuing discussion about these issues, I think moved the conversation forward, well beyond where we would have been able to move it had we not done the games. I'm satisfied that the players as well believe that they did the right thing and decided to play.